

# History of Australia

## I. History

The existence of the continent of Australia was well known long before the discovery of the east coast by Captain Cook in 1770. Such men as Hartog, Vlamingh, Nuyts, and Dampier had already discovered parts of the northern, western, and southern coasts, but, as they had all reported the country to be barren and desolate, with stunted vegetation and primitive inhabitants, no nation had claimed the new land for its own.

When Cook reached the eastern coast, he found a different type of land, fertile and well watered, and took possession of the eastern half of the continent for England, naming it New South Wales. The continent as a whole still retained the name of New Holland, bestowed on it many years before by the Dutch.

In 1788, a convict settlement was established at Port Jackson and later free settlers migrated and took up land near Sydney. The need for wider settlement soon became apparent and to this end a number of brave men commenced the exploration of the continent by both land and sea.

The Aborigines have the longest cultural history in the world, with origins dating back to the last Ice Age. The first humans travelled across the sea from Indonesia over a landbridge to Australia and Tasmania, about 70,000 years ago. The next immigration followed 20,000 years later. The members of this group which had spread over the western part of Australia are the Aborigine's ancestors. The whole continent was colonised within a few thousand years. When the Europeans came to Australia in the 18th century, they found about 750,000 "primitive" natives, as they called them, who seemed to live there as in the Stone Age.

Australia's original inhabitants, the aborigines, arrived in a series of migrations from Southeast Asia more than 40,000 years ago. There were as many as 600 distinct groups of aborigines living throughout Australia when Dutch mariners explored parts of the west and southern coasts in the early 17th century.

Although traders from Asia had probably been making contact for centuries, aboriginal culture and language survived untouched by the outside world until 1770, when Captain James Cook claimed the eastern coast for Great Britain. The British landed at what became Sydney in 1788 and founded a penal colony under Captain Arthur Phillip.

In 1803 another penal colony was established in Tasmania. The first free settlers arrived in the struggling new town of Sydney in 1791. For a time, the colony came under the control of the corrupt NSW Corps, or "Rum Corps", whose officers did much as they pleased under a state of virtual martial law.

Australian soils and climate, with the recurrent droughts that plague the land to this day, were better suited for large-scale grazing than for farming. The most successful and dramatic transformation of the Australian continent occurred in the 1830s and 1840s, as squatters established huge sheep runs. Paying only £10 a year for a license, squatters could claim virtually as much land as they wanted. It used to be said that in economic terms, Australia "rode on the sheep's back".

The expansion of sheep grazing resulted in the colonization of the Port Phillip district, which in 1850 became the colony of Victoria, with its capital at Melbourne founded by John Batman in 1836. To the north, graziers also gave the outlines to another colony, Queensland (with its capital at Brisbane), which was separated from New South Wales in 1859. The future state capitals, Perth and Adelaide, were thriving settlements by this time.

From 1830 to 1850, wool exports rose from £2 million to £41 million. With new immigrants and the growth of the capital cities, each serving as the major port for its region, Australian colonies began to agitate for

self-government, a measure of which the crown granted in 1850. Following the discovery of gold a year later, the number of free people emigrating to Australia multiplied many times over.

In principle, the official colonial policy throughout the 19th century was to treat aborigines as equals, with the intention of eventually converting them to Christianity and European civilization. Governor Macquarie established a school for aboriginal children.

Such well-intentioned acts, however, were infrequently supported. In the face of resistance from warlike tribes, Tasmania's early colonial government moved from a policy of protection to one of persecution. The last original Tasmanian, Truganini, died in 1876. In the 1830s and 1840s, as the frontier pushed inland, some aborigines were employed on sheep stations, and others worked in police patrols, but even some active church efforts to serve and educate the aborigines did not stabilize race relations. White settlers poisoned and hunted aborigines and abused and exploited aboriginal women and children.

Where graziers sought lands for their sheep runs, the aboriginal communities of hunters were made to retreat into the drier interior. Forced to survive on even scantier supplies of food, aborigines were steadily reduced in number. By the 20th century their traditional lifestyles were confined to the Northern Territory, Queensland, and the western regions of New South Wales.

It was not until the 1960s that aborigines were afforded full citizenship rights. As governments have subsequently pursued policies of land rights and reconciliation, aboriginal Australians today constitute about 1.5 percent of the population. Their own distinctive black, gold, and red flag is recognized by the Federal Government, as is that of the Torres Strait Islands.

In 1896 women of South Australia won the right to vote, the first in the world. In 1901 the colonies, which by that time totaled six, agreed to federate as the Commonwealth of Australia. New Zealand withdrew at the last moment, leaving New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania, South Australia, and Western Australia as the founding states. The new government convened in Melbourne until 1926, when it was moved to the Federal Capital of Canberra.

The Great Depression of the 1930s was a time of high unemployment and widespread suffering in Australia. Its effects were felt longer and more deeply in Australia than in many other countries.

During WWI, Australia sent tens of thousands of soldiers overseas, more than half of whom were killed or wounded. During WWII, Australians served in all theaters of the war, with the bloodiest fighting in the jungles of New Guinea, where a Japanese invasion of Australia was narrowly averted. Darwin and several other northern Australian towns were bombed. In the Korean War (1950–53) Australian forces served with the United Nations, of which it was a founding member. During the Vietnam War (1959–75) Australian forces supported the United States.

After WWII, a period of government led by the Australian Labor Party (ALP) was followed by more than two decades of a conservative coalition between the Liberal and Country (now the National) parties, led by Sir Robert Menzies. This time is generally regarded as a golden era of prosperity. The population exploded after the war as hundreds of thousands of immigrants were encouraged to make Australia home. Under the White Australia Policy, which was not abolished until 1973, only Europeans were allowed into the country.

In 1972 the ALP was returned to power under Gough Whitlam, who ended Australian involvement in Vietnam. In 1975 a constitutional crisis arose when the governor-general, the Queen's representative in Australia, took the unprecedented step of dismissing the Whitlam government. This bitterly divisive action gave momentum to the push for a republic. Many Australians, especially younger ones, favor its establishment in time for the centenary of federation in 2001 and the adoption of a flag which does not contain the Union Jack.

The Liberal/National coalition won the election that followed, but in 1983 the ALP, led by Bob Hawke, was returned to office. Increasing internal dissatisfaction with the Hawke leadership led to his replacement in late 1991 by his former treasurer Paul Keating, who went on to lead the ALP to victory in the 1993 elections. The Hawke–Keating years came to an end with the Coalition victory in March 1996. John Winston Howard became Australia's new prime minister.

## II. The Key Words

### Discovery and Exploration:

European settlement of Australia began in 1788 when a British penal colony was established on the East Coast. From this starting point, Australia grew rapidly and continually, expanding across the entire continent. A number of reasons contributed to Britain's decision to colonize Australia. The most important factor was Britain's need to relieve its overcrowded prisons. Several violent incidents at overcrowded prisons convinced the British government of the need to separate unruly elements from the rest of the prison populace.

Additionally, Australia was of strategic importance to Britain, and it provided a base for the Royal Navy in the eastern sea. Also, Australia could be used as an entry point to the economic opportunities of the surrounding region. All these points figured in the decision by Lord Sydney, secretary of state of home affairs, to authorize the colonization.

To this affect, on May 13, 1787, Captain Arthur Phillip, commanding eleven ships full of convicts, left Britain for Australia. He successfully landed a full fleet at Botany Bay on January 18, 1788. However, they left the bay eight days later because of its openness and poor soil, and settled instead at Port Jackson, a few kilometers north. The ships landed 1,373 people, including 732 convicts, and the settlement became Sydney, Australia.

### Settlement :

After the establishment of the colony at Port Jackson, further settlements were begun at Hobart, Tasmania in 1803; on the Brisbane River in Queensland in 1824; and on the Swan River in Western Australia in 1829. Melbourne was established at Port Phillip Bay in Victoria in 1835 and Adelaide at the Gulf of St. Vincent in South Australia in 1836. Explorations into and along the coast helped the growing settlements expand further and survive.

Perhaps the most important innovation to happen to colonial Australia was the introduction of sheep. In the Late 1700s Captain John Macarthur began experiments in breeding fine-wool sheep using Spanish merinos. These experiments laid the foundations of the country's economic development. The merino was gradually transformed into a superior wool growing animal. The wool industry flourished and the sheep population grew from 34,000 in 1820 to 405,000 in 1850.

In 1840, Britain ended the practice of transporting convicts to most of Australia. In 1853, transportation to Tasmania ceased as well. Western Australia would continue to receive convicts until 1868. In all, more than 100,000 convicts had arrived in Australia since the settlement began.

### Gold Rush :

The gold rush technically started when gold was first discovered in 1851 at Bathurst, New South Wales, and then later at Ballarat and Bendigo, Victoria. At first the authorities tried to hush up the news because they worried that the discovery would worsen the chronic labor shortage and damage the agricultural economy. However, after a succession of lean years, and the news of the wealth that the California gold rush had brought to that State in 1848, the government decided to publicize the discovery.

Prospectors from all over the world rushed to New South Wales and Victoria in the hope of making their fortune. Tent cities dotted the Australian countryside, some as large as 40,000 people which would then disappear over night with the discovery of the next gold field. Violence was not uncommon, although the stories of violence have been greatly exaggerated, much like the stories of the old American West.

#### Convicts and Settlement :

In 1776 Britain was no longer able to transport their convicts to North America after the revolution. It soon became essential for Britain to find an alternative for the convicts, as the jails, prison hulks were overcrowded with prisoners. Sir Joseph Banks soon suggested New South Wales as a suitable site for a colony of thieves. In 1776 the King decided that Botany Bay will be where the convicts will be transported to the new colony.

#### Aboriginal History :

When the British first settled in Sydney Cove, it was believed about 300 000 Aborigines lived within Australia and around 250 different languages. In respect tribes living on opposite sides of a river in Sydney Cove spoke two different languages.

In spite of the British knowing that the continent was already civilized by the Aborigines, the Europeans considered the new continent terra nullius (a land belonging to no-one.) The Aborigines were soon forced off their land and exposed to exotic diseases such as influenza, smallpox and whooping cough that the European settlers introduced to Australia.

During the first 100 years of white settlement in Australia, the Europeans wiped out the total population of full-blood Aboriginal people in Tasmania and left a devastating effect on the Aboriginal people of South Australia. During the end of the twentieth century all that was left of traditional Aborigines were the small groups that lived in Central and Northern Australia.

#### The Europeans :

British settlement, dating from 1788, was altogether different. The arrival of carriers of a powerful, imperialist culture cost the Aborigines their autonomy and the undisputed possession of the continent, and it forced them into constant compromise and change as they struggled to accommodate the newcomers. Initial contacts were often tentative but friendly. Although the Colonial Office in London prescribed the safeguarding of indigenes' rights and their treatment as British subjects, friction soon developed between the colonists and local Aborigines. Communication was minimal and the cultural gulf was huge. Once European settlement began to expand inland, it conflicted directly with Aboriginal land tenure and economic activities and entailed the desecration of Aboriginal sacred sites and property. Clashes marked virtually all situations where conflicting interests were pursued, and the Europeans viewed Aborigines as parasites upon nature, defining their culture in wholly negative terms.

The frontier was a wild and uncontrolled one for a long period. Aborigines in some areas used their superior bushcraft to wage prolonged and effective guerrilla campaigns until they were finally overwhelmed by force of arms. In the period of "pacification by force," up to the 1880s, a large number of Aborigines were killed. Others were driven into the bush or remained in small pockets subject to the "civilizing" influence of missions or were left to fend for themselves in the fringe settlements of cities and towns; still others remained in camps or pastoral and cattle stations to become the nucleus of a labour force.

Introduced diseases exacted a terrible toll and probably killed many more Aborigines than did direct conflict. The disappearance of the Aborigines in southeast Australia was so rapid that the belief arose that all would soon die out. Growing humanitarian concerns and reactions to frontier excesses led the Australian colonies to pass laws, beginning in 1856 in Victoria, concerning the care and protection of Aborigines. They were put

onto reserves and given food and clothing, to "smoothe the dying pillow" as they awaited what the Europeans took to be cultural extinction. These laws offered Aborigines no place in the economy or society of the colonists, and in practice they resulted in much greater restriction and control exerted by whites over the lives of Aborigines. Aborigines were kept off their land and were therefore unable to survive by hunting and gathering. Those who survived were drawn—often forcibly, always uncomprehendingly—into wretched poverty on the margins of life in the developing colonies. Armed conflict was superseded by a more passive but nonetheless determined opposition to cultural absorption by the invaders. Forced adaptation entailed impoverishment, both material and cultural, but no alternatives were left. Gradually, missionaries and government welfare agents began to have some effect, and questions of humane treatment came to have a more practical meaning. But in outlying areas maltreatment and violence lingered on into the early 1940s. Further, wherever European settlement was intensive, miscegenation took place, and Aborigines of mixed descent eventually outnumbered those with pure Aboriginal ancestry in southern and eastern Australia. Their traditional life ceased to exist as a living reality over much of the southwestern, southeastern, and middle eastern areas of the continent, though continuities with the past have remained important in the values and modes of behaviour surrounding kinship and social relations. In the central and northern regions traditional life remained, even on some pastoral, mission, and government stations, although in a modified form. In more remote areas it was still possible for Aborigines to live approximately in the way they had before but with notable modifications, particularly in the arena of law and order. It was for some time believed that the Aborigines would eventually die out, and reserves were established in the late 1920s and early 1930s to serve as a buffer between them and Europeans. But many were attracted to the fringe settlements, where they formed tribally and linguistically mixed communities. This meant the emergence of a new form of living, structurally linked to the wider Australian society. It was not until the 1960s that the frontier period finally ended, with the move into settlements of the last few nomadic groups from the Great Sandy Desert.