



# Chainletter

*News from the Founders & Survivors project, at the Universities of Tasmania, Melbourne, Flinders, New South Wales, and the Australian National University*

**A Quarterly Newsletter**

**Issue No 1, June 2009**

#### **Project Report**

*A checklist of where we are now and where we hope to be in the next six months*

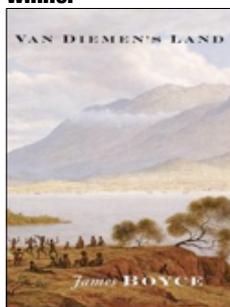
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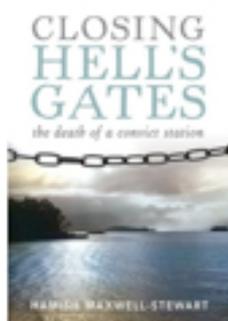
*Your preliminary instructions for your probation OR a welcome letter to our volunteers advising you on our immediate plans.*

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## Welcome to Chainletter

*This is the first issue of what we hope will be a long-living newsletter for the Australian Research Council funded project, Founders & Survivors: Australian life-courses in historical context.*

*Chainletter* is to be your link with the project team of Founders and Survivors and with other members of the 'Chain Gang' of volunteer researchers. We will produce four issues a year and we invite contributions and correspondence from you all. We can publish short stories of your convict ancestors, of interesting historical 'finds' and of problems you have encountered in your research.

Over time we will profile the various members of the project team and we



begin with our leader in Hobart, Hamish Maxwell-Stewart.

Members of the team will also have regular columns about their specialised interests: James Bradley on medical history and convict health; Rebecca Kippen on aspects of demography and

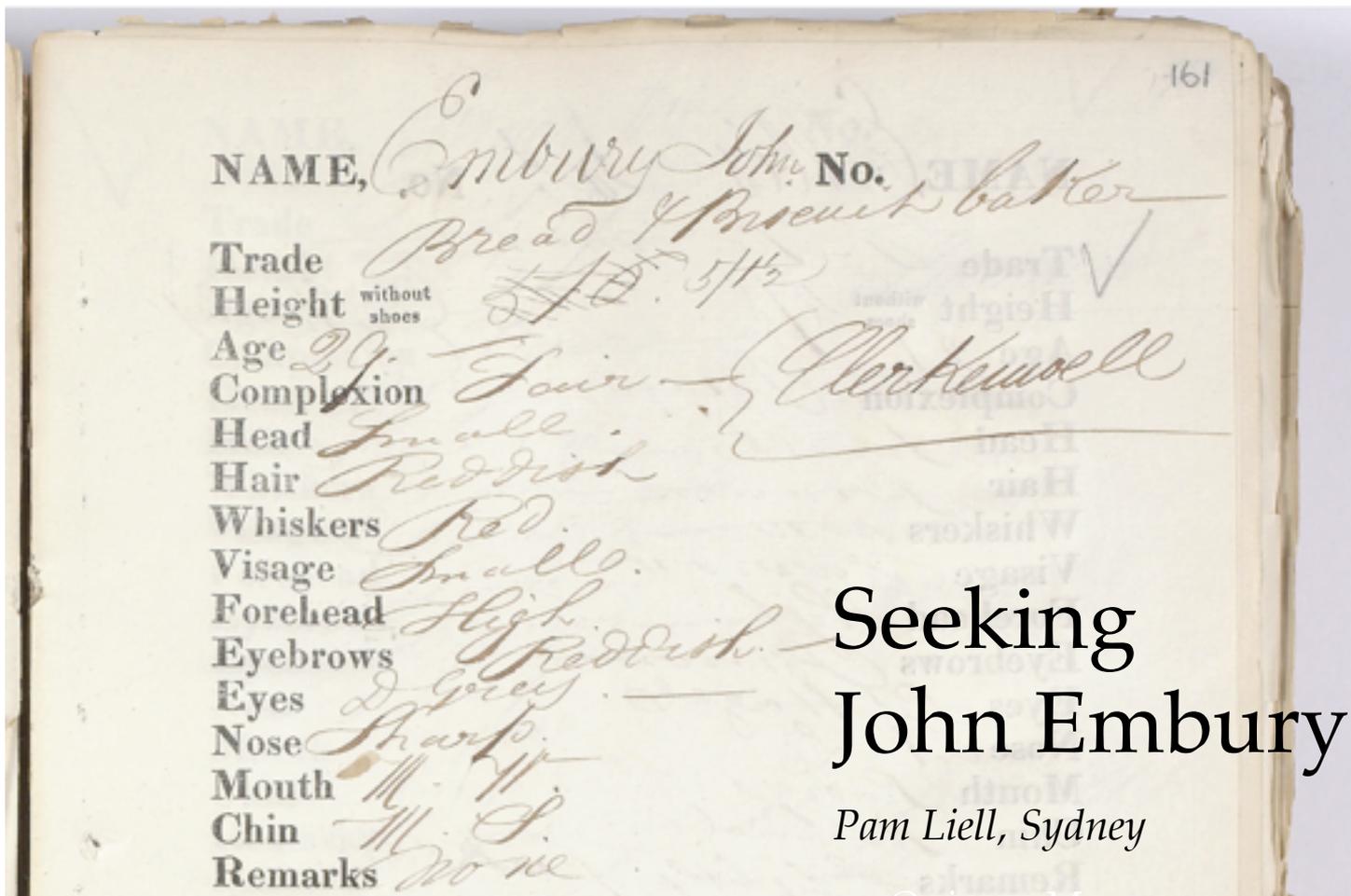
family history; Janet McCalman on the Victorian research into former convicts' lives (VicLinks), Peter Gunn on South Australian connections (SALinks), and of course, Alison Alexander to report on Tasmania. Alison and Hamish lead a growing team of transcribers and research students who are completing the identification data that will provide the key architecture of the project.

We will use *Chainletter* to publish guides to transcription methods and protocols, explanations of abbreviations and arcane terms, causes of death and of the processes of the convict system that are found in the records.

And we will alert you to publications by members of the team or the Chain Gang.

We hope you will enjoy *Chainletter* and we thank Pam Liell of Sydney for being our first Chain Gang contributing author.

—the Editors: Janet and Alison



# Seeking John Embury

*Pam Liell, Sydney*

It all started when I heard the noted historian Philip Geeves speaking on his regular spot on Caroline Jones's ABC morning radio in about 1981. He said that if you have an ancestor in Tasmania before 1850 the chances are you have a convict.

My mother (b 1912) had said that her grandfather William Embury told her he went to school in Tasmania. And he had a goatee beard. He died 1919. So I reached for my quill pen and parchment (it was before computers) and wrote to the Archives of Tasmania. All I knew was the name EMBURY. The answer was as follows:

John Embury was transported to Tasmania on the ship Southworth (2) arriving on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1834, on a life sentence for housebreaking and larceny. Catherine Kelly was transported on the Garland Grove (1) on 10 October 1841 on a seven year sentence for stealing three handkerchiefs. Copies of their convict records and physical descriptions (CON 31/11, 18/20, 40/6, 19/3) are enclosed with some explanatory notes.

The couple applied to the government for permission to marry in November 1842 and were married on 23 January 1843 (CON62/2 p46). A copy of their marriage certificate RGD 120/1843 is enclosed. You will notice that John Embury was already married with a wife and three children in Clerkenwell. The chance of them ever returning to England was very remote and it would seem that the officials did not ask too many questions when convicts remarried. An account for \$2 is enclosed.

This thrilling news gave me many avenues to explore. I got the transcript of the trial at the Old Bailey, the surgeon's account of the voyage when John was a nurse in the ship's hospital, the write-up in *The Times* of an earlier trial, and his employers. He was a bread and biscuit baker by trade, probably in demand. A census report of Launceston. A death certificate of a toddler. The ship passenger list to Victoria. John's death certificate at the Benevolent Asylum North Melbourne at the age of 71.

His children and grandchildren. His

son's service in the Waikato War: William Embury was in the Third Waikato's Long Roll Book (AD76/3) as follows: Name: William Embury. Regimental Number 53. Date Enrolled: 25 August 1863. Place Enrolled: Melbourne. Born: Launceston, Tasmania. Trade: Labourer. (Also described as Blacksmith). Age at Enlistment: 21. Size: 5ft 6ins. Ship: Star of India. Struck off: 11 March 1866. His grandson in the Great War at the time of enlistment was 38 years 11 months 5 Mar 1915. 9 stone. 5Ft 4in. (my cousin says "Great jockey material").

While I have been tracing John since he got his ticket of leave and pardon and took his family to Victoria in 1852, there is a relative in England descended from the wife and daughters abandoned in London who has been doing parallel work from the other side. So John's family goes on and the descendants of this 5ft 1 1/2 ins reddish haired baker with red whiskers are widespread. He had seven children. There are 145 descendants, of whom 83 are blood relatives.

—Pam Liell, Sydney



Hamish Maxwell-Stewart in full flight at Port Arthur Historic Site, with his colleague at the University of Tasmania, Professor Lucy Frost

# Hamish, history and Port Arthur

Associate Professor Hamish Maxwell-Stewart is the lead chief investigator of the Founders & Survivors project. He teaches in the School of History and Classics at the University of Tasmania.

Hamish was born in Nigeria, grew up in Hastings in England, and was schooled at the University of Edinburgh. Before coming to Tasmania, as the Research Fellow at Port Arthur Historic Site in 1998, he spent five years at the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine in Glasgow, living for a time in Oban in Argyll. He has been teaching at the University of Tasmania since 2000.

Each of these places has made a mark on his historical repertoire. As a schoolboy he became a historical war-gamer and this fascination with strategy games comes out in his interpretation of the

experiences of men and women in total-institutions like the convict system. His students are often treated to imaginative historical reconstructions and his house guests can find themselves immersed in history strategy games.



As a child in Hastings, he accompanied his father to antiques auctions and learnt how to be a 'dealer' and to have an 'eye'. He is something of a collector, a student of material culture and a talented museum curator. The interactive museum at Port Arthur Historical Site bears his stamp.

Living in Oban, he was drawn to the archaeological riches of Argyll, and his archaeological expertise has contributed to the exploration of the Port Arthur site. (Hobart meetings of the Founders & Survivors project have to adjourn in time to watch Tony Robinson's *Time Team*.)

His training at the University of Edinburgh was in economic history and his work has explored both the human experience of transportation and servitude, and the economics and structure of the system

His most recent book, *Closing Hell's Gates: the death of a convict station* (Allen & Unwin 2008) is based on an elaborate reconstruction of day-to-day life at Macquarie Harbour: the work regimes, the human relationships, the floggings and the notorious

escapes. The book has just been awarded the Margaret Scott prize for the best book by a Tasmanian author.

His other books include *American Citizens, British Slaves* (with Cassandra Pybus, now research professor at the University of Sydney), and *Chain Letters: narrating convict lives* with Lucy Frost, Professor of English at the University of Tasmania.

Hamish leads the Founders & Survivors Hobart team, who are transcribing convict records for the database, and working on convict mortality, health and experience under servitude. He remains active in conservation and heritage protection in Tasmania.

Hamish is married to a general practitioner. They are both wonderful cooks.



# Founders & Survivors

Australian life courses in historical context 1803-1920  
A national project funded by the Australian Research Council

## Dear Volunteers...alias 'Chain Gang'

Thank you for your generous offers to become volunteers. We now have to work out how to organise you all into a productive 'Chain Gang'.

We have just held a project meeting in Melbourne, planning the next phase of the website development and the research. Sandra Silcot and Claudine Chionh will be building the research platform over the next six months. While that is going on, we can begin to organise working parties and structures of communication.

### Why is the research platform so complicated?

The platform has many functions:

1. The research database which starts with the convict, his or her characteristics, background and history in the penal system.
2. The 'normalisation' of the data which arrives in many different forms, so that it can be managed within the same system.
3. The linkage between data from multiple sources: eg. births, deaths and marriages, burials, parish records, government and police gazettes, inmate registers for benevolent and lunatic asylums and the linkage within the convict records themselves. For instance, there are records in the Tasmanian Archives of around 72,500 convicts. That amounts to over 300,000 individual records that we can link by the 'police number' and the name of the voyage. Over the past two years, the Hobart team have transcribed the key identification data for around 90 per cent of the convicts, and with the

addition of Hobart Town Gazette records of pardons, tickets of leave etc. we already have around half a million processed records to populate the database.

4. In the database, each convict will have this key identification data and URL links to the images of the relevant records so that the transcribed data can be verified against the original, and additional data extracted when needed.

5. A workflow program will manage the interactions with the website's users and the dataset, keeping track of who is meant to be doing what, which convicts have been successfully traced to a death certificate and to descendants. We need to emphasise that the majority of convicts probably did not leave descendants, but we still need to track their fate after leaving the system. Those who did not become founders and survivors are just as important as those who did.

6. An online 'Factory' will be your working space with the project. This will allow you to view the convict data, and contribute your research on individuals to the database itself where appropriate and to record your work in the wiki tool connected to each convict.

7. Discussion board: we will provide a space where researchers can contact each other, post general queries, provide feedback to us.

8. And much more....

### What we can do in the meantime

Over the next months we need to organise our work program and develop an administrative structure for our volunteers. Almost 200 people have volunteered so far and this will need careful organisation and continuing management. Our administrative

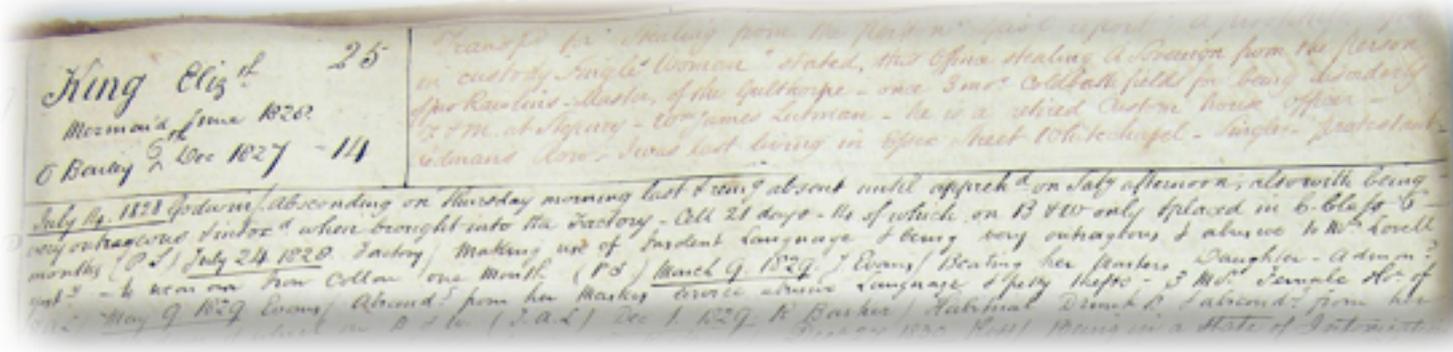
resources at the universities are limited and it is difficult to manage the flow of email correspondence and attend to all our other duties (teaching, research, administration).

We are appealing therefore for people who like organising activities, who are comfortable with computers, and who have the spare time to devote up to two days a week to the project to assist with the management. In penal language, we are recruiting **overseers** to keep watch over our chain gang workers.

Second, much of the work can be undertaken from home and communicated online. However, many prefer to work in groups (we do ourselves), and we are hoping that volunteers around the capital cities and regional centres will organise themselves into research groups. These might meet in local libraries or archives search rooms or in the premises of family and local history societies. This will enable people who are not 'online types' to work with paper, pen and companions and still be part of the project. It is important that we can offer support to those who do not use computers or who are daunted by the online database.

We have to take care that researchers are not duplicating work assigned to others, that gaps are not missed and that the data collected is entered correctly. We have to keep records of all our sources so that it is possible to recover the original information if needed. Where there are original records, we are digitising them so that the original is always on hand for verification.

Examples of the type of work we are asking to be done is systematic



extraction from the BDM of Victoria all those who appear to have had a connection with Tasmania, and then a retrospective check against the convict records. A team might divide the Pioneer Index between them alphabetically, for instance. A similar strategy, this time taking sets of issues, could be used to scan the *Police Gazettes* for former convicts.

We are sure that many of you will have ideas of how to approach the task of finding traces of people who did not want to be noticed! Already one volunteer has suggested family name studies: taking a set of surnames and seeing how many came from the same area, were possibly related. For those who don't know of it, the UK National Trust Names site is a wonderful guide to the historical distribution of surnames. <http://www.nationaltrustnames.org.uk/>

Individual convicts can be traced to their place of birth and their families often reconstituted from the indent and the censuses after 1841.

Over the next few months we will be talking with the genealogical and family history societies to see how we can work together to facilitate working parties. The Tasmanian Archives and PROV are also partners in Founders & Survivors.

We will report on progress both of the database construction and of the negotiations in the September issue of *Chainletter*. Please do not volunteer for anything specific until we have mounted an **assignment** register on the website.

Until September...

Best wishes

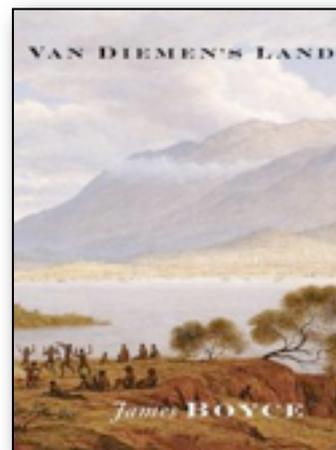
Janet and Alison.

## Research Report

June 2009

- ❖ Transcription of Convict Identifying data almost complete in Hobart.
- ❖ Data collected on burials
- ❖ Convict deaths inside and outside the penal system within Tasmania
- ❖ Hobart Town Gazette data on Tickets of Leave, Pardons and Conditional Pardons collected
- ❖ Absconder data
- ❖ Departures from Tasmania data collected
- ❖ Over half a million individual records now collected
- ❖ Transcribed convict records delivered to Melbourne database construction team
- ❖ Protocols for data collection and entry created
- ❖ More than 600 convicts entered by their descendants on the database.
- ❖ New Virtual server purchased at the University of Melbourne to host research platform.
- ❖ Research team meeting held 16th June at University of Melbourne.
- ❖ First test of concept of database structure end of July.
- ❖ Review at conference meeting in Hobart 6th September
- ❖ Expected date for completion of site development and testing, December 2009.

## A must-read prize winner



In 1803 the convicts and their gaolers in Van Diemen's Land found themselves in a paradise compared to the harsh hinterland of Port Jackson. They had few horses, but they did have dogs, and with marsupials who had never known the predations of the dingo, the pickings were easy.

James Boyce's *Van Diemen's Land*, is an environmental history, where the land itself is as important as the human actors. How did the land affect the men and women who found themselves exiled in the wilderness?

Boyce has uncovered a different convict experience: of people drawing on traditional skills of hunting (poaching), living off the land to survive and build their own world.

These Vandemonian bushmen lived in comparative harmony with the Aborigines until the expansion of white settlement forced violent conflict.

*Van Diemen's Land* has won a number of prestigious literary awards. Now in paperback, you can order from the publisher Black Inc:

<http://www.blackincbooks.com/>  
RRP: \$32.95

## Feature Article

# *The Founders & Survivors Project:* an overview

Australia is unique among settler colonies because we have detailed records of more than 150,000 of our founding mothers and fathers. No other society built by colonization and migration, has records that tell us names, families, places of birth, literacy, skills and training, religion and character, let alone the colour of eyes and hair, height, scars, moles and tattoos. Our convict records are an astonishing inventory of the people who were transported here to build a new British society.

Many of the 73,000 convicts transported to Van Diemen's Land between 1803 and 1852 managed to keep out of trouble in their time under sentence. Certainly many had been youthful offenders, who, as today, simply 'grew out of it'. Others had been driven by need and desperation, especially during the hungry 1830s and 1840s. But a distinctive minority were more committed criminals, who remained at war with authority, trapped in an ever-narrowing cycle of rebellion, insolence, drunkenness, violence, theft or deceit.

We can know all this, because every time convicts broke the rules, they went before a Magistrate, and at the end of each week, the clerks from all over the colony would send the list of offences and punishments to the Convict Department in Hobart to be added to the convicts' conduct records. Everything that happened to a convict was recorded: we can see them rebelling in their early days of servitude and then learning to work the system, defer to authority, and avoid trouble. We can see others sliding into alcoholism, cussedness, incapacity. We can glimpse temperaments: the hardworking and quiet, the quick-to-anger and impulsive, the depressive, the ambitious, the lazy, the silly and the smart.

Thousands of convicts were managed on distant farms, penal stations, town businesses, mines, forests and places of extreme punishment. It was done by meticulous record keeping with what has been called 'The Paper Panopticon': leaving us with a unique mass portrait of Australian founders.

### Life after sentence

However, that's where it mostly stops. Once they left the convict system, the vast majority disappear from sight. How many returned to the British Isles or Ireland? How many went to other ports and colonial outposts? How many stayed in Tasmania? How many took their chances in other colonies? How many, and which ones, went on to become not merely Survivors of the convict system, but Founding fathers and mothers of modern Australia?

It is these, and many more questions that the national research project, Founders & Survivors, seeks to answer. It involves historians, demographers, epidemiologists and IT specialists from the universities of Tasmania, Melbourne, Flinders, Oxford, New South Wales and the Australian National University. Funding comes from the Australian Research Council and that has paid for the imaging of the convict records, which are now uploaded on to the Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Centre website. The funding is also paying for the complete transcription of the identifying data—birthplace, offence, place of trial, place of birth and physical description for the 73,000 records held in the archives.

### The Founders & Survivors' website

A daunting task is the design of the research website. Currently we have a project website where descendants of convicts can upload information on their convict ancestors so that we can begin our search for convicts' death records. We are also seeking information on their marriages and whether any descendants served in the Great War. This will be to compare heights of convicts and their sons, grandsons or great-grandsons.

The next stage is to provide a working website for registered researchers. This will have each convict and display fields that can be filled in by researchers. Attached to each will be a wiki page where all new information can be logged with the date and name of the researcher, so that we can keep track of who has found what.

Our registered researchers will have access to all the information on convicts and their lives after penal servitude until the year of death. For their spouses and descendants, the time limit will be 1900, when we will cut off public access for privacy reasons. We will store later information on descendants in a confidential database that will only be accessed by the paid staff of the project who are contracted to work under university research protocols.

We cannot publish genealogies and neither are we in a position to provide genealogical assistance to the public, but we can share with the wider community the results of the historical search for the convicts.

### Researching a shipload

We want to research convicts as 'job lots' according to the ship in which they were transported. The colonial bureaucracy always identified convicts by their ship and the voyage to Van Diemen's Land was a critical shared experience for the people on board: Did they form enduring connections with shipmates? Did their health on board ship affect their health on land?

We will be asking volunteers (singly or in teams) to take a 'voyage' such as that of the 'Duncan' that arrived in 1841. We will have run the 'Duncan's' convicts through our database of deaths while under sentence and the Tasmanian BDM and added any 'found' convicts who have been submitted, leaving as 'unfound' the remainder. The task will be to track as many as possible—in the BDM of Victoria, NSW, South Australia; in the UK and Scottish Censuses; and so on.

Working with a single ship load will

increase chances of finding connections between former convicts.

### Finding connections

We suspect that patronage, especially among the early pastoralists who came from Van Diemen's Land to Victoria, was important to the success or otherwise of a freed convict. Many who went on to obtain farmland, benefited from such patronage in the first ten or fifteen years of freedom.

Former convicts who had to make their way without protectors found freedom more hazardous. In a society where your 'character'—testified to by letters of introduction, written references or word of mouth—was everything, those who had no 'character' struggled to find work.

This was still a traditional society where it mattered more 'who' you knew rather than 'what you knew'. People without connections of family or friends found making their way especially difficult and were the most vulnerable to falling back into crime to survive.

### Why families matter

We are using 'family formation', to give it its technical term, as the test of a former convict's capacity to cope with freedom. Establishing a stable household where a new generation could be successfully raised was not easy—a test of men's and women's resilience, self-discipline and ability. It is also a sophisticated 'test' of a society's economic condition, welfare structure and social investment. We suspect that fewer than a third of the men, but more of the women transported to Van Diemen's Land, went on to become fathers and mothers of the nation.

Therefore it is just as important for us to trace all those convicts who failed to establish a new family and life. We will be seeking volunteers to work through the Victorian Deaths, *Police Gazettes*, lists of inmates at Benevolent Asylums in Victoria and Tasmania, goldfields archives and to check if former convicts made their way back home to the British Isles or Ireland. Here the censuses and

resources through *Ancestry.com* and *Findmypast* will be valuable.

### The importance of volunteers

This is a vast project, and it can only be completed with volunteer researchers, as has been the case with similar population reconstitution projects in England (the Cambridge Population Group), the Netherlands (the Historical Sample of the Netherlands) and in Sweden (the Umeå Demographic Database).

All these databases are yielding valuable research findings on health, well-being, social mobility, resilience and family history. This is data that is vital for long-term social and economic policy.

We plan to link the convicts' descendants with the Australian Army records for all wars, and to take convicts' family histories back into the generations before they were convicted and transported. Perhaps it will take twenty years' work by many people, but we could end up with the longest and most detailed population database in the world, longer even than the Swedish data that starts in 1760.

### Why longitudinal data matters

The Swedish database is built on the annual parish reports that Lutheran pastors were required to submit to the King. See [http://www.ddb.umu.se/index\\_eng.html](http://www.ddb.umu.se/index_eng.html). Our data sources are even richer, containing in convict and military records body measurements so that we can assess changes in nutrition and child health, behaviour under psychological stress, records of specific illnesses and systematic causes of death.

But we are also historians, interested in how people moved about, were affected by famines, emigration, economic slumps and booms, educational opportunity, war service and repatriation benefits afterwards, property ownership, and family life.

Each time a former convict is 'sighted' in an historical record that usually gives us a time and place. If the GIS (Geographical Information Systems) data is entered into the database

alongside the 'sighting' we can map people's movements over time and space.

For instance, did former convicts cluster in certain areas such as in Clarence in Tasmania or Port Fairy/Portland in Victoria? Were they more likely to remain in the bush or go to the city? How many were convicted away from their place of birth and how many were still near home when they got into trouble?

We know that homelessness was a major factor in becoming convicted and transported: being 'on the town' meant not having a permanent, family household, and in the economic hardships of the 1840s, how many were fending for themselves far from their family and original friends?

Did losing a father make you more vulnerable to getting into trouble? How many Irish were convicted in England and Scotland after fleeing the famine at home? How many Scots convicts were dispossessed Highlanders, suffocating in the Glasgow slums? These are just some of the questions we will be exploring with this dataset.

### Volunteers: the Chain Gang

You will have free access to the convict data and historical material that takes the convict up to their death. You will be free to use this data for your own research, as long as its source is acknowledged.

You will receive news and updates on the project and you can form online chat groups if you wish.

This is an opportunity for family historians from around the world to contribute to building a history of a settler society from the ground up. This history will not only tell us about the past, but also provide data to help us plan better for the future.

### Janet McCalman

Versions of this article also appear in *The Genealogist*, June 2009, Vol XII, (10) and in *Ancestor*, June 2009, Vol 29, (6).

## Who's Who & Where

### University of Tasmania

Associate Professor Hamish Maxwell-Stewart

Associate Professor Alison Venn

Professor Haydn Walters

Associate Professor John Bass AM

### University of Melbourne

Professor Janet McCalman

Associate Professor Shyamali Dharmage

Dr James Bradley

Sandra Silcot

Claudine Chionh

Gavan McCarthy

### Australian National University

Dr Rebecca Kippen

Dr Len Smith

### Flinders University of South Australia

Associate Professor Ralph Shlomowitz

Dr Peter Gunn

### All Souls College, University of Oxford

Dr Deborah Oxley

### University of New South Wales

Associate Professor David Meredith

**Founders & Survivors: Australian life courses in historical context 1803-1985, funded the the Australian Research Council.**

Centre for Health & Society,  
University of Melbourne, Vic,  
3010, Australia (Victorian inquiries)

or C/- School of History & Classics,  
Private Bag 81, Hobart, 7001,  
Australia (Tasmanian Inquiries)

## Workshop on Founders & Survivors,

Warrnambool Family History Group  
23 May, 2009.

About 60 turned out for the day to attend the Founders & Survivors workshop.

This was a wonderful opportunity to connect with the many descendants of Tasmanian convicts who passed through or settled in South Western Victoria. We hope that a local working group can be formed to collect family histories of former convicts for the region.

We are keen to conduct similar workshops with other regional family history groups. Please email [janetsm@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:janetsm@unimelb.edu.au) for talks in Victoria or for Tasmanian groups, [Alison.Alexander@utas.edu.au](mailto:Alison.Alexander@utas.edu.au).



Ian Pearce, Head of the Archives Office of Tasmania with the convict records in the stacks.



**The Melbourne Benevolent Asylum in North Melbourne where John Embury, like many former convicts, spent his last days.** From 1846 to 1911 it dominated the city's northern skyline until it was demolished as a fire hazard and all the patients transferred to what is now the Kingston Centre in Cheltenham

The Hotham History Project has published a history of the Benevolent Asylum by Mary Kehoe. It is now out of print but widely available in libraries.

We will be looking for volunteers to check names of former convicts against the records of inmates in all the asylums. The records should indicate the ship and port of arrival of inmates. These records are in the State Library of

## Training notes for Chain Gangers on probation

### What is the 'Police Number?'



The identifier (not unique) used by the police to number convicts. The number sequence for the assignment period was started in 1816 and reorganised in 1824. A separate numbering sequence was used for surnames beginning with different letters of the alphabet. That is,

the first convict to be landed with a surname beginning with the letter A became 1. (Unique within first letter of surname.) There is one important exception to this: convicts with surnames that started with the Gaelic prefixes Mc, Mac and O' were usually but not invariably recorded under the first letter of the rest of the surname, for example McDonald would be filed under D, not M. We are using these numbers and the name of the voyage. to identify our convicts throughout the database. They are different from the convict number in the Archives of Tasmania index.

**Chainletter:** edited by Prof Janet McCalman (University of Melbourne) and Dr Alison Alexander (University of Tasmania).  
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