

Convict Costume Collection Guide

Introduction

The Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery houses a unique and highly significant collection of Tasmanian convict costume. It consists primarily of clothing, headwear, footwear and eyewear. The majority of the convict costume collection can be attributed to the photographer and collector, JW Beattie. His museum, including convict-related material, was purchased by the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in 1927.

Significance/collection rationale

The Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery has the largest and most diverse set of convict costume in the Commonwealth. Several of the pieces are from Port Arthur and the Point Puer juvenile settlement. Markings on the costume also indicate a collection representative of several decades spanning from the 1840s to the early 1870s. There are only several examples of 19th century prison dress in Britain. This highlights the importance and rarity of this particular collection.

Seventy-five thousand men, women and children were transported to Van Diemen's Land between 1803 and 1853. A uniform was an integral part of daily life. Although the form and function of convict costume changed over a period of time, the purpose did not; style and colour variations being employed to accentuate humiliation and segregation from the rest of society. This collection complements other convict-associated material held in the Museum's collections particularly relating to art, craft, photography, technology and archaeological finds.

Discussion

The convict period can be divided into two periods. Until the early 1840s, well-behaved prisoners were assigned to settlers. In 1838 a British Parliamentary Committee recommended a change from, what it believed, was an inconsistent system of punishment. From this the probation system emerged, where male prisoners were first placed in probation gangs. The majority of convict costume that survives is from this later period.

Markings on convict garments give vital clues regarding their age. All goods issued, including clothing, had a mark to indicate government ownership. The broad arrow is the best known of these marks. It was also used to brand machinery, tools, and firearms amongst other things. Lesser known of the government issue markings are the initials 'B O' indicating the Board of Ordnance. This was the government department in charge of issuing goods from the stores. In 1855 this became known as the War Office or War Department, signalling a change in markings from 'B O' to 'W D'. This change provides a useful tool for dating government issue, including convict clothing, from that period.

Several items in the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery's convict costume show signs of alterations. One pair of trousers has an addition identified as an early 20th century button. It is known that J W Beattie was a costume consultant to the film *For the Term of His Natural Life*. The movie was partly filmed on the Tasman Peninsula, including Port Arthur, in 1926. An earlier film version was made in 1908 and stage plays of the novel performed in Tasmania as early as the 1880s. It is very likely that Beattie could have been involved with these earlier interpretations of Marcus Clark's well-known epic.

The Donors: Some biographical information

J W Beattie

James Watt Beattie was born in Scotland and emigrated to Tasmania with his parents in 1878. He was a well-known environmentalist, photographer and inveterate collector. Beattie had a passion for convictism, especially Port Arthur. He travelled Tasmania penetrating areas not photographed or documented before. Beattie's fervour has furnished the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery with a diverse series of collections representing early European Tasmania.



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M Cryan

Martin Cryan was the son of a convict transported for stealing. He worked as a miner, farmer, surveyor and as proprietor of the Federal Hotel in Wynyard in north-western Tasmania. In 1929 he donated a leather cap worn by convicts. The cap was said to have been worn by Rufus Dawes, the character developed by Marcus Clark in *For the Term of His Natural Life*. Museum documentation tells us Cryan was given the cap by his friend Matthews who had worked at Port Arthur when it operated as a prison.

Significant items in this collection:

	<p>Mark Jeffrey Glasses</p> <p>These glasses were said to have been worn by convict, Mark Jeffrey. Transported for burglary, Jeffrey was a well-known identity in late 19th century Tasmania. He published his memoirs <i>A Burglar's Life</i> in 1893. His obituary claimed his greatest enemy was his temper and that 'when aroused he was exceedingly dangerous.' Jeffrey died in the New Town Charitable Institution in 1894.</p> <p>Beattie Collection QVM.1983.H.0124</p>
 	<p>Neckerchief</p> <p>Neckerchiefs were produced by female prisoners at the Cascades Female Factory. One example was sent to the International Exhibition in Paris in 1855. This neckerchief is similar to those worn by prisoners at Port Arthur in the 1870s. The Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery has a collection of carte de visites taken of prisoners wearing such clothing.</p> <p>Beattie Collection QVM.2003.H.0581</p>
	<p>Cape</p> <p>Made of felted wool, the purpose of this cape is not certain. Markings on the interior include 'AF 687' 'NP 46' AND 'WP'. One theory is that female prisoners may have worn this cape, another that it was worn by convict constables to protect them from the elements. It is thought the two silk bags attached to the cape may be 20th century additions.</p> <p>Beattie Collection QVM.2003.H.0580</p>
	 



Trousers

According to Beattie, these corduroy trousers were 'the type of mole-cord trousers worn with leg irons by chain gangs working in the streets of Hobart Town and Launceston.' A later addition to them was a button marked 'BEST RING EDGE', which has been dated to the early 20th century.
Beattie Collection QVM.2003.H.0583



Shoes

Shoemaking was a trade taught to both adult and juvenile prisoners at Port Arthur. These shoes were made at Point Puer, the juvenile reformatory established adjacent to Port Arthur in the 1830s. It is possible the leather was produced at Port Arthur and the shoes destined for the government orphanage in Hobart Town.
Beattie Collection QVM .1984.H.0036



Waistcoat

In 1855 the Board of Ordnance who were responsible for all government issue became the War Department. This parti-coloured waistcoat has the initials 'W D' in white paint on the inside, dating it to after 1855.
Beattie Collection QVM.2003.H.0585

Other items in this collection:








Cap






Felted grey woollen convict cap. 'B O' stamped in white paint inside cap
Beattie Collection QVM 2003.H.0571





Cap

Felted grey woollen convict cap

	<p>Beattie Collection QVM 2003.H.0572</p>
	<p>Cap Semi-circular leather convict cap Beattie Collection QVM 2003.H.0573</p>
	<p>Cap Semi-circular leather convict cap Beattie Collection QVM 2003.H.0574</p>
	<p>Cap Semi-circular leather convict cap Beattie Collection QVM 2003.H.0575</p>

	<p>Cap Semi-circular leather convict cap. Broad arrow stamped in black paint inside cap Beattie Collection QVM 2003.H.0576</p>
	<p>Cap Semi-circular leather convict cap. 'B O' stamped in black paint on inside of cap Beattie Collection QVM 2003.H.0577</p>
	<p>Cap Semi-circular leather convict cap. 'RUFUS DAWS' (sic) handwritten in ink on inside of cap. Rufus Dawes was a character in Marcus Clarke's book <i>For the Term of His Natural Life</i>. Possibly attributed to M Cryan, Wynyard, Tasmania, 1929 QVM 2003.H.0578</p>
	<p>Cap Semi-circular leather convict cap. A 1950s collection label says 'Rufus Dawes' Cap'. Possibly attributed to M Cryan, Wynyard, Tasmania, 1929 QVM 2003.H.0579</p>
	<p>Cap, Woollen Knitted grey felt woollen convict cap. Initials 'BO', letter 'a' and broad arrow stamped in red paint. Beattie Collection QVM 2005.H.0395</p>

	<p>Cap, Woollen Knitted grey felt woollen convict cap. Initials 'BO', letter 'a' and broad arrow stamped in red paint, also '156' in white paint. Beattie Collection QVM 2005.H.0396</p>
	<p>Cap, Woollen Knitted brown woollen convict cap with red strip. Possibly a hospital cap. Beattie Collection QVM 2005.H.0397</p>
	<p>Cap, Woollen Knitted grey woollen convict cap. Initials 'BO', letter 'a' and broad arrow stamped in red paint. Beattie Collection QVM 2005.H.0398</p>
	<p>Cap, Woollen Knitted grey felt woollen convict cap. Initials 'BO' and broad arrow stamped in black paint. Beattie Collection QVM 2005.H.0399</p>
	<p>Cap, Woollen Knitted black felt woollen convict cap. Used by prisoners awaiting execution. Beattie Collection QVM 2005.H.0400</p>

	<p>Cap, Woollen Knitted black felt woollen convict cap. Used by prisoners awaiting execution. Beattie Collection QVM 2005.H.0401</p>
	<p>Cap, Woollen Knitted black felt woollen convict cap. Used by prisoners awaiting execution. Beattie Collection QVM 2005.H.0402</p>
	<p>Cap, Woollen Knitted black felt woollen convict cap. Used by prisoners awaiting execution. Beattie Collection QVM 2005.H.0403</p>
	<p>Shoes Pair of adult leather shoes with studded soles made at Port Arthur. 'B ^ O' stamped on sole. Possibly attributed to Beattie Collection QVM 2003.H.0582</p>
	<p>Trousers Pair of adult woollen trousers, parti-coloured black/brown and yellow. Split sides with buttons. Three broad arrows on both legs inside and out and front and back. '4' stamped in black paint at top rear of trousers. Beattie Collection QVM 2003.H.0584</p>



Waistcoat

Black and yellow woollen waistcoat. 'W D ' stamped inside in white paint.
Beattie Collection QVM 2003.H.0586



Waistcoat

Black and yellow woollen waistcoat. 'W D ' stamped inside with 'A' underneath in black paint.
Beattie Collection QVM 2003.H.0587



Waistcoat

Yellow woollen waistcoat. Sleeveless. Six metal buttons painted black. '2' stamped inside in black paint.
Beattie Collection QVM 2003.H.0588



Jacket

Yellow woollen jacket with sleeves. Five metal buttons painted black. '2' stamped inside in black paint.
Beattie Collection QVM 2003.H.589