

Using the Archives

Overview: Visit the Archives Office of Tasmania to view the original convict records for the *Australasia* convicts and learn how to find records at the AOT. Interpret these records and compare the record keeping system of the convict period with how we would do it today.

Big Question: How did Governments store large amounts of information for easy retrieval before they had computers?

Key Element Outcomes:

MAJOR

- Thinking: Inquiry
- Communicating: Being Literate; Being Information Literate

MINOR

- Thinking: Reflective Thinking
- Social Responsibility: Understanding the past and creating preferred futures

Standards: 3–5

Background: The Archives Office of Tasmania holds extensive records from Tasmania's convict period. The originals are accessible by appointment—they are usually accessed on microfilm. Governor Arthur instituted a comprehensive record keeping system in the 1820s and this was used until the end of the convict period.

The main records available for each convict are: conduct record, indent, description list, appropriation list. Not all of these are available for every convict. There are also many other records available. A guide to these records is available online (see Resources for address). A brief guide to the most frequently used records is also available online (see Resources for address).

Lesson Ideas:

1. Students to search to find or randomly choose from the CD *A Drift of 'Derwent Ducks': Chapter 7 The Facts* a female convict.
(The CD contains one pdf file for each of the 200 convicts.)
2. Students note the references for the basic convict records for their chosen convict.
3. Discuss why all of the *Australasia* convicts have the same (or similar) references.
(The women were processed as a batch upon arrival and so their records were recorded together in the convict books.)
4. Students search Tasmanian Archives Online for the file references for the convict records to find a description of the records (see Resources for address).
(Use Series Search, typing, for example, CON40 in the Series Number field.)
5. Take your class on an excursion to the Archives Office of Tasmania to view the extensive convict records they preserve.
(You will need to make an appointment with an archivist first if you wish your class to view the original records.)

6. Using the microfilm printers, students make a copy of the conduct record for their chosen *Australasia* convict.
(The cost of a microfilm print is \$1.10.)
7. Students compare the information in the CD pdf file to the information on the conduct record to assist them in interpreting the entries.
8. Students investigate and discuss the record keeping system for the convict records and suggest how this information could be collected and stored using today's information technology.
9. Design a computer-based record keeping system for the information contained in the conduct records, indents and description lists.

Resources:

- Archives Office of Tasmania website – <http://www.archives.tas.gov.au>
- Tasmanian Archives Online website – <http://www.archives.tas.gov.au/database>
- Guide to the Public Records of Tasmania, Section Three, Convict Department – http://www.archives.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/28706/Con_guide.pdf
- Brief Guide No.13: Records most frequently used for personal information about convicts – <http://www.archives.tas.gov.au/guides/list/bg013>