More than Magpies: Tasmanian Convict Clothing in Public Collections

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Abstract
Convict clothing has been written about by most historians of the convict period, but their research has largely been confined to the written records. As museum professionals, we were concerned that the surviving material had received little attention. At a workshop in 2006 we brought together and studied intensively the large body of material held in three public Tasmanian collections in an attempt to document the material culture and assess it against the archival records.

These items were special in their rarity and particularly poignant in their meaning. Unlike many of the other items that we knew had been issued to convicts, these woollen garments marked the wearer as ‘convict’ for all to see, perhaps most particularly for himself, in the most vivid way. The men for whom these garments were intended wore them as a badge of their indelible shame.

With one or two exceptions, all such clothing in public collections appears to have a Tasmanian provenance. Amongst the collection items, there are no obvious regional differences in the style, construction or fabric of clothing, and it is only the exterior markings that indicate where garments were issued or used. These items exhibit little change in design from the 1820s to the late 1890s. Very few extant garments show evidence of wear or have known provenance and we conclude that they were probably obtained by collectors from warehouses of surplus stock in the later 19th century.

Introduction
Some years ago, at a meeting of the Tasmanian branch of Museums Australia, curators from the major convict collections in the state got chatting. We discovered that we were all interested in convict clothing, and bemoaned the limited research that had so far been carried out on collection items. With the exception of research by Linda Young (1988: 70–84), Kylie Winkworth and Margaret Maynard (1994) in the 1980s and ‘90s, all of the published material that we knew of was derived from archival records. Who knew how closely the two sources aligned or how much they could inform each other?

So we decided that we would take up the challenge to try to find out. We were also motivated by our awareness that in the public imagination all convicts were ‘magpies’, dressed in black or grey and yellow clothing, liberally bespattered with broad arrows. We knew the story to be so much richer and more complex, and hoped that publication of our results would help to dispel this powerful myth.

Tasmania seemed the obvious place to embark on such a study. Tasmanian public collections hold the vast majority of the known items of convict clothing. Apart from a few items with known mainland provenance, including a distinctive West Australian duck jacket and a shirt found under the floorboard in Hyde Park Barracks, most convict garments in public collections are thought to have a Tasmanian provenance, although only a few items are attributed to a particular place of incarceration. As far as we know, the remainder were collected in Tasmania by private collectors and donated to museums as part of larger penal collections.

We held a workshop in 2006, when three Tasmanian institutions, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG), the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (QVMAG) and the Port Arthur Historic Site (PAHS) brought together their convict clothing collections for intensive comparison, recording and analysis. Our findings concern only male convict clothing and headwear; there are no known surviving examples of female, children’s or early transportation clothing in public collections.

Historical Background
One hundred and sixty thousand convicts were transported to the Australian colonies between 1788 and 1868, including 75,000 men, women and juvenile convicts sent to Van Diemen’s Land. The management of these convicts en route to and after arrival in the colonies was an enormous undertaking, requiring a vast bureaucracy to organise it efficiently. Clothing the convicts was a significant part of this management; it provided an opportunity to control prisoner behaviour, distinguished them from the free population and embodied the classification system within the penal system.

Contrary to popular myth, according to documentary evidence convict clothing changed frequently throughout the transportation period, although this is not reflected in the collection items. Styles, fabrics and colours were fluid, depending upon the period, place, supply, season, employment and modifications to the penal system. It is uncertain when convicts first wore distinctive ‘uniforms’. Initially, the government issued identical ‘slops’ to both convicts and working class free settlers. These ‘slops’ were similar to the clothes commonly worn by the working class during the late eighteenth century. Male issue typically consisted of short shapeless blue jackets, drop front duck trousers and loose shirts with full sleeves. Reflecting the hierarchical and class-conscious colonial society, convict overseers – who were awarded their positions for good behaviour – received fashionable tight fitting grey pantaloons and short, close fitting blue coatees to denote their higher status (Maynard 1994: 14). No clothing from this period is known to survive.

During the early years of settlement, most clothing was imported ready-made from Britain and India, although throughout the transportation period convicts are believed periodically to have assembled or repaired garments during their passage from Britain. En route to Van Diemen’s Land, female convicts on board the Woodbridge in 1844 (‘Memorandum to the Comptroller’ 1844) and male convicts on
obtain the Pestomee Bomangee in 1845 (‘List of packages’ 1845) made duck trousers and grey waistcoats, jackets, shirts and trousers, all probably intended for prisoner use.

Obtaining sufficient clothing of acceptable quality was a continual challenge for the colonial authorities as ships were frequently delayed or lost at sea during the long ocean voyage to the colonies. Although the government intended to issue clothing twice a year, this was not always possible. As a result of the scarcity of requisite items in the early decades, the authorities were unable to insist on convicts wearing government-issue slops. In fact, a government order in 1831 informed settlers that they were expected to clothe their assigned convicts (Government Order, 29 June 1831, Sydney Gazette 5 July 1831, cited in Maynard 1994: 32) and both men and women in assigned service wore cast-off garments from their masters and mistresses. Gentlemen convicts with sufficient private means were permitted to wear their own fashionable clothes, although this unsettled and angered both free and convict colonists, since their reduced station in life was not reflected in their clothes (Maynard 1994: 10).

In the early years, Tasmanian convicts sometimes resorted to making clothes from animal skins and in 1804 convicts in Tasmania were issued with kangaroo skin shoes (Boyce 2009: 37). By the 1820s this policy had changed and a government notice of 1822 forbade the wearing of skins, ‘as the actual necessity for resorting to such covering no longer exists and as it is calculated to serve as a disguise’ (Hobart Town Gazette 1822: 2). Authorities disapproved of the wearing of animal skins, seeing it as a sign that convicts were ‘going native’ and moving outside their control.

Forcing convicts to wear distinctive penal uniforms became easier throughout the 1820s, when a growing number of convicts were accommodated in barracks or sentenced to government work gangs. In Tasmania, the introduction of probation stations from 1839 enabled the wearing of prison uniforms to be even more rigorously enforced, as all convicts were incarcerated for an initial period upon arrival. Issued clothing was considered government property and subject to rigorous inspection and accounting procedures. McLeod, the Superintendent of the Launceston Female Factory, noted in 1845 that clothing was ‘worn by the convict as long as serviceable. When unserviceable the clothing is stored and kept until inspected by the Ordnance. Great care is made to last as long as possible by repairs’.

The irregular clothing supply forced the penal authorities to consider manufacturing fabric as well as clothing in the colonies. From at least 1793, cloth was imported into New South Wales (Bladen 1978: 82) and from the early 1800s ‘factory cloth’ was being woven at Parramatta in New South Wales. In 1818, the Hobart Town Gazette (1818: 112) advised that all convicts would receive 2½ yards of ‘colonial cloth’ in lieu of a jacket. By 1828, ‘upwards of 1,000 yards of good cloth fit for coarse jackets and trousers [sic] had already been made at Maria Island’ (Hobart Town Courier 1828a: 3). It was ‘said to be fine enough for every purpose of common wear’ (Hobart Town Courier 1828b: 3) and dyed with ‘colouring matter extracted from the seaweed and woodchips’ (Hobart Town Courier 1828c: 3). Weaving continued on the island until the Maria Island penal station closed in 1832. By then, the Female Factory at George Town in northern Tasmania had begun producing a variety of fabrics suitable for the clothing of prisoners. The factory also manufactured ‘substantial blankets’ and ‘indestructible cloth from asbestos’ (Cornwall Chronicle 1872: 2).

A convict tailor arrived at the Port Arthur Penal Station in March 1831, three months after the station was established, and by late 1833 there were three (‘Monthly return’ 1832: 32–9). This station had been established on the Tasman Peninsula south of Hobart in 1830 as a timber getting camp but within a decade it had become a major industrial centre producing a vast range of goods for both government and the private market. In 1862 three tailors, drawn from the better-behaved prisoners and invalids, made 217 pairs of trousers and repaired 416, made 93 jackets, 26 vests and repaired 1,826 flannels. In the Separate Prison a number of men were also doing tailoring; they made 679 pairs of trousers and ‘flyied’ 129 pairs; they also made 281 jackets, two vests, 729 pairs of cloth slippers, 342 blanket frocks, 770 flannel shirts, 155 cotton shirts, 43 linings for prison masks, 250 cloth caps and nine canvas jackets. Very few of these items have survived (House of Assembly 1863: 31).

**Convict Clothing in Public Collections**

Fewer than 100 convict garments survive in public collections today, representing a tiny proportion of the material issued. Although in the public imagination parti-coloured waistcoats, jackets and trousers emblazoned with broad arrows have become synonymous with convicts, historical references and the surviving garments suggest this was only a small part of the story. For example, contemporary accounts show that in 1826 John Lakeland, Principal Superintendent of the Convicts’ Office in Van Diemen’s Land, requisitioned 4,000 yellow cloth jackets, 6,000 yellow cloth trousers [sic], 1,500 grey jackets, 1,000 parti-coloured jackets, 1,000 party-coloured trousers [sic], 7,000 striped cotton shirts and 10,000 pairs of shoes (Watson 1919: 466). Likewise, in addition to parti-coloured clothing, surviving convict garments include grey, red and yellow jackets and waistcoats, yellow and possibly brown corduroy trousers, neckerchief, leather and woollen headwear, and shoes.

**Trousers**

The three yellow and four parti-coloured trousers surviving in collections are made from coarse fulled wool (a process involving cleansing, then moistening, heating and pressing). Most feature concealed buttoning on the outside leg opening to facilitate dressing and undressing when wearing leg irons. Most have drop fronts, waistbands and a gusseted seat with the waist being slightly higher at the back than the front. The legs taper slightly. Some have the crotch lined with a white cotton or linen with a red stripe. The buttons are usually bone, concave with a ridged rim. Most of the trousers are marked externally with three broad arrows on each side of each leg although two pairs bear no markings. The trousers have been carefully made, probably by a skilled seamstress or tailor.

Two pairs of strikingly similar cord trousers from this period survive in the collections of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (QVMAG) and the National Trust of Australia, Tasmania (NTTas). Neither have markings, nonetheless circumstantial evidence appears to be strong that they were made in Tasmania, although their convict provenance is not firmly established. Cord was indeed used for convict trousers; in the late 1830s, a government tender called for the supply of "substantial blankets" and "indestructible cloth from asbestos" (Cornwall Chronicle 1872: 2).
‘jackets, waistcoats and trousers [sic] either of cord, beverteen or cloth, required for the convict services’ (True Colonist 1837: 689). Two years later, the Commissariat Office called for a similar tender for cord or fusian trousers for the convict service (Hobart Town Gazette 1839: 97). The pair of cord trousers in the QVMAG collection bears a handwritten tag by the photographer JW Beattie, an early collector of convict material, asserting that they were ‘used by chain gangs in Hobart and Launceston’. The NTTas corduroy pair was found in the solitary cells area beneath the floorboards of the Chapel at the Hobart Penitentiary. The Hobart Penitentiary in Campbell Street was erected around 1821 as the Hobart Prisoners’ Barracks to hold male convicts on arrival and undergoing punishment. From 1857 it operated as the Hobart Goal and finally closed in 1863.

The QVMAG pair has been crudely adapted. It is unlikely that the trousers were used with leg irons, however, due to the flimsy sewing of the leather dressing around the ankles. A button on the waist, dated to the early 20th century, suggests these may have been altered well after the convict period, possibly for stage or film versions of For the Term of His Natural Life. Beattie was costume advisor for the 1927 film and garments for it were copied from his collection (Roe & Rieusset 2001: 31).

Waistcoats and Jackets
Sixteen waistcoats and seventeen jackets are held in Australian public collections. They are made from the same coarse fabric as the trousers. Most are hand stitched using a beige coloured thread, although some were at least partly machine stitched. They feature a stand up collar that narrows towards the front edge. They have six black enamelled buttons down the front, each with four holes and a concave centre. Facings on the collar and front and bottom edges are assembled from scraps of woollen cloth, demonstrating an economical use of fabric. Jacket sleeves are made from two pieces of fabric with a buttoned opening at the wrist. Some jackets have pockets, usually on the right front. Unlike the trousers, these crude and shapeless garments would have been relatively simple to sew, even by convict men or women unskilled in tailoring.

Bone and iron buttons, similar to those seen on surviving trousers, jackets and waistcoats have been found at a number of convict-period archaeological sites in Tasmania. Examples were found during excavations at Port Arthur Penitentiary (Jackman 2005: 49-51) and at Ross Female Factory (Casella 2002: 70). One button at Port Arthur was threaded with copper wire, perhaps the contrivance of a convict with no sewing skills (Brooks 2005: 7) or no access to thread.

The Meaning of Colour
Apart from their colour and markings, the jackets, waistcoats and trousers are remarkably consistent in their cut, fabric and sewing techniques. The waistcoats and jackets are made of grey, yellow, parti-coloured and red woven fabric, each colour intended for a different class of convict. In Tasmania in 1826, the majority of men in positions of trust, such as house servants and convict clerks, wore grey or blue; those confined in the Prisoners’ Barracks were conspicuous in yellow, while those in the gaols sported a ‘party dress of jackets and trousers [sic], one half of which should be yellow the other half black’ (Watson 1919: 466). In 1847, J.S. Hampton recommended to His Excellency Sir W.T. Denison that ‘without any exception, pass-holders and ticket-of-leave men under magisterial sentences should only be allowed to wear yellow or partly-coloured clothing, and there would then be a commonly-known distinctive dress for each class of convicts: those under probation being in grey, under magisterial sentences in yellow or partly-coloured, and pass-holders eligible for hire in moleskin or corduroy’ (‘Clothing made at Convict Stations’ 1847). Although His Excellency agreed with the proposal, it is not known if this recommendation was carried out.

Parti-coloured clothing was first introduced in 1814 by Lachlan Macquarie, Governor of New South Wales, for men undergoing secondary punishment and in work gangs. ‘In order to brand their ill conduct with a public mark of disgrace and to distinguish them from the better behaved they are to be clothed in parti-coloured dress. Half black and half white, which they are to wear at all times during the time they are sentenced for’ (‘Hobart Public Notice’ 1822; see also Maynard 1994:18). These men were known derisively as ‘magpies’. After 1822, colonial parti-coloured clothing was usually yellow and black, rather than white and black. The parti-coloured clothing was derived originally from the medieval jester’s costume and identified men on the lowest rung of the penal hierarchy. Parti-coloured clothing continued to be worn by ganged convicts in penal settlements, including Port Arthur, and until the end of transportation to Western Australia in 1868. A number of parti-coloured jackets, waistcoats and trousers are held in collections, including a parti-coloured waistcoat in the Port Arthur collection that bears the stamp of ‘HM GAOL HOBART’ on its back and a ‘BO’ mark inside. This would have been the first gaol in Hobart, known as the Hobart Town Gaol or HM Gaol Hobart Town. It operated in Murray Street from 1817 until it was demolished in 1857, when the Hobart Gaol was transferred to the Campbell Street site.

As a mark of humiliation and a guarantee of high visibility, parti-coloured clothing was very successful; convicts loathed these so-called ‘magpie suits’. To make themselves less conspicuous during escape, some convicts separated the component parts and re-stitched them as single coloured suits (The Mercury 1874: 3). They then dyed the yellow suit with ‘some material found in the bush’ (Becke 1975: 44-5). They also traded the black pair to soldiers in the black markets that thrived on every convict station, adding a red stripe made from an old soldier’s jacket to turn them into passable regimental trousers (Clark 2010: 86; Becke 1975: 44-5).
Yellow convict clothing was first introduced by chance in 1817 when clothing of a coarse yellow cloth was accidently sent to the colony (Maynard 1994: 21). One yellow jacket in the TMAG collection is daubed all over its exterior with black broad arrows. Possibly this jacket originated in New South Wales as Maynard has suggested that convicts in government gangs in that colony wore this type of jacket, but it was less commonly worn in other colonies.

The grey waistcoats and jacket are prominently marked on their exterior back with the name of the gaol. One of the waistcoats, marked on its centre back ‘PA 798’, was found in the roof cavity of the Norfolk Bay Convict Station. This station was constructed in 1839 as a port terminus for the convict-powered tramway across the Tasman Peninsula. This waistcoat is unusual in having a concealed inner pocket that might have been used as a hiding place for contraband. Another grey waistcoat is stamped ‘GAOL’ on its centre back while a black jacket is stamped ‘HM GAOL HOBART’.

The red waistcoat has a fine red woollen front, white woollen back, seven silver buttons and is stamped with a ‘BO’ mark. This garment is of far higher quality than the general issue. Red waistcoats were issued in New South Wales in 1810 for prisoners (Maynard 1994:15) but by 1836 it was reported that ‘the police are gradually making their appearance in the new uniform; the red waistcoat is introduced as well as the button; this is a good move, as by this means a constable may be placed on any almsman’ (Launceston Advertiser 1836: 3). In 1845 not only ‘field police’ but surveyors were to be issued with red waistcoats (Colonial Secretary’s Office 1827: 137–152). Some researchers have suggested that this may be a rare example of a woman’s garment, but there are no capes mentioned on any of the lists of clothing to be issued to female convicts.

A list of Tasmanian articles sent to the Paris exhibition of 1855 describes a ‘plaid scarf also made of Tasmanian material’ that had been made at the Cascades Female Factory in Hobart (‘List of items’ 1851). Chequered and, more rarely, spotted scarves were issued to both male and female convicts. Representation of these scarves, tied in a variety of ways, can be seen in the 1874 photographic convict portraits taken at Port Arthur (see Figures 4, 5, 6 & 7). In a few of the images, the scarves have been hand-painted blue. Only one scarf is known to survive, made of a triangular blue and white plaid cotton and held by the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery. This scarf is one of the few collection items that show signs of wear, with staining around the neck area and creases where it was tied together.

Shirts

Two striped shirts with full sleeves, partial front openings and stand-up collars survive in mainland collections. Both shirts answer the description of shirts ordered by John Lakeland, Principal Superintendent of the Convicts’ Office in Van Diemen’s Land, in 1826 and those produced in Port Arthur’s Separate Prison as described above, and have provenance that associates them with convict activity. One was found at Hyde Park Barracks, New South Wales and the other was stuffed into a cavity in a wall of the Commandant’s Cottage, at South Bridgewater (Granton in Tasmania) and is marked ‘BPC’. The Bridgewater station operated from 1830–1849, initially housing men under punishment in chained road gangs who worked on the construction of the Bridgewater causeway and the main road between Hobart and Launceston, and later becoming a probation station.

Cape and Scarves

A heavy, machine-stitched black felted wool cape is held by the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery. It is made from four panels, with a narrow collar and three buttonholes. The convict provenance of the cape is uncertain; one theory suggests it may have been a police constable’s cape, as it is known that field police and surveyors’ men were issued with ‘round jackets’ (Colonial Secretary’s Office 1827: 137–152). Some researchers have suggested that this may be a rare example of a woman’s garment, but there are no capes mentioned on any of the lists of clothing to be issued to female convicts.

The Language of Stamps

While it is not possible to date the clothing precisely, the markings found on many garments give some indication of their period of manufacture. The broad arrow, ‘BO’ and ‘WD’ marks found inside many items identify them as government property; this included but was not exclusively convict material. ‘BO’ represents the Board of Ordinance, the government department that oversaw the supply of clothing between 1827

Figure 2 Jacket stamped ‘HM GAOL HOBART’ (Source: Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority PAHS E73965, John Leeming photographer)

Figure 3 Chequered Scarf (Source: Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery QVM 2003.H0591, John Leeming photographer)
and 1855. The ‘BO’ mark always appears in association with a broad arrow. The War Department assumed responsibility for issuing clothing in 1855. The ‘WD’ mark is also associated with a broad arrow and often the letter ‘A’, although the meaning of the letter ‘A’ is unknown. Based on their markings, eight waistcoats, one jacket, and the majority of leather and grey woollen hats date from 1827–1855, while eleven jackets and five waistcoats were made after 1855. It is interesting to note that the style of these garments hardly changed during the Board of Ordinance and War Department administrative periods. In fact the same style of jacket, shirt and scarf was being worn by convicts in a series of photographic portraits taken at Port Arthur in 1873-4, and even by prisoners in Hobart Gaol as late as the 1890s.

As well as the government mark, a number ‘1’, ‘2’ or ‘3’ is found on the inside of many jackets and waistcoats. The number ‘4’ or ‘5’ is found on the outside at the back of some woollen trousers. Initially, it was assumed these numbers represented the size, but the dimensions of the jackets and trousers do not support this theory. Both the numbers and government marks are small and relatively inconspicuous and usually found inside the garment. It is believed these markings were necessary for accounting purposes, rather than for fitting, or identify prisoners. In contrast, the place names, such as ‘PA’ (representing Port Arthur), ‘PB’ (Prisoners Barracks) and ‘HM GAOL HOBART’ are always found on the outside of garments and are large and conspicuous.

A few garments are stamped with three digit numbers, such as ‘687’, ‘156’, and ‘798’. These numbers may identify individual convicts, as a reference in the Regulations for the First Stage of Convict Probation in VDL (1843) states that ‘all mess and barrack utensils, and bedding, are to bear a station mess number – the numbers will be from 1 to 400. The men’s clothing and shirts will bear a number corresponding with that on the respective probation records’ (Brand 1990: 234). These numbers seem unlikely, however, to be derived from probation records, which have five digits. None of the very few mess utensils in Tasmanian collections bear numbers.

The cape features several unique and perplexing letters and number markings on its interior. Could the large ‘AF’ stamp stand for assignable female, artillery force or possibly a location, such as Austin’s Ferry? The faint ‘WP’ marks may stand for Women’s Prison, but this seems unlikely as such prisons were invariably referred to as Female Houses of Correction or Prisons and the inmates as ‘female’ convicts.

**Headwear**

A variety of convict headwear survives. Leather hats with fold-up brims were ubiquitous for outdoor wear; they appear in several colonial images, two 1880s prisoner photographs (‘James Mullins and William Smith’) and at least 20 are held in private and public collections. Two leather caps have a known provenance. One was found in Tasmania, at the Courthouse and Police Station of the Jerusalem Probation Station (now Colebrook), which operated from 1830–1850. The other is thought to be from the Hobart Gaol. When unfolded they have a high inverted-pleat crown and semi-circular sides. They are lined with soft, tan-coloured leather and a brown ribbon or leather thonging holds the flaps in place. Five hats are unmarked while the rest have either a ‘BO’, a broad arrow or combined ‘BO’ with broad arrow mark.
Thirteen woollen grey indoor hats are held in public collections. Eleven are grey cloche-shaped hats with a high crown, valley fold and curved sides with a toggle in the centre of the crown. They are made of felted wool and have been knitted in the round. They are nearly all stamped with a ‘BO’ and broad arrow. The colour and style of the ‘BO’ mark shows considerable variation. Two grey hats have a knitted red band.

Several dark brown caps, similar to Monmouth caps, a popular style originating in the Welsh town of Monmouth, also survive. These are also knitted in the round and feature a cloche shape with a flared rim. A knitted loop is attached to the rim and there is a toggle on the crown. Only one has a marking of ‘WD’. The others are not marked and it is uncertain if they are in fact convict issue.

Three unique hats are held in collections. These are:
- a large leather hat with a wide brim and very large flaps. The crown is lined with black woollen fabric, but like the others folds into a semi-circular shape.
- a cabbage tree style hat made of woven cane with a thickly applied black surface. It has a wide flat brim and a square shaped crown lined with fine fabric and bears a black stamped label in the centre.
- a fireman’s helmet, made of leather and canvas with a metal trim and black finish. It is stamped with a broad arrow and ‘BO’ that dates it to before 1855. A contemporary account of the fire station at Port Arthur records ‘24 helmets hung on racks’ (Weidenhofer 1981: 90).

The enigmatic cowl or mask from TMAG is made of cambric (a fine white linen or cotton fabric). Masks were a standard feature of the Separate System, imported from Pentonville Prison in London. They were worn when men were outside their cells, to disguise identity and prevent communication of any kind. They replaced the physical forms of coercion and brutal physical punishment of previous years, but reputedly inflicted more serious damage on a man’s mind than any physical punishment did on his body. The masks worn in the Separate Prison are usually described as being of grey or black (Gruncell 1893: 5) and made from woollen tweed (The Mercury 1870: 3). This suggests that the TMAG item may be a mask lining and such linings were made at the Separate Prison (House of Assembly 1863: 31.).

Material Culture versus Documentary Evidence
To what extent could we align the items in our collections with the archival evidence? It is clear that the collection items represent a very narrow range of the clothing supplied to convicts. We have very few shirts and scarves, for example, and a much larger number of jackets and waistcoats. We have woollen hats but only one straw hat of uncertain provenance. We have no canvas or duck trousers or jackets, no flannel shirts and only two dubiously convict examples of corduroy trousers. These items were also worn by free working class men, and so did not mark the wearer as a convict, unlike the woollen items. We have no female clothing at all.

One might surmise that these items of clothing, that were not obviously convict, were simply absorbed into the civilian population until they fell apart from wear. But the shirts and scarves appear in late period Hobart Gaol photographs and so are obviously still circulating in the prison system. If, as we hypothesise, our clothing is unworn and made its way into our
collections from warehouses, why were these other items not stored and souvenired with them?

**Conclusion**

The convict clothing held in Tasmanian public collections generally appear to have a Tasmanian provenance, although the broad arrows daubed all over a yellow jacket possibly suggest a NSW origin. Amongst the collection items, there are no obvious regional differences in the style, construction or fabric, and it is only the exterior markings that indicate where garments were issued or used. The clothing exhibits little change in design from the 1820s to the late 1890s.

Very few extant garments show evidence of wear. According to convict William Thompson, the convicts were usually in a ‘tattered, wretched state’ because they were only issued with two suits of clothing each year (Clark 2010: 78). The few items with known provenance were found in roof or wall cavities or under floorboards at former convict stations. They are in poor condition and so it seems likely that these items had been worn, although the conditions of their deposition would also have contributed to their deterioration. Most collection items were acquired by museums through early collectors and appear unworn. It seems likely that they came directly from government stores after the penal system closed down and the government began clearing out redundant goods, although as none have known provenance this must remain hypothetical at this stage.

The surviving clothing would have been simple to sew and used fabric economically. Close study of these shapeless, coarsely textured garments suggests that they would have been uncomfortable to wear on bare skin. The jackets and waistcoats are fairly crudely sewn, possibly by unskilled convicts with little previous sewing experience, while the trousers exhibit some degree of skill in their construction. While it is not possible to conclusively state that the clothing studied was Tasmanian made, there is ample archival evidence that both cloth manufacture and tailoring were carried out within the colony’s penal system.

It is misleading to assume that surviving garments encapsulate the entirety of the convict sartorial experience. Our collections represent only a limited range of the items described in the documentary sources as once issued to convicts, particularly those items that were of lighter fabric and may be characterised as summer wear. In order to gain a real understanding of the nature and extent of this material, it is essential that both the archival records and the material culture should be interpreted together. However, despite their limitations, these fragile and very personal garments do express complex and changing ideas about how prisoners should be controlled and managed; how their status was to be reflected both to the prisoners themselves and to society at large, and how their public humiliation was to be used against them, in order to compel them to turn from lives of deviance to social usefulness.

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