

Why Van Diemen's Land? - 1

The Dutch explorer Abel Tasman, in 1642, was the first European to discover Tasmania. By planting a flag, he claimed the land as Dutch territory and named it after the Governor of the East India Company, Anthony Van Diemen. But the Dutch never came back to claim Van Diemen's Land.

There are records of numerous British and French visits there after 1772. This explains why Van Diemen's Land was included in the proclamation the British made in 1788 when they established their colony in Sydney and claimed Australia for Britain.

Ten years later, Bass and Flinders sailed through Bass Strait and proved Van Diemen's Land was a separate island. This news caused a big problem for the British, when they learnt the French explorer Baudin had spent six weeks there. So, to stop their enemies from claiming this island, it was decided to establish Australia's second colony in Van Diemen's Land. In 1803 Lieutenant John Bowen was sent to set up a colony at Risdon Cove. He took settlers and some convicts as labourers. The soil was poor there, so he moved five kilometres to the lower Derwent River and joined a second settlement established by Lieutenant Colonel David Collins at Sullivan's Cove. Water was plentiful and this settlement did better. It became known as Hobart Town, named after Lord Hobart, the British Colonial Secretary.

By 1806 the colony was struggling and without bread, sugar, tea, vegetables or alcohol. It was decided to provide convicts with guns so they could hunt kangaroos for meat. This made it easier for some of them to escape and become bushrangers. They terrorised the countryside. It also upset the Aborigines because their food supplies were affected.

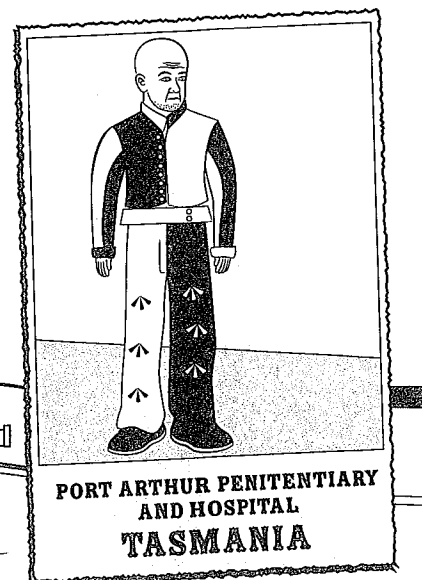
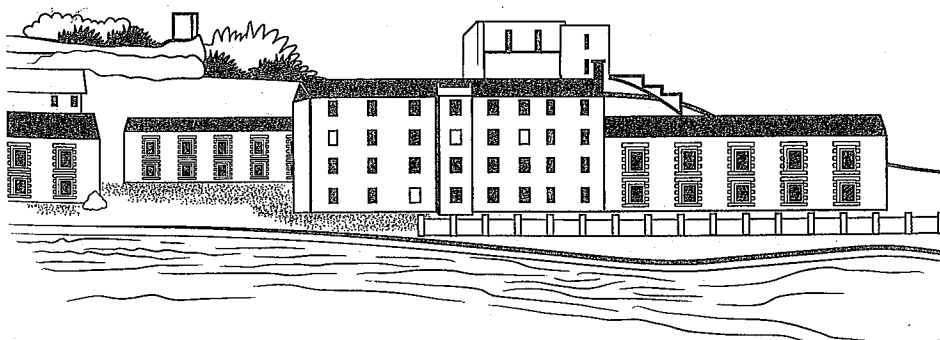
In 1822 the first convict prison, Macquarie Harbour, was built at Sarah Island on the west coast, followed three years later by one on the east coast at Maria Island. Port Arthur, 60 km from Hobart, was established in 1830 to replace both of them. This infamous prison, surrounded by a shark-infested natural moat, closed in 1877.

By the time the last of 74 000 convicts arrived in 1853, they made up more than half the population. The island had a reputation as a cruel and brutal place. To separate it from its terrible past, they applied to Queen Victoria to have the island's name changed to Tasmania. This was granted in 1856 when Tasmania became a separate colony from NSW.

One of the tragic outcomes of British settlements in Tasmania was the plight of the Aborigines. It is calculated there were 5000-6000 in 1803, but many died of European diseases or were killed. Thirty years later there were only about 300 left. They were moved to Flinders Island but only 47 survived. They were transferred to Oyster Cove where they all died; the last woman there in 1876.

After some initial difficulties the island prospered, producing wheat and wool for export. In 1825, it separated from NSW and became an independent colony. In the same year the Van Diemen's Land Company was formed to provide cheap wool for British factories. An important shipbuilding industry was developed on the island. The economy improved and the population increased after gold was discovered in the 1870s.

Reasons (economical, political and social) for the establishment of British colonies in Australia after 1800 (ACHHK093)



Why Van Diemen's Land? - 2

1. (a) Why did the reputation of Van Diemen's Land start to change in 1822, about 20 years after it was first settled?

- (b) Explain why its reputation became so bad.

- (c) When did it start to improve and why?

2. (a) Why were Sarah and Maria Islands established?

- (b) Where are they situated?

- (c) When and why were they closed?

3. Find out about the site of Port Arthur and why it was chosen as a convict prison. Record your information below in note form.



When sheep were introduced in 1824, they were easier prey for Tasmanian tigers (Thylacines) than kangaroos. To protect the sheep, a tiger bounty was offered in 1830. As a result, these shy, secretive animals became extinct when the last one died in the Hobart Zoo in 1936.

