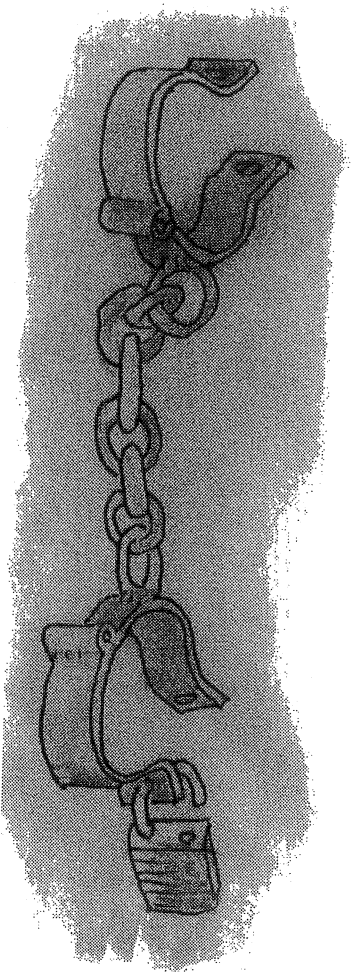


The First European Settlement



Britain sent 40,000 of its criminals to American colonies. This had to stop when America won its War of Independence. Britain now had to find somewhere else to send its criminals, as the jails were extremely overcrowded in England. Australia was the answer!

The first fleet of eleven ships arrived in Botany Bay in 1788. On board were 568 male convicts, 191 female convicts, 13 children convicts, 206 marines, as well as others. Most of the convicts had been sentenced to transportation for theft. The job of the marines was to guard the convicts during the journey and then guard the settlement once they arrived.

The fleet shifted to Sydney Cove eight days after arriving in Australia. It was a better location and so became Australia's first European settlement.

Life in the convict settlement was very harsh. There was a great shortage of food. Punishment for breaking the law was whipping or even hanging. Most of the convicts were from English cities and so didn't have building or farming skills, which were needed to help set up the community. Many people suffered from diseases and died. The marines wanted to be given their own land, and didn't think it was their job to guard convict working groups. Many of the farm animals brought over died or ran away. Life was miserable for everyone,

The Aborigines who lived around Sydney Cove had some good and some bad encounters with the Europeans. The sight of bearded white men wearing clothing, wielding guns and living in such large numbers on their land would have been a shock to them. Fights would sometimes break out. But worst of all, diseases from the Europeans killed many Aborigines.

The transportation of convicts to Australia continued until 1868, with more than 158,000 arriving in crowded ships to live in horrid conditions.