

Background Brief

3.02 History of Norfolk Island

Overview Timeline

- c1150CE – c1450CE: Polynesians occupied Norfolk Island prior to Europeans.
- 1774: Norfolk Island discovered by Captain Cook on 10 October 1774.
- 1788: First penal settlement was established (6 weeks after Sydney) on 2 March 1788.
- 1814: First (colonial) settlement was abandoned.
- 1825: Second settlement was established for convicts who reoffended.
- 1855: Second (penal) settlement on Norfolk Island was abolished.
- 1856: Pitcairn Islanders (Bounty descendants) arrived on Norfolk Island on 8 June 1856.

Polynesian Settlement

- Archaeological remains at Emily Bay suggests Polynesian occupation between c1150CE and c1450CE.
- Other evidence for Polynesian settlement included banana plants growing in Arthur's Vale.
- Numerous Polynesian artefacts have also been found at many locations on Norfolk Island.

First (Colonial) Settlement

- The HMS *Supply* arrived on Norfolk Island on 2 March 1788 with eight officers and 15 convicts.
- By 1790 cultivated areas stretched along Arthur's Vale to Cemetery Bay. The settlement grew to include a hospital, bakehouse, barracks, storehouses, a school, and a Government House.
- The colony's only links to the outside world were HMS *Sirius* and HMS *Supply*. On 19 March 1790 the HMS *Sirius* ran aground and sank at Norfolk Island.
- The population reached a maximum of 1156 by 1792. By 1803, it was recognised Norfolk Island could not support itself independently, despite petitions from now free settlers.
- The settlement's closure was ordered in 1810 and most remaining settlers left by March 1813.
- It was abandoned in February 1814, and settlement buildings burnt to prevent use by others.

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Second (Penal) Settlement

- The settlement reopened in 1825 as a place of secondary punishment for reoffending convicts.
- By 1833, there were 600 prisoners and 130 troops. Over the next eight years, key buildings including the Prisoners Barracks, Pier Store, New Gaol and Crankmill were constructed.
- By 1839, there were 1200 prisoners and 180 soldiers. Agriculture, including flax production, was reintroduced. The convict population reach its highest number of 1872 in March 1840.
- In 1847, the decision was made to abolish the settlement and it closed in 1855.

Third (Pitcairn) Settlement

- In 1852, the British Home Office offered relocation to the Pitcairn community (which had its origins in the mutiny on *HMAV Bounty*), who had outgrown Pitcairn Island.
- The people of Pitcairn Island voted to make the transfer to Norfolk Island and sailed on the *Morayshire*, landing on Norfolk Island on 8 June 1856, initially staying in the barracks.
- The Pitcairn community maintained the buildings they needed and made alterations and additions. Several buildings decayed in the 1870s and 1880s. A courtroom was built in 1896.
- The Pitcairn community gradually established farming and whaling industries.

Twentieth Century

- Administration of Norfolk Island was transferred to the New South Wales Governor from 1901.
- In the 1920s, a number of former convict buildings were renovated as offices and residences.
- The tourist trade saw the construction of a guest house and creation of the golf course.
- In 1942 an airfield was built on Norfolk Island to refuel aircraft during the World War II Pacific campaign.
- After the war, tourism increased and became a mainstay of Norfolk Island's economy.
- From 1962 into the 1970s, the Commonwealth Department of Housing undertook restoration.
- In 1979, Norfolk Island was granted limited self-government by Australia, in place until 2015.

Attachments: Nil

