

The Guildford Colonial Gaol **by Dr. Pamela Statham Drew April 4th 2017**

The Colonial Gaol and the adjacent Guildford Courthouse are important examples of colonial architecture and together they represent the history of law and order in Guildford and the Swan District through to 1969. The Guildford Colonial Gaol was constructed in four stages 1841, 1851, 1853 and 1867, and the Courthouse was constructed in 1866. The gaol therefore has a longer history – and a different one.

From 1841 onwards the Colonial Gaol was the local lock up for petty criminals awaiting trial or serious offenders awaiting transport to Perth or Fremantle gaols. Sentences of four weeks or less were served at the gaol which at that stage consisted of two cells, a constable's room and stocks.

If only the walls could speak they could tell us of the earliest days of white settlement in Guildford, when Peel's relocated servants occasionally became drunk and disorderly on a Saturday night, or when a debt could not be paid...for in those days property was almost more important than human welfare. Run-away servants – even if free - were locked up when caught and if sentenced by the Magistrate –which many were – they served further time in gaol. Very few, if any, women saw the inside of this gaol in the pre-convict period as magistrates believed husbands could chastise their wives for misconduct!

By the 1850's and 60's the convicts had arrived and their labour allowed a huge investment in infrastructure. Under the watchful eye of Richard Roach Jewell, the Colonial Clerk of Works, his civil engineer James Manning and Edmund Henderson the comptroller General of the Convict Establishment (until kicked out by the Governor Hampton's son) – the colony saw the blossoming of a number of beautiful Flemish bond brick buildings. Government House, the Town Hall and the Pensioner barracks are outstanding examples but the Courthouse here is another such gem.

Convict's and ex-convicts provided the labour for **two extensions to the Guildford Gaol in 1853 and 1867**. But it was also convicts who made those extensions necessary. Again if the walls could talk they could tell of our early bushrangers - and not only Moondyne Joe (I do not know if he was ever incarcerated here) but **James Lilly** –York and Toodyay's bushranger - certainly was. Lilly was an accomplished horse thief who led the mounted police a merry dance till cornered and captured and brought down to Fremantle - spending the night here on the way.

But most inmates were incarcerated for more mundane matters, principally stealing, drunkenness, using obscene language or 'vagrancy' (ie being homelessness). Some of the stories of past inmates are highlighted inside the Gaol - including one **Thomas Jackson** who was charged in 1854 with stealing grapes from Mr Devenish's garden, and sentenced to 12 months hard labour. !

By the late 1850's the settlers initial fears that the introduction of Convicts would endanger their lives and freedoms had dissipated. Whilst the convicts were not the minor-crime types that had been asked for, they posed little threat to life. Indeed it was said that the conditions in the colony - sunshine, good food and enough of it - took away the motives that had driven many of the men to crime in England. We know that while in **this** gaol inmates were treated pretty well. All prisoners received three meals a day – though they varied over time depending on the generosity of the supplier and the experience of the cook!

It is interesting today to see how important **horses** were in keeping order and how every police station and gaol had its own stables and usually at least four horses. Horses of course meant the need for blacksmiths to maintain horseshoes, and leather tanners to keep saddles and reins in trim. All manner of items were linked to the dependence on horses – there are even leather shoes to stop them sinking into the sand...shoes to make a horse more like a camel!

This beautifully restored old Gaol now houses many of the items that were in daily use in the past – and it gives us cause to be thankful that we live now, and not then, when you see how rough and heavy many of their utensils were. In fact the collection of artifacts in this Gaol, tendered by volunteers from the Swan- Guildford Historical Society, is **the third most significant historical collection in WA. !!**

The importance of **the Gaol Building** has long been recognized and it has been listed by the **National Trust** and placed on the **Register of National Estate** since **1978**. But that didn't stop the ravages of time. The Gaol has been the subject of **Conservation Studies** – and is covered in Guildford's 1994 Conservation Policy Documents.

BUT knowing how important it is and how much it needs conservation is one thing – getting it DONE is another.

Members of the Swan Guildford Historical Society kept clear records on the state of the building and when rising damp and dry rot were detected a couple of years ago they went into campaign mode - pushing, cajoling, and persuading the powers that be to fund the necessary restoration.

But it was going to be an expensive project. **The City of Swan** have spent almost \$300,000 and the **Swan Guildford Historical Society** has expended almost the same amount in terms of the value of hours worked in getting this Project up and running and seeing it through to the launch today.

Celia Miller, President of the Society has said it has been a huge undertaking. The building needed to be stripped back entirely and then rebuilt to last another 100 years. All the windows needed significant restoration, (particularly the Georgian windows in the Justice Room) and the floors and walls needed to be stripped and re-rendered – and that revealed some surprises! **Paul Bridges** the Society's Curator said:-

'We uncovered new doorways... and discovered new artefacts under floorboards. A particularly poignant example was a couple of clay pipes' reminding him of the story of Mrs Ellis and Mrs Saunders 'who fought over such a pipe with much hair pulling and name calling' before being brought in front of the bench in 1852.'

Members of the Society can tell many more such stories – as they guide visitors through the Exhibition inside the beautifully restored Old Gaol.

So now we can declare the restored Gaol OPEN AGAIN and wish it all the best for the next 100 years.



The Colonial Gaol is also home to a major collection of social history artefacts. You will be able to explore items that help to show how people lived and worked in Guildford and the surrounding area. What kind of kitchen utensils would be used? How was wood cut for the weatherboards, the roof shingles or even to make the roads? What kept food cool before electricity was available? What was the role of the blacksmith and what tools did the cooper use? We have a terrific collection of equestrian history from side saddles to stirrups and spurs.

Enjoy a browse through a time gone by. Our SGHS guides will let you in to the secrets behind many of the objects.