



Family History

Convict research: getting started

When did convicts come to Australia and what basic records exist on them?

Convicts were transported to New South Wales from 1788. Transportation to the East Coast of Australia officially ceased in 1840, but the demand for labour led to male convicts (termed “exiles”) being shipped to Moreton Bay in 1849 and 1850. Convicts were sent to Tasmania (Van Diemen’s Land) 1803-1812 via NSW, then directly 1812-1853, when convict transportation to Tasmania ceased.

Convicts were extensively documented from their trials, transportation records and steps towards freedom such as tickets of leave, conditional pardons and certificates of freedom. Censuses and musters also tracked them. For information about these records, see also Research Guide - *Convict research: finding out even more*.

Convict arrival dates in Australia

New South Wales (including Qld)	1788-1842
Moreton Bay (Queensland)	1849-1850
Tasmania (Van Diemen’s Land)	1812-1853
Victoria	1803-1849
Western Australia	1850-1868

The convict ships, 1787-1868 by Charles Bateson (G 365.994 1983) and (FAMHIS 365.3 1969) provides comprehensive information about the convict voyages.

Convict records in Australia by Cora Num (FAMHIS 929.394 2003) lists information about the types of records available and which institutions hold them.

How does a researcher find a convict?

Work back through the generations from yourself.

Death and marriage records may give important clues, including place of origin, age, occupation, time in Australia as well as conditions applied to getting married. Do not assume that a name and age match. Traditional naming patterns meant many had the same name! Crosscheck.

Search for a convict’s family

- *New South Wales Immigration records: wives and families of convicts on bounty ships 1849-1855* [microfiche] (MFC 929.3944 1986)
- *Convict applications to bring out families to Van Diemen’s Land (also NSW, Vic & WA): index 1827-1873* compiled by Coralie Mesecke. (FAMHIS 929.3946 2001)
- *Index to NSW Convict Marriage Banns 1826-1841* [microfiche] (MFC 929.3944 1989) / compiled by Joan Reese and Norma M. Tuck. This is an index to the *Records of Persons Applying for Publication of Banns* in the Colonial Secretary’s papers. State Library of Queensland holds *Persons applying for Publications of Banns* on microfilm at MFLM 929.3944 199- (AO/SR reels 716-739, 2192, 2210 and 2215). As well as convict records, there is considerable detail regarding free persons who wished to marry a convict.
- NSW State Archives & Records online index, *Convicts Applications to Marriage (1826-1833, 1838-1841)*
<https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/collections-and-research/guides-and-indexes/convicts-applications-marry>

Search the English transportation records

Convict Transportation Registers 1787-1867 (HO11) list convict ships and their convicts, in chronological order by ship's date of departure. Find a name in the *British convict transportation registers 1787-1867* database through One Search, <http://onesearch.slq.qld.gov.au> [SLQ Family History Indexes], for a convict who went to any Australian colony. The digitised records can be found at National Library of Australia <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-728075871/findingaid#nla-obj-728081133>, at Ancestry (Library edition), available onsite at State Library; or at The National Archives UK <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/browse/r/h/C8875>. Irish records are not included here. See below.

Search the Irish transportation records

Irish transportation records. These were the Irish Government's bicentennial gift to Australia. Search the Ireland-Australia Transportation database available at the National Archives of Ireland website, <http://findingaids.nationalarchives.ie/index.php?category=18&subcategory=147>. Index entries provide a reference to the full record on microfilm (MFL 929.394 1987). Records cover convict lists mainly, and mostly after 1836, but also include Fenian photographs, petitions and applications to bring the families of convicts to Australia. See also *Irish convicts to NSW 1788-1849* <http://members.pcug.org.au/~ppmay/convicts.htm>

Search in New South Wales

• Transportation records

Convicts to New South Wales 1788-1812 [CD ROM] (QCFS 929.3944 2002). As well as a complete list of convicts transported up to 1812, this also includes convicts who were sentenced to transportation but did not come to Australia

Convict indents: index and lists

The indents were the official government lists of convicts transported, arranged by ship name in order of arrival date. They provide information about the convict's crime, place and date of trial, sentence, place of birth, former occupation and sometimes a physical description.

Start with: *Index to convicts who arrived in NSW 1788-1842 and an index to the ships that transported them*. Available on microfiche (MFC 929.3944 2000). Search by surname. This index provides the convict's ship and date of arrival, with a fiche and page number to locate the convict's full entry in the *Convict Indents*.

Then from the fiche collection, locate the fiche (AO) number provided on the index to search the *Bound indents 1788-1835* (MFC 929.3944 1985) and/or *Annotated printed indents, 1831-1842* (MFC 929.3944 1984). Search for the page listed.

Can be found online at:

- NSW State Archives & Records *Convict Indents (digitised) index 1788-1801* <https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/collections-and-research/guides-and-indexes/convict-indents-digitised-index>
- Ancestry (Library edition), available at State Library, under *New South Wales, Australia, Convict Indents, 1788-1842*.

Check for an overview of a convict's movements

Check the *Australasian genealogical computer index (AGCI) Vol 2* [CD-ROM] (QCFS 929.394 2004). An index of the *NSW Government Gazette 1832-1863* arranged by surname, it tracks among the records, the stages of sentences convicts served, which may include ticket-of-leave, conditional pardon, certificate of freedom, even abscondment, providing information about where they were at that time and a description of them. This may prove/disprove you are on the right track. State Library holds the *NSW Government Gazette* to 1870 on microfilm (MFL 328.944 1832-). The Gazette after 1870 is available in print format (OSREF 328.944). It can also be searched through Trove digitised gazettes <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/?type=gazette>

Greater detail on these stages may be found in the NSW State Archives & Records documents. See Research Guide - *Convict research: finding out even more*.

Index to colonial convict movements 1827-1853 [CD-ROM] (QCFS 929.3944 2003). This index covers convict movements in the Colony of New South Wales (encompassing what is now New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Victoria) of nearly 10 000 convicts.

Search in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania)

- *Convict records Tasmania* [microfiche] (MFC 929.3946 2000) is a list of all convicts transported to Tasmania, from the records of the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office. It shows the convict's name with the place and date of departure and arrival and covers the period 1804–1893. It is also online through the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office Names index, https://librariestas.ent.sirsiidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/names/. The complete records are available only from the Archives. Most records are available online, but if not, there is a cost involved to access them.
- *Tasmanian convicts, miscellany 1821-1854*. [microfilm] (MFL 929.3946 198-) and *Index to more Tasmanian convicts... 1814-1845* [microfiche] (MFC 929.3946 1995) are indexes to assignment lists for convicts sent directly to Tasmania, plus miscellaneous convict records relating to Tasmania. The indexes are in a folder on open access in the family history area, Level 3. View the records indexed by locating the CY reel number listed together with the call number given at the beginning of the folder.
- *Tasmanian colonial index* [microfiche] (MFC 929.309946 1997). This is an index to the convict registers for Tasmania 1816-1889 and Norfolk Island 1792-1855.

Search in Western Australia


- *Convict records of Western Australia : a research guide* by Gillian O'Mara (FAMHIS 929.1072 1990)
- *Dictionary of Western Australians 1829-1914*, compiled by Rica Erikson (REF 920 0941 1979-) gives brief details of ship, date of arrival, conviction.
- State Records of Western Australia *Convict records* <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/state-records-office-of-western-australia/convicts> is a guide to Western Australian convict records.
- *Western Australian convicts ACC 1156* [microfiche] (MFC 929.3941 1988) indexes convicts alphabetically by surname and provides convict number, name of ship of arrival, volume and page where convict entry can be found.
- *W.A. convict registers ACC 128* [microfiche] (MFC 929.3941 1994) is an index providing details of when and where the convict was tried, name of ship and date of arrival. See the Fremantle prison convict database, <http://fremantleprison.com.au/history-heritage/history/convict-database/>, which is also an index to these registers.
- *Convict records* [microfilm] (MFL 929.3941 1990). These records include convict registers 1850-1894 and a register of ex-convicts leaving the colony 1863-1894). For full location details, consult the handbook *Access to Ancestors* at the Reference Desk, Level 3.

This is a select list of convict material at the State Library.

Check the **One Search** online catalogue (<http://onesearch.slq.qld.gov.au>), the *Guide to New South Wales State Archives relating to convicts and convict administration* (MFA 929.394 2006), and the NSW State Archives & Records online guide to convict records at <https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/collections-and-research/guides-and-indexes/convicts-guide>

Need further information?

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