

FIRST TOLs AT THE TOODYAY CONVICT HIRING DEPOT

The first shipload of convicts sent to the newly declared penal colony in Western Australia arrived on the 1st June 1850. The *Scindian* carrying 75 convicts had come sooner than expected. No preparations had been made to receive them and no accommodation had been organised.

Two more ships arrived over the next 12 months delivering another 308 convicts but it was the unexpected arrival of the *Pyrenees* on the 28th June 1851, with a further 293 convicts on board, that stretched the resources of the Colony.

All convicts were to be granted their ticket of leave immediately they disembarked. There was a real concern about them finding work and accommodation. It was raining incessantly and the convicts had arrived without tents of any kind.

In July, Governor Fitzgerald announced plans to distribute the convicts between Perth and Fremantle, and three rural towns – Bunbury, York and Toodyay. Land was immediately acquired at the Toodyay townsite to construct a Convict Hiring Depot.

Forty ticket of leave holders were selected to travel to Toodyay. The flooding around the Swan Valley was quite severe and the party were delayed at Guildford. On Monday 18th August the first group finally set off from Guildford for Toodyay, marching alongside two bullock teams which carried their bedding and supplies.

They were heading for the original township of Toodyay (now known as West Toodyay), 5km downriver from the present town. The track they were travelling on was poorly maintained. There was a steep climb up what is now known as Red Hill and beyond that the road continued through more hills and valleys.

They arrived at the military barracks at old Toodyay, on the high bank of the Avon River, at nightfall of Wednesday 20th August. On the opposite side of the river was the land set aside for the Convict Depot.

The next day the flooded river was forded with difficulty – men, bullocks and supplies taking most of the day to get across. The Depot site comprised a narrow allotment along a creek bed and an adjacent 10 acre block upon which a cottage stood. The cottage was used for emergency housing of the TOLs.

The ticket of leave men were immediately employed to construct temporary accommodation for the Pensioner Guards. These were A-framed huts made of a frame of bush poles and thatching of dry rushes, brushwood or straw. The huts were completed on 20th September. Next the TOLs were put to work on the roads until



such time as enough masons and mechanics were available to begin constructing the new gaol for the town.

Two more ships arrived in October and November that year, carrying a further 580 prisoners. As more men and resources became available to build the infrastructure associated with the Convict System, the primitive conditions endured by the first TOLs sent to Toodyay were greatly improved.

By early 1852 it was decided to re-locate the Depot complex on a larger and higher block upriver. By late 1852 the cottage first used by the TOLs at the West Toodyay site was given over to the Pensioner Guards.

In 1853 and 1854 the West Toodyay site was used as an Immigrants Depot. On the 19th August 1857 the Government sold off both properties that comprised the original Depot site to John Davidson, a local settler.