

The Experience of Convictism: Five Pieces of Convict Clothing from Western Australia

By LINDA YOUNG

JUST FIVE pieces of clothing survive from the era of convict transportation to Western Australia, 1850 to 1868.¹ They are a jacket and a pair of trousers in the WA Museum and two jackets and a waistcoat in the Fremantle Prison Museum. But for one of the jackets, all are elements of the bizarre punishment uniform, composed of black and yellow particoloured wool, worn by the chain-gang. The remaining jacket appears to be unique in Australia, being of unbleached duck — the only extant example of the everyday ration of clothing issued to ordinary convicts.

All the pieces are stamped with the infamous broad arrow that indicated British government property. In Australia today this symbol contains growing popular significance as the mark of the oppressed founders of this country, but discussion of the convict origins of the colonies has only recently ceased to ruffle certain family feathers. Long seen as a hateful stain, the reality of the presence of convicts represented a past better forgotten until the advent of the 1988 Bicentenary began to stimulate a contrary pride in an ancestor's very early arrival in the colony.

The crucial and formative influence on Australian history of the institution of convictism and of individual convicts themselves is now a subject of intensive study. But the material is limited, legalistic, and impersonal. In these circumstances the tiny stock of convict clothing speaks expressively of the immediate, next-to-the-skin experiences of convictism.

Western Australia was the latest and last of the Australian colonies to receive convicts from Britain. Transportation to New South Wales ceased in 1848 after a long, angry campaign by the then sixty-year-old colony, and to Van Diemens Land [VDL] (which changed its name to Tasmania in celebration) in 1853. Untainted by convictism, South Australia had been proudly founded in 1836 to be entirely free-settled. Seven years before, so had the Swan River colony on the distant west coast of Australia. But by the mid-1840s the reality of harsh local conditions had so discouraged both potential immigrants and struggling settlers that the little oligarchy of land-owners who controlled the colony began to call on the imperial government to send convicts to WA as vital, cheap labour. The first convict transport arrived in June 1850. During the next eighteen years nearly 10,000 male convicts were shipped to WA. Transportation ceased in 1868, but British convicts remained in the colonial penal system for nearly forty years more — the last six were pardoned in 1906.²

Before transportation prisoners were gaoled for nine months in one of the English convict prisons such as Portland or Pentonville. Upon arrival in WA most were held for a further nine months in the huge Convict Establishment at Fremantle, whence they laboured during the day on public works such as roads and bridges. According to the length of sentence and the good conduct marks system, they could become eligible for a

ticket to leave within a year of landing. This enabled a man to seek private employment and lodgings for the remainder of his sentence, though he had to report regularly to the local police and was liable to summary justice. Until he could, or if he could not, find private employment he was housed, clothed, and fed by the government and worked on public projects in one of the up-country convict depots.

Prisoners convicted of further crimes were sentenced to ever longer terms and a variety of disciplines such as solitary confinement, flogging, and hard labour in irons. Weighing between twelve and twenty-eight pounds, these consisted of thick rings of iron rivetted around the ankles, linked by about five feet of chain; a vertical length could be attached in the middle with which to carry the heavy weight. In these punishing constraints, convicts worked in 'chain' or 'iron gangs' building roads.

Ordinary prisoners, ticket of leave men, and chain-gang men wore different issues of clothing. The details are traceable in various records: the annual indents of the Convict Establishment to the Colonial Secretary in London; certain regulations of the WA Convict Department; accounts in newspapers and private papers; and a very few contemporary illustrations.³ The issue appears to have been much the same throughout the convict period. As will be shown, it seems also to have been identical to that of NSW at an earlier date and in VDL in the same period.⁴

The particoloured pieces

Four of the five Westralian pieces are relics of the special uniform issued to convicts sentenced to the extra discipline of hard labour in leg irons — the chain-gang. They are a jacket and a pair of trousers in the WA Museum (CH84.118 a-b) and a jacket and a waistcoat in Fremantle Prison Museum (168/79, 96/78). (Fig. 1)

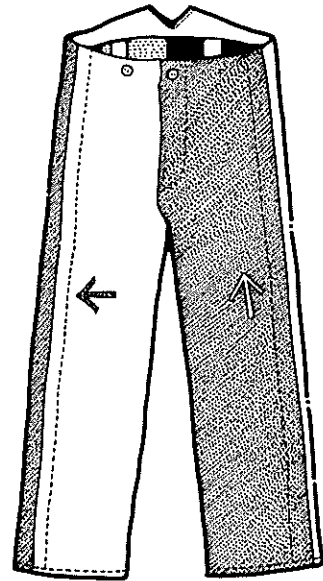
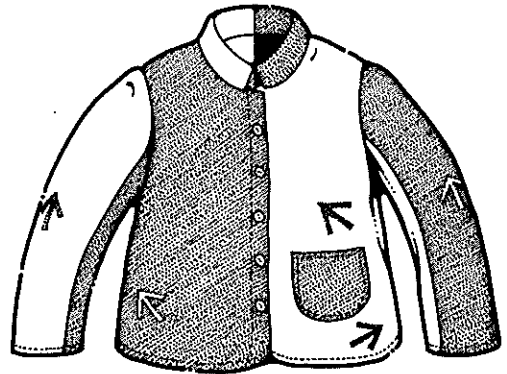
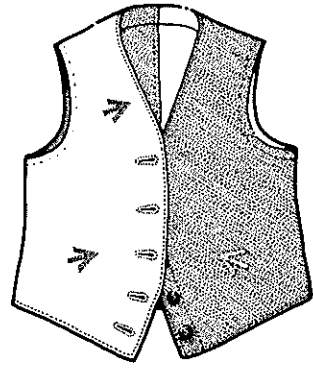
Each is made of the characteristic coarse, felty-surfaced wool tabby common to all the recorded pieces of convict woollen clothing in Australia; it is usually referred to in the records as 'fustian' or 'woollen'. Though the condition of all the pieces seems superficially bad (they are variously stained, faded, torn, and insect-damaged) the basic structures are sound. None of the garments has been worn — that they were never issued probably explains their survival.

The cut of the two jackets is clearly based on one master pattern (yet to be identified in the archives), as are all the comparative VDL examples. The trousers too are evidently of a standard pattern. However, the waistcoat is unusual, being shaped with rounded front edges like a conventional, non-prison piece; this is unlike all the VDL examples, which are effectively sleeveless jackets with a smaller, straighter collar.

All pieces are machine-sewn. The trousers have been re-made at least twice (probably for display purposes before they were acquired by the WA Museum), but the inside seams appear intact. Both jackets have been 'mended': CH85.118a has had a patch pocket added to the left front, and 168/79 has been barbarously repaired with cannibalized fragments of old fabric. A number, '10507', is roughly stitched in white thread on the lower right back hem of CH85.118a; however, as its position in the sequence of the numbering of prisoners would date it to about 1900, long after the chain-gang was abolished as a punishment, it must be seen as a 'romantic' addition.⁵

FIG. 1. Particoloured suit of black and yellow wool fustian, the chain-gang uniform. Jacket and trousers: WA Museum CH85.117 a-b; waistcoat: Fremantle Prison Museum 96/78; reproduction shirt

Photograph by Linda Young; drawing by Jill Ruse



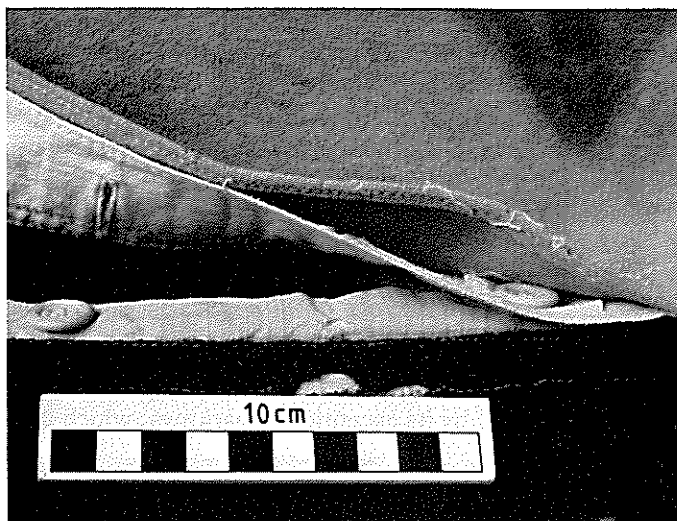


FIG. 2. Detail of flyed outer leg seam on chain-gang trousers. The linen fabric of the button-stand is probably original; the cotton buttonhole-stand is a modern introduction

Photograph by Linda Young

The manufacture of all the pieces is simple to the point of coarseness. The square shapes are roughly stitched together, only the lower edge being turned up in a single hem. The facings and collars of the jackets and of the waistband of the trousers are sewn flat to the body of each piece with a backstitch outline along the otherwise raw edges.⁶ One jacket, in common with most of the VDL examples, has a second line of stitching enclosing the buttonhole stand; this and the outer line continue around the collar — the sole gesture towards style in the convict suit.

The trousers exhibit a most unusual construction. In order to accommodate the constant presence of the leg fetters (sentences to chains were for periods of up to seven years), the outside seams are flyed, unbuttoning entirely from waistband to hem. The eight bone buttons on each side are sewn to the back half of the legs; the front half contains an attached fly of unbleached cotton (replaced) with the buttonholes, the whole concealed by the broad flap edge of the front of the trousers. (Fig. 2) Mounted on a dummy, it is clear that the front edges stick out in a crude and awkward fashion. The front opening is also a fly.⁷ The fly-opening side seams may derive from trousers of such pattern worn in the late eighteenth century by certain workers, possibly as protective overgarments.⁸

The most striking aspect of the chain-gang uniform is the grotesque particolouring of the pieces in bright mustard yellow and black, the glaring warning colours of nature. Each garment is pieced together in halves, the right front black, the left yellow, vice versa on the back.⁹ The facings on each side contrast with the body colour, as does the lining of the collar. The two-piece sleeves of the jackets have the upper half respectively yellow and black, also with contrast linings at the cuff. Both the yellow and the black dyes have faded externally to pale yellow and dirty grey-green. This is the case with all the Westralian pieces; inside, however, the shades remain bright. Electron microscopic analysis shows that the yellow colour derives from a tin dye, and the black from a chromium dye, both probably fixed with alum.¹⁰

The pieces are variously marked with the broad arrow. Black or brown ink is used on the yellow portions; white or orange on the black. Some of the VDL clothing is very modestly stamped only on the inside, but the Westralian material is marked large, with bold arrows composed of equal-sized, narrow triangular shapes. On the trousers they are prominently placed, one on each leg at thigh level, front and back; the waistcoat too is boldly marked with arrows at hip and breast on both sides. The Prison Museum jacket is less obtrusively stamped, with a single arrow on the lower right of the yellow back; the WA Museum jacket, however is liberally scattered with eight large arrows.

The duck jacket

The duck jacket (167/79) is altogether a more complex artefact than the particoloured models. Its cut is dandy by comparison and its construction relatively professional. Its value as a historical document is multiplied by its exceptional markings, which include the supplier's dated stamp. (Fig. 3)

Made of a heavy whiteish duck, the garment is unworn and still contains dressing. It is hand-sewn. The waist is fairly high, the side seams are placed far back over the shoulder blades, and it possesses a generously rolled over collar, all giving the piece an 1820s stylishness. Elegant pretension, however, is overruled by the plethora of marks indicating its criminal status. The jacket is stamped with orange broad arrows uncomfortably located over the armpit ribs. Inside the lower right front are a narrower arrow flanked by the initials 'W D', and an oval containing the name 'R. T. TAIT & COY/C & M/1865/LONDON' in brown ink.

'W D' stand for 'War Department'; 'C & M' stand for 'Clothing and Munitions'. These or a third set of initials, 'B O' for 'Board of Ordnance', also appear variously on almost all the VDL pieces. Robert Thomas Tait & Company is listed in London trade directories in 1865 at 10 Essex Street, Strand, as an army and navy contractor.¹¹

Origins

Institutional clothing for convicts was an innovation of the prison reform movement of the late eighteenth century. (Before this time, prisoners either paid for or provided their own supplies; if they could not they lived in appalling conditions such as those described by reformers like John Howard and Sir George Onesiphorus Paul). Among the earliest manifestations of the reforming order were the establishment of new 'penitentiary' gaols at Horsham in 1779 and Gloucester in 1792, together with elaborate codes of rules and procedures. The Horsham regulations specified that all prisoners would be bathed and de-loused on admission and provided with a uniform, 'of the Cheapest Sort of woollen without plaits or pockets and to be mixed in pieced Green and Yellow'; the Gloucester uniform was blue and yellow.¹²

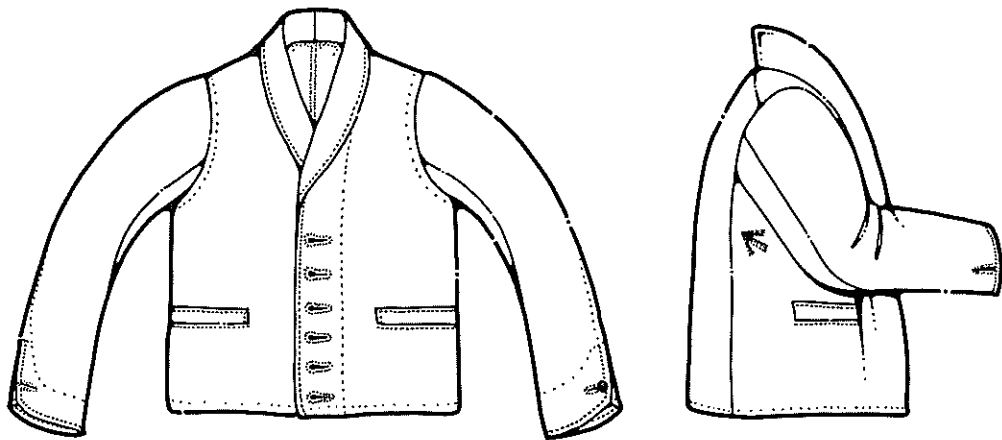
The peculiar particolouring of the penitentiary uniforms appears for a time to have been unique to the new institutions. Provision of uniforms in the regular bridewells and prisons was a long, erratic process, mainly determined by the efforts of individual reformers in specific gaols, such as Elizabeth Fry in Newgate in 1816.¹³ They do not appear to have been of so outré a pattern, but rather a plain, cheap version of conventional clothing.

Such was the material envisaged by Home Secretary Lord Sydney when plans were being drawn up in 1786 to establish a convict colony in NSW. He estimated a year's supply of clothing for a male convict at two jackets, three pairs of trousers, three shirts, three smocks, four pairs of woollen drawers, four pairs of worsted stockings, three pairs of shoes, and a cap.¹⁴ These specific pieces form a very basic wardrobe, and they did indeed transpire to become standard issue. The quantities, however, are almost laughably generous in comparison with the materials with which the First Fleet actually sailed and with which the Botany Bay colony was supplied for the next thirty years. Reporting on his inquiry into the state of the colony in 1820, Commissioner Bigge implied the inadequacy of the existing system in his recommendation that convicts ought to be issued with slops biannually. In winter, he suggested, they should receive a woollen jacket or smock, a pair of colonial-made trousers, a colonial-made linen shirt, and a pair of shoes;



FIG. 3. Duck jacket, the standard convict summer issue. Fremantle Prison Museum 167/79

Photograph by Linda Young; drawing by Jill Ruse



and in summer, a canvas smock, another linen or cotton shirt, two pairs of trousers ('one of which ought to be reserved for use on Sundays'), a cap, and a pair of shoes.¹⁵

Home government neglect of distant NSW had frequently left the Commissariat store quite bare, with the consequence that the large portion of the population who received official provisions — both convicts and military — were, for prolonged periods of time, 'nearly naked'.¹⁶ Cargoes of readymade clothing arrived sporadically, supplemented by quantities of duck, gurrah and coarse yellow wool — the latter, the origin of the slang term 'canary' for a convict.¹⁷ These were to be manufactured into appropriate clothing by female convicts at the Parramatta Factory, but Commissariat records also show that lengths of fabric were issued to individuals.¹⁸

The majority of convicts in NSW were assigned to private employers, who undertook to clothe them to certain basic specifications. The general lack of supplies, however, led to the necessity to dress in whatever was available; thus Commissioner Bigge observed disapprovingly that there was no particular uniform by which to identify convicts living outside the barracks — their dress was 'that of ordinary men'.¹⁹

There was one exception, at least in theory. In 1814 Governor Macquarie issued a general order that chain-gang men should be clothed in 'party-coloured jackets and trousers, to distinguish them from other convicts'.²⁰ This appears to be the Australian origin of the 'magpie' uniform for chain-gangers. The proposal for such a uniform probably came from within the local administration, possibly from the Chief Engineer of the Colonial Establishment, Major Druitt, who supervised the physical arrangements for convict provisioning.

The particoloured suit was institutionalized a few years after in VDL as a step in the hierarchy of punishment at Port Arthur. Here in 1832, Lieutenant-Governor Arthur issued orders defining and regulating convict clothing. He directed that men working on the punishment gangs should wear the conspicuous 'magpie' outfit made in yellow and grey; that regular prisoners wear standard yellow; and that good behaviour entitled a promotion to the relatively modest grey.²¹ Black was substituted for grey in the particoloured uniforms in 1839 and the new scheme launched with an order home for 10,000 such suits.²²

Hereafter the provisioning apparatus of the Colonial Office seems to have functioned smoothly in supplying convict clothing. As early as 1849, when West Australian Governor Fitzgerald began to investigate the possibility of convicts being sent to his colony, Colonial Secretary Earl Grey informed him that such supplies as clothing were governed by general regulations, and would be the same as those sent to all convict stations.²³

Official issue and local reality

The *Rules and Regulations* of the WA Convict Department outline the quantity, sizes, markings, and specifications according to status of the clothing issued to convicts. What was actually ordered and what was ultimately available is listed in the accounts of the Convict Stores, the records of its miscellaneous expenditure and the semi-annual reports of the Comptroller General of the Convict Establishment.²⁴ A few personal accounts, verbal and graphic, flesh out the official records.

For ordinary prisoners the official summer issue, handed out on 1 November each year, consisted of a jacket, waistcoat, and trousers of duck or dowlas; four cotton shirts; two pairs of cotton socks; two cotton neckerchiefs; a pair of boots, and a felt hat. This outfit was exchanged on 1 May for winter gear comprising a fustian suit; two flannel shirts; two pairs of woollen socks; two handkerchiefs, and another pair of boots. Each man received a leather belt upon arrival; there is also some reference to braces. Though the *Rules* state that 'drawers can be issued only on the recommendation of the Surgeon', other lists suggest that white flannel drawers were standard issue from at least 1855.²⁵

For the 'hard labour party' (the chain-gang) the *Rules* give 'a Dowlas suit in summer, and a drab cloth suit with a red [line omitted] in winter.'²⁶ The missing line probably specifies a red stripe to be woven through the drab cloth, another mark of British government property.²⁷ No particular details are given for ticket of leave men.

With the exception of his socks and his neckerchief, a convict's issued clothing was required by the *Regulations* to be marked with his prisoner number,²⁸ for which purpose the *Annual Demands* included regular supplies of boiled linseed oil and pigment. Under the administrations of certain Comptrollers General, the number was augmented with the letters 'G' or 'VG' meaning 'good' or 'very good' — aspects of the various English prison good conduct marks systems used to encourage reliable behaviour.²⁹ None of the photographs showing convicts shows markings other than the familiar broad arrow, but contemporary descriptions of convicts locate such numbers and letters on the arm and thigh.³⁰

Indeed, on the regular duck or grey uniforms of most convicts these painted letters and numerals appear to have been among the most distinctive indicators of the wearer's station. Several contemporary accounts of convicts mention them. The report of a seaman aboard the 1865 transport *Racehorse* described a practical function of these 'great white figures' as being used by the guards to form groups of odds and evens to allocate periods of deck exercise.³¹ The absence of such markings on any of the surviving pieces confirms that they were never issued.

The clothing came in three sizes: no. 1 for men 5'3" to 5'5"; no. 2 for men 5'6" to 5'8"; and no. 3 for those over 5'9". They were predictably inadequate, as the Superintendent of the Convict Establishment reported in 1865:

The outer clothing of trowsers, vests and jackets, received readymade from England, are too small for a portion of the prisoners, amounting perhaps to 40 per cent, consequently considerable labour and material are expended in enlarging them . . .³²

The very few illustrations and first person accounts to describe convicts in WA confirm these basic specifications, but also indicate the irregularity of what was actually worn. Patrick Wall, one of the Fenian political prisoners transported in 1867, described his comrades' conditions in a letter published in *The Irishman*, mentioning that they were ' . . . dressed in a suit of Drogheda linen, ornamented with a red stripe'.³³

The single known sketch of prisoners in WA shows a pair of convicts breaking stones; they appear to be wearing light-coloured jackets and trousers, dark neckerchiefs, solid boots and, respectively, a broad-brimmed straw hat and a tricorn cap. (Fig. 4)³⁴ Three photographs of the late 1860s show figures who can be interpreted as convicts from their roles in the public works projects depicted. None of them is clear, but two show men working on building projects, wearing white trousers, light-coloured shirts, and straw



FIG. 4. Convict stone-breakers, Perth, c. 1867
Ink sketch by William Stone, Perth, c. 1867; State Library Board of WA:
Battye Library 26641P

hats. The other shows three convict gardeners in dark shirts, two in light trousers and one in dark, all wearing broad-brimmed hats; they are supervised by a ticket of leave man in dark waistcoat, white shirt, light trousers, and peaked hat. (Fig. 5, 6)³⁵

These sources confirm the local reality of considerable differences between the lists in the *Rules* and the material ordered and received by the Convict Stores. Other items referred to in various documents include straw hats, gambroon caps, and eyeshades; there is reference too, to a far wider range of fabrics than is named in the *Rules*. Convict suits, for instance, are listed made of duck, dowlas, drabbet, fustian, grey and drab woollen, and beaverteen.

Despite the drabbet and dowlas uniforms specified in the *Rules* above, the particoloured suits for the chain-gang appear in the 'Annual Demands' itemized distinctly e.g., the trousers are described specifically as 'flyed for chains'.³⁶ They were nearly three times as expensive as ordinary issue, a full particoloured suit costing 17s. *od.* when the basic duck outfit totalled 6s. 7d.³⁷

As with all work, certain jobs required specialized clothing. About twenty per cent of convicts, probably those working animals or agricultural produce, were issued with smocks of duck or dowlas. The twenty-four prisoners who rowed the pilot boat wore oilskin coats, leggings, and souwesters. Special wooden shoes were made in the prison workshop for men assigned to burn charcoal in the bush.³⁸

Ticket of leave men still being clothed by the government received tweed trousers in 1870. The major signs of their status within the system appear to have been a blue cap with a leather peak and a neckerchief of black twilled cotton, at 1s. 1d. apiece of considerably higher quality than the sixpenny cottons worn by ordinary prisoners.³⁹ In theory, ticket of leave men were free to buy and wear their own clothes, but it seems to

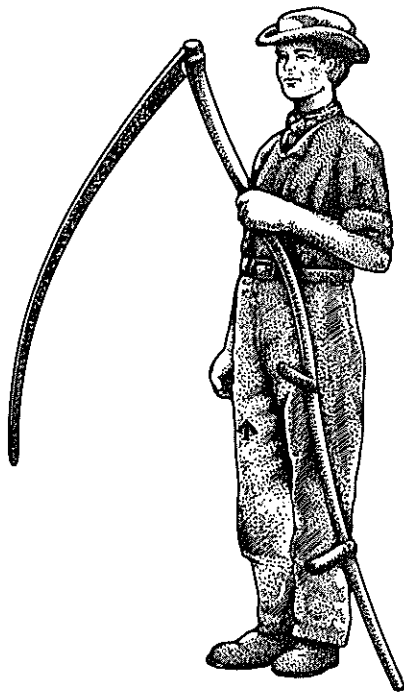


FIG. 5. Convict gardener in the grounds of Government House, Perth, 1868. He wears duck trousers stamped with a broad arrow at the right knee, grey wool shirt, dark neckerchief and straw or felt hat

Detail of a photograph by Alfred Stone, Perth, 1868; State Library Board of WA: Battye Library 21465P

have been not uncommon for men still employed by the government to continue to take the official issue for work and to buy only good or holiday clothes.⁴⁰

Supplies

Where did convict clothing come from? Like the convicts themselves, the infrastructure of support was almost entirely imported from Britain. The required quantities of clothing were ordered in 'Annual Demands' to the Colonial Secretary in London. The various military marks — 'W D', 'B O', 'C & M' — on the surviving pieces indicate the role of the empire's biggest organization in supplying mass clothing to a broad clientele.⁴¹ The Army apparently contracted for the supply of such clothing with London slop merchants, and they, in an ironically circular move, subcontracted to the tailoring workshops of prisons such as Millbank and Holloway.⁴²

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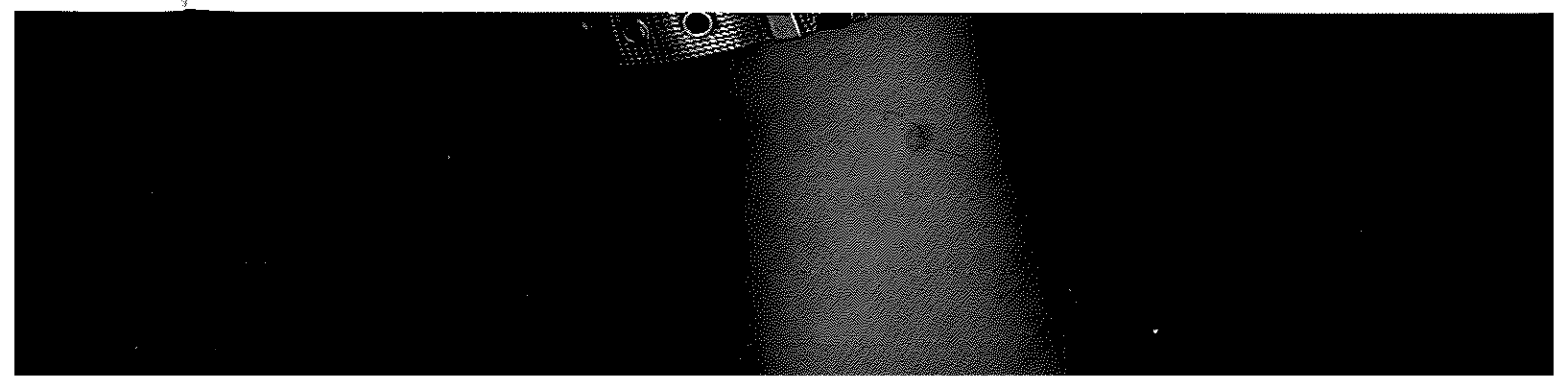




FIG. 6. Ticket of leave man supervising Government House gardeners, Perth, 1868. He wears duck trousers, white flannel shirt, black waistcoat, black neckerchief, and the peaked cap and beard that identify him as a ticket of leave man

Detail of photograph by Alfred Stone, Perth, 1868; State Library Board of WA: Batty Library 21465P

Some clothing was manufactured on board the convict transports en route to Fremantle, as had also been the practice with east coast transportation. John Wroth, writer of the only surviving WA convict diary, recorded of his 1851 voyage on the *Mermaid* that:

A certain number of men are employed in making up clothing of different descriptions, principally grey, with a number of duck canvas trousers. Another portion occupied in knitting . . . Four shoemakers constantly-employed in repairing shoes.⁴³

The *Mermaid* men completed two hundred grey suits, three hundred and fifty pairs of duck trousers and seventy-seven knitted stockings within the first two months of the four month journey; evidence, perhaps, of the scarcity of shipboard occupation.

Given the utter lack of training among its manufacturers, it is unsurprising to find that the quality of clothing provisions was frequently criticized. This was the reason, reported the Gaol Steward in 1857, that prisoners were issued with an irregular three pairs of trousers.⁴⁴ In response to the problem, the Convict Establishment tailor shop was enlarged for two or three years in the late 1850s to produce all clothing *in situ*. However, the scheme was abandoned by 1862, when the Prison Storekeeper claimed that 'the whole supply requires so large a staff of tailors and shoemakers as to interfere seriously with the other demands of the convict service'.⁴⁵

Yet supply problems seemed unavoidable. Sometimes ships were late, fewer than expected, or didn't arrive at all, leaving the Convict Store unsupplied, as in 1859 when the Comptroller General reported that they had run out of winter trousers and stockings.⁴⁶ On such occasions, the Commissariat sought to buy from local suppliers, though

unlike arrangements for food, the Convict Department never called for local tenders to supply clothing. Thus in 1867–68, cotton shirts estimated at 3s. *od.* each were acquired locally at 4s. 6*d.*, but flannel shirts at 2s. 9*d.* were ‘not purchasable’. In the same year it was noted that strong hobnailed boots with heel plates could be made in the colony for ninepence less than the requisition price, ‘but they are inferior’.⁴⁷ By 1869 a summary of costs concluded that all the material required ‘may be purchased [here] at 30 to 40% in advance of English prices’.⁴⁸ The difficulties of provisioning were compounded by unimagined local events, such as the effect of the Westralian summer on heavy boots: as the leather dried out, the nails became loose and the soles dropped off.⁴⁹

Britain ceased transporting convicts to WA in 1868 and soon after transferred control of the entire imperial convict apparatus to the colonial government. Henceforward it appears that all supplies were contracted locally.

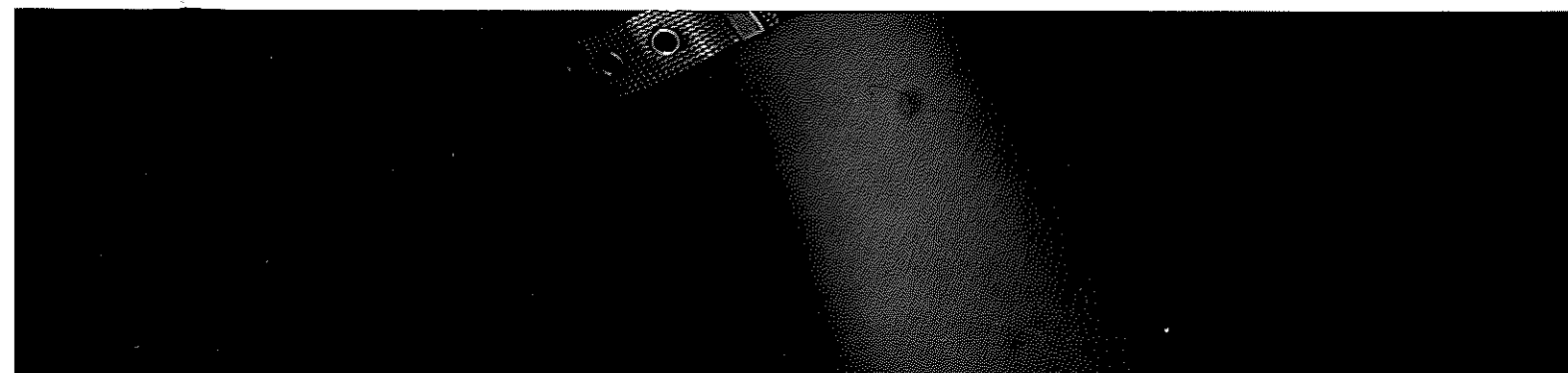
Function

Clothing fulfils a multitude of practical and social functions.⁵⁰ Environmental conditions clearly explain certain differences between English prison issue as described by Mayhew and that supplied to the colonial convict establishments; Commissioner Bigge, for instance, noted that the mild climate of NSW made stockings and waistcoats unnecessary, though he acknowledged that waistcoats were required in chilly VDL.⁵¹ Further practical arrangements for clothes in the convict colonies were determined by bureaucratic indifference and the mischance of fate. Similarly, the selective provision of specialist work-clothing also expresses a practical function of clothes. But the uniforms provided to Australian convicts also filled social roles: they were simultaneously active agents in the sentence of criminal transportation; carriers of highly charged social messages at home and abroad; and indicators of a complex weave of archaic and modern attitudes to punishment.

The clothing issued to convicts was an integral element in the programme of punishment devised and intended by contemporary penal practice. This function was stated explicitly in the Penitentiary Act of 1779: ‘Offenders shall be clothed in a coarse and uniform Apparel . . . as well to Humiliate the wearer as to facilitate Discovery in Case of Escape.’⁵² The motive is summed up in an exposition of the Act by Sir G. O. Paul: ‘The punishment should be of the *mind* rather than the body’.⁵³ This function was recognized acutely by convicts themselves. John Mortlock, a gentleman convict who served sentences in Norfolk Island, VDL and WA, wrote that ‘the horrid clothing was the source of intense humiliation’. Petitioning the Home Secretary for a review of his case, he challenged him with it as the fundamental image of penal servitude: ‘. . . how would [you] like . . . to be decked out in the dress of a convict?’⁵⁴

Among the penitential punishments meted out to convicts were several partly or wholly fulfilled by distinctive clothing. Most obvious is the function of clothing as uniform, identifying and setting apart the wearer both to self and to others. In establishing uniformity it seems to have been the colour rather than the cut of the convict suit that was most influential in indicating the wearer’s status. Thus when Pip stumbled against Magwitch in chapter one of *Great Expectations*, it was the escapee convict’s grim clothing that Dickens used to convey the terror of the encounter: ‘a fearful man, all in

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coarse grey, with a great iron on his leg'.⁵⁵ A visitor to Port Arthur in 1842 made a similar identification between his horror of the damned class of convicts with their sartorial presentation: 'It was hideous to mark the countenance of the men,' he wrote, 'to which their yellow raiment — or half black, half yellow . . . imparted a sinister and most revolting expression'.⁵⁶ As identification photos of the convicts of Port Arthur demonstrate the men to have been merely average in physiognomy, Burn's own linkage of his response to the signification of the uniform is a telling response to the public function of its existence.

A more subtle, but no less powerful, function of the official issue of clothing was the abolition of the individual convict's modicum of independence as a free, adult man. Undergoing the initiatory rite of bath, haircut, shave, and donning of uniform, the convict experienced the subjection of his every feature to control. He was removed from society and translated into an artificial state of dependence; '. . . fed, clothed, lodged without need of care on their part, they come to lead the life of children — little children', described an anonymous convict at Fremantle.⁵⁷ The style of clothing issued to convicts seconds his analysis, for in it are embedded explicit signs of emasculation.

The short jacket in particular is a juvenile garment. That it was intended as a signifier of the wearer's childlike powerlessness is witnessed in the evidence of Magistrate John Stephen in the 1832 Select Committee on Secondary Punishment. Here he stated that no NSW convict was allowed to wear a long coat; indeed, it had happened that courts had ordered cutting off the tail or frock of a refractory convict's long coat.⁵⁸ This cutting down to size is literally a reduction of the adult to the status of child. The most extreme expression of such infantilizing intent is to be found in the button-up legs of the chain-gang man's trousers, which recall the intricately buttoned young boy's skeleton suit of the early nineteenth century, with its trapdoor backside.⁵⁹

Suffering leading to penitence was the basis of the prison reform movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It was a reaction to the old practice of retributive punishment, a reflection of the changing social economy of industrialization.⁶⁰ The reforms were not, however, revolutions; elements of the old order persisted in the new, and can be identified in the penal practices of the antipode and convict colonies well into the middle nineteenth century.

The chain-gang uniform was such a survivor. Particoloured like a pierrot, yellow and black like a wasp, buttoning up like an incontinent infant — the chain-gang man was sentenced not only to the pain of shackles and hard labour, but also to suffer while ritualistically marked. Conceived in these terms, the chain-gang uniform fulfils the three conditions of torture identified by Foucault as 'supplice': it produced a certain degree of [psychological] pain; it formed part of a ritual; and it was a public marking of the body.⁶¹ Even the ordinary prisoner's dress — comparatively less dramatic but still distinctive and branded — met these criteria. Thus interpreted, the clothing of WA convicts indicates the ferocious demands of penitential punishment on the minds and the bodies of the transported.

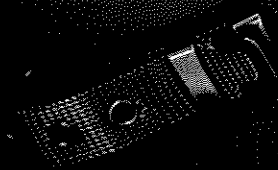
ABBREVIATIONS

BL: Battye Library of West Australian History, State Library Board of WA.
 HRNSW: *Historical Records of NSW*, Sydney 1892.

PP: *Parliamentary Papers*, reprinted in the IUP facsimile series, *Crime and Punishment/Transportation*, Dublin 1966-74.

REFERENCES

- ¹ My preliminary catalogue of convict material in east coast Australian collections suggest that some twenty-five further pieces of body clothing (excluding hats and caps) are still in existence; all but one of these can be provenanced confidently to Van Diemens Land.
- ² A. G. L. Shaw, *Convicts and the Colonies*, London 1966, p. 358.
- ³ The Convict Dept records are very incomplete; first person convict accounts are few; pictorial references are extremely scarce.
- ⁴ WA records suggest that surplus VDL material could be sent to WA if required; *Convict Finance Board: Minutes*, 1851-54, 22.8.1851, p. 19.
- ⁵ The pages of the volume of the *Convict Registers* that should contain this number are illegibly damaged, but the date sequence is clear. The romanticizing attribution of pieces to known characters, and even to fictional characters, is not uncommon, e.g., a leather cap in the collection of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery at Launceston (Tasmania) is inscribed inside 'Rugus Daws'. Daws was the hero of Marcus Clarke's epic *For the Term of his Natural Life*; it was probably added by J. W. Beattie, collector of much VDL convictiana.
- ⁶ Noted as standard practice on the well-milled wool coats of the early-mid nineteenth century; Nora Waugh, *The Cut of Men's Clothes 1600-1900*, London 1964, p. 120.
- ⁷ The two pairs of trousers from VDL both have fall fronts.
- ⁸ Suggestion of Dr Aileen Ribeiro, Courtauld Institute, personal communication, 7.2.1986.
- ⁹ Some VDL pieces break this rule, though it was certainly the predominant practice.
- ¹⁰ Analysis by Dr Ian McLeod of the WA Museum Conservation Laboratory, using a back-scattered secondary electron image in a low vacuum environmental cell attached to a Jeol scanning electron microscope with EDAX analysis.
- ¹¹ Information generously provided by the research of Margaret Maynard, University of Queensland.
- ¹² Sean McConville, *A History of English Prison Administration, 1750-1877*, London 1981, vol. 1, p. 91; Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain*, London 1978, p. 124, illus. 12 (opp. p. 176).
- ¹³ Ignatieff, op. cit., p. 144.
- ¹⁴ Sydney to Lords of Treasury, 18.8.1786, *HRNSW*, Sydney 1892, vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 17.
- ¹⁵ J. T. Bigge, *Report of the Commissioner of Inquiry into the State of the Colony of NSW*, Sydney 1966 (fac. of 1822 edn), vol. 1, p. 61.
- ¹⁶ Hunter to Portland, 21.12.1795, *HRNSW*, vol. 2, p. 344.
- ¹⁷ G. A. Wilkes, *A Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms*, Sydney 1978, p. 72.
- ¹⁸ E.g., Government & General Order, 24.2.1798: 2½ yards of duck, ¼ lb of thread; *HRNSW*, vol. 3, p. 362.
- ¹⁹ Bigge, op. cit., p. 49.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- ²¹ I. Brand, *Penal Peninsula*, Hobart 1978, p. 10; M. Wiedenhofer, *The Convict Years*, Melbourne 1973, p. 112.
- ²² Brand, op. cit., p. 45. No particoloured yellow and grey articles survive; the remaining stock represents only yellow, grey, and pieced yellow and black.
- ²³ Grey to Fitzgerald, 2.6.1849, *PP* 1848, 'Convict Discipline and Transportation: further correspondence', p. 252.
- ²⁴ *Convict Stores Accounts, 1853-60* [BL: acc., 1156; V.35]; *Convict Establishment: Miscellaneous Expenditure, 1865-69* [BL: acc. 1156; V. 1]; Convict Department WA, *Rules and Regulations for the Convict Department WA* (Laws, Statutes etc WA), Fremantle 1862 [BL: 395.941/WA:LAW]; 'Comptroller General's Half-Yearly Reports', later 'Annual Reports', in *Parliamentary Papers*. But for the *Parliamentary Papers*, none of these records is complete for the whole period of transportation, or of convictism, in WA.
- ²⁵ *Rules*, p. 33; e.g., *Accounts*, entry no. 7. It had been the particular contention of Surgeon Rennie (presiding 1853-59) that only old or infirm convicts required drawers.
- ²⁶ *Rules*, p. 33.
- ²⁷ Henry Mayhew & John Binney, *The Criminal Prisons of London and Scenes of Prison Life*, London 1968 (fac. of 1862 edn), p. 155.
- ²⁸ *Regulations*, p. 33.
- ²⁹ The system used on the Woolwich hulks is described in Mayhew and Binney, op. cit., pp. 206-07.
- ³⁰ E.g., J. R. Wollaston, *Wollaston's Albany Journals*, ed. P. V. Henn, Nedlands 1975, p. 124.
- ³¹ Charles Bateson, *The Convict Ships 1787-1868*, Glasgow 1959, p. 280.
- ³² *Rules*, p. 47; 'Annual Report of the Convict Establishments at WA and Tasmania, 1866', *PP*, vol. 16, p. 241.
- ³³ Rica Ericson, *The Brand on his Coat*, Nedlands 1983, p. 131.
- ³⁴ 'Convict stone-breakers', c. 1867, ink sketch by William Stone; BL: 26641P.
- ³⁵ Photographs by A. H. Stone, 1868; BL: 26614P, 26579P, 21465P.
- ³⁶ *Miscellaneous Expenditure*, p. 290.
- ³⁷ 1867 costs; *ibid.*, pp. 142-45.
- ³⁸ 'Acting Comptroller General's Half-Yearly Report, period ending 31.6.1856', *PP*, vol. 14, p. 107.



- ³⁹ *Miscellaneous Expenditure*, p. 140. A convict neckerchief from Port Arthur survives in the collection of QVMAG, Launceston: 1956/60/87; it is a coarse, blue and white Madras cotton.
- ⁴⁰ E.g., the experience of John Wroth described in Ericson, op. cit., p. 32.
- ⁴¹ Cf., the role of the US Army Clothing Establishment, described in Claudia Kidwell and Margaret Christman, *Suiting Everyone: the democratization of clothing in America*, Washington 1974, pp. 47-53.
- ⁴² Mayhew and Binney, op. cit., p. 259, p. 563.
- ⁴³ Ericson, op. cit., p. 25.
- ⁴⁴ 'Comptroller General's Half-Yearly Report, period ending 31.12.1857', *PP*, vol. 14, p. 91.
- ⁴⁵ 'Comptroller General's Annual Report, 1862', *PP*, vol. 15, p. 539.
- ⁴⁶ 'Comptroller General's Annual Report, 1859', *PP*, vol. 15, p. 84.
- ⁴⁷ *Miscellaneous Expenditure*, pp. 140-44.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 415.
- ⁴⁹ 'Annual Reports on the Convict Establishments at WA and Tasmania, 1866', *PP*, vol. 16, p. 241.
- ⁵⁰ This approach is influenced by the theories of function in dress outlined in Petr Bogatyrev, *The Functions of Folk Costume in Moravian Slovakia*, The Hague 1971.
- ⁵¹ Bigge, op. cit., p. 61.
- ⁵² Ignatieff, op. cit., p. 94.
- ⁵³ McConville, op. cit., p. 102.
- ⁵⁴ J. F. Mortlock, *Experiences of a Convict*, Sydney 1965, p. 75, p. 222.
- ⁵⁵ Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (pub. 1861) Harmondsworth 1876, p. 36.
- ⁵⁶ David Burn, 'An excursion to Port Arthur', Brand, op. cit., p. 62.
- ⁵⁷ 'A Convict's view of Penal Discipline', *Cornhill Magazine*, 1864, p. 723.
- ⁵⁸ *PP*, v. 1, p. 28.
- ⁵⁹ Phillis Cunnington and Anne Buck, *Children's Costume in England, 1300-1900*, London 1965, pp. 172-73.
- ⁶⁰ Ignatieff, op. cit., p. 90.
- ⁶¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, London 1977, pp. 33-34.