



Settler Australia, 1780-1880, Volume 1: Settlement, Protest and Control

Richard Brown

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Settler Australia, 1780-1880 will be published in two formats. There are two printed volumes, a necessity given the scale of the project, and a single Kindle volume that contains both printed volumes. Settlement, Protest and Control examines the way in which Australia developed. It is divided into two parts: establishing a colonial state and violence and protest. Uniquely in Britain's growing empire, the colonies in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land were established as penal settlements. Why the British government decided to settle Australia and the problems encountered by the first three fleets in transporting convicts to the other side of the globe demonstrate the scale of the endeavour. Between 1788 and 1823, the two colonies were ruled by a naval and then military autocracy unaccountable for their actions to the growing number of free settlers and the emancipists, convicts who had completed their sentences and, because of their distance from London, accountable with difficulty to the Colonial Office in London. This was, for instance, evident in the Rum Rebellion in 1808 not a populist uprising but a coup within the governing elite for whom Governor William Bligh's 'tyranny' challenged its political and economic hegemony. By the 1820s, there were calls from the British Parliament for a more responsive system of government for New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land that reflected demands from settlers in Australia. The result was a gradual process of constitutional evolution away from an autocratic system of government towards one that was more responsive to local inhabitants, a process completed in the 1850s with the introduction of responsible government, a devolved system of rule that combined local hegemony over colonial issues within an overarching and developing notion of imperial sovereignty. This process of constitutional change occurred at the same time as the territories of New South Wales were divided and new colonies founded: Western Australia in the late 1820s, South Australia from 1836, belatedly Victoria in 1851 and Queensland in 1859. The ways in which the land was settled concludes the first part of the book. State violence accompanied the birth of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land and was a constant presence during the following century. Nowhere was this more evident than in the punishment settlement on Norfolk Island, 'Hell in Paradise' as it was termed by contemporaries, where those already transported were re-transported for further transgressions. So brutish was it that convicts in New South Wales often preferred to be hanged than submit to its regime. Convict society was often volatile and resistance to the arbitrary character of colonial rules was widespread as the attitude of women prisoners amply demonstrates. Rebellion or the threat of rebellion was infrequent although New South Wales experiences a spate of rebellious conspiracies in the first decade of the nineteenth century including the rebellion at Castle Hill in 1804 and rebellion on Norfolk Island was an endemic problem. Those convicted of political offences such as Swing rioters in 1830 and Chartists in the 1830s and 1840s were, from the 1790s through to the end of transportation in 1868, frequently dispatched to the Australian colonies. This was particularly the case with political prisoners from Ireland with Young Irelanders and later Fenians exiled to the colonies to serve their sentences. The violent and militarised character of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land was gradually diluted with the establishing of the rule of law and the emergence of colonial policing though this could be as arbitrary and harsh as the use of the military to control the population.

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