

# Why Western Australia? - 1



WHY COLONIES WERE ESTABLISHED

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

The rugged coast of Western Australia was visited often by European ships sailing to the West Indies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is believed 54 ships came to the coast between 1606 and 1770. Most of their captains were unimpressed by the sandy soil and limited fresh water and just sailed away. But ... these coastal waters did become home to a number of wrecked ships that were not so lucky.

The first documented landing on the west coast was by a Dutchman, Dirk Hartog, in 1616. He left a plate on the island telling about his visit. Another Dutchman, de Vlamingh, visited the coast eight years later and named the Swan River after seeing black swans there. So it is not surprising that the west was known for many years as New Holland.

William Dampier was on the first English ship to land. He was sent back ten years later to map New Holland's north coast. However, it was the French who later caused the British the most concern. In 1772, the French Captain St Allouram actually claimed Dirk Hartog Island for France, but the French never settled there. French ships were frequent visitors and a number of French captains had mapped and named many places along the Western Australian coast. In 1802, Matthew Flinders met up with one of them, Nicolas Baudin, at a place he later named Encounter Bay.

Earlier in 1791, George Vancouver had formally claimed King George Sound, on the south coast of Western Australia, for Britain. But it wasn't until 1826 that Major Lockyer took troops and convicts to establish a military outpost there at Fredrickstown, later known as Albany. He was sent to stop the

French from settling in that area. He claimed it again for Britain early in the new year.

At the same time Captain James Stirling was surveying the Swan River with the idea of planning a settlement there too. His reasons for doing this were more about making money and starting a new society than about politics. Although his plan was approved by the British Government the following year, the setting up and running of this settlement was a private business and was not paid for by the government. In 1829 the first free settlers arrived and had to establish the settlement themselves. Stirling named it Perth to honour Sir George Murray, the secretary of state for colonies, who came from Perthshire in Scotland. The state capital was later changed from the harbour town of Albany on the south coast to Perth on the Swan River.

Many of the free settlers who arrived in the Swan River Colony had planned to set up their farms as soon as possible. But this proved to be difficult. Without enough land, poor soil, limited water, little money, few labourers and no government support, the colony struggled and grew very slowly. Some disappointed farmers returned to Britain and there were only 1000 people there twenty years later.

In 1850 a group of farmers from York requested convicts to help them and to develop the colony by erecting public buildings and other facilities. Britain had sent the last convict to NSW that year and the last would be sent to Tasmania in 1853, so they agreed. Convicts arrived until 1868. In 18 years, they improved Western Australia's economy, changed its society and its politics.



## Why Western Australia? - 2

1. Dutch sailors were the first Europeans to land in Western Australia and many others visited later. Why did the only ones who stayed long in New Holland come from a ship that had been wrecked on the coast?

2. The British Government knew that the Dutch captain Dirk Hartog had claimed New Holland as Dutch territory in 1616. Explain why in 1829 was it more worried about the French taking possession of it than it was about the Dutch.

3. What was the main difference in the reason why the two settlements—in Albany and on the Swan River—were set up by the British?

4. Explain why the Swan River Colony settlers didn't have as much help from the British Government as the free settlers in NSW, Tasmania and Queensland did.



*The sandbar which made entering the Swan River at Fremantle to travel upstream to Perth so difficult in 1829, wasn't actually removed until the 1890s when the harbour in the port of Fremantle was constructed by the famous engineer, C Y O'Connor. This was a most significant development for Western Australia. He was also the engineer responsible for the pipeline which still takes water about 600 kilometres from Perth to the goldfield town of Kalgoorlie-Boulder today.*