

Australian Immigration



The British 'First Fleet' arrived in Australia in January 1788 to establish a European settlement in Sydney. From that time, records of a passenger's arrival in Australia are most likely to have been created by the government administering immigration at the ship's first Australian port of call. As a general rule, check the archives of the relevant Australian state government for arrivals up to 1922/23 and after that look in the National Archives of Australia. However some schemes, including 20th century youth migration, were administered by the states even after 1922.

Immigration at first port of call

Sailing ships from Europe to Australia took advantage of the currents and winds to follow the 'Great Circle Route' from Europe south through the Atlantic Ocean and then eastwards across the Southern Ocean to Australia. Until about 1880 most ships took this route, generally making their first landings in Sydney or Melbourne, after which passengers travelled overland or on domestic shipping to their eventual destination. (After Fremantle Harbour was opened in 1898 that Western port became a common first stop.) An alternative 'Mediterranean route' became available after the Suez Canal opened in 1869, allowing ships to travel north of Australia before heading south down the Queensland coast.

When considering which government administered the 'first port of call' it is important to consider that some areas that later became separate colonies or states were formerly land claimed by the British as part of New South Wales:

- Van Diemen's Land (later renamed **Tasmania**) became a separate colony in 1825.
- The new colony of **South Australia** was established in 1836. From 1863-1911 this included the 'Northern Territory of South Australia'. In 1912 **Northern Territory** became a territory of the Commonwealth of Australia.
- **Victoria** (formerly the 'Port Phillip district of NSW') became a separate colony in 1851.
- **Queensland** (formerly the 'Moreton Bay district of NSW') became a separate colony in 1859.
- In 1909 land was transferred from NSW to the Commonwealth to create the Federal Capital Territory (later renamed as the **Australian Capital Territory**).
- Only **Western Australia**, which the British settled in 1829, was not on land formerly claimed as part of NSW.

Categories of migrants

Incentives were needed to attract desirable European emigrants to travel to Australia, as it was a much cheaper and shorter journey to migrate to North America. Generally this was done by offering free or subsidised travel, often financed by land sales in the colonies. Australian governments determined suitability based on age, gender and occupation, while it sometimes suited governments, parishes or charities in the UK to subsidise the passage to the colonies of those who would otherwise need support.

The categories of migrants also determine where records are likely to be held:

- **Convicts** were sent to NSW and Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) from 1788-1853. Male convicts were sent to Western Australia from 1850-1868. Convict records are generally held in the relevant state government archives.
- Records of **government-assisted migrants** from Europe are likely held in the archives of the relevant government. Less information was recorded about passengers who were not assisted by governments (classed as '**unassisted migrants**').
- Officers who travelled in the **military** to Australia may be listed in the ship's records, but generally those of other ranks were not.
- Few records are available for those who worked their way to Australia as **crew**.

Those not from the British Empire who wanted to vote or own land had to be **naturalised** first, and these naturalisation documents often list the individual's place of birth and also ship of arrival. Until 1903 naturalisations were handled by the individual colonies or states – and an 'alien' moving between colonies may well have been naturalised in more than one colony. After 1903 naturalisations were administered by the Commonwealth government and granted rights across the whole of Australia.

20th century

Following Federation in 1901, the Commonwealth government gradually took control of immigration policy, while initially the states continued to administer their own migration schemes, sometimes independently and sometimes in conjunction with the Commonwealth. For arrivals after 1923 researchers should look first in the archived records of the Commonwealth government.

The new Commonwealth government initially concentrated more on keeping out certain groups rather than encouraging new settlers. Under the infamous 'White Australia Policy' a dictation test could be given to non-Europeans in any European language, allowing unwanted migrants to be refused on the grounds of their 'literacy', rather than 'race'. The 'White Australia Policy' was gradually dismantled, with the final step taken in 1973.

Various child and youth migration schemes operated in the first half of the twentieth century. Records of these schemes are mainly held by the original organisations, although some documents may be found in the relevant state's government archives.

The threat of invasion during World War II alerted Australians that a small population in a large country could not defend itself. This led to the catchphrase 'Populate or Perish' and consequent programs designed to attract more desirable immigrants. 'Ten Pound Poms' was the largest assisted immigration scheme to Australia, funded jointly by Australia and the UK. Begun immediately after World War II it was offered to Britons and those from most British colonies. Records are generally to be found in the National Archives of Australia.

From 1947-1954 under the Mass Resettlement Scheme for Displaced Persons, Australia received more than 170,000 European refugees and displaced persons. The last assisted passage schemes ended in 1975, except for refugees.

Look for records created at both ends of the journey, at the time of boarding and also when disembarking. Journals and diaries as well as newspapers describe the actual voyages. Ships' pictures can also help you better understand and illustrate their journey.

Considering 'where and when they came' provides the clues for where to look for records of arrivals in Australia. Learning about what was happening in the 'old country' as well as the new, as well as the migration schemes and incentives, allows researchers to better understand how and why a migrant undertook the long and dangerous journey to Australia.

Further information about the above can be found in a book by the author entitled 'Arrivals in Australia from 1788', published by Unlock the Past in 2015.

See also pages 'Immigration to Australia' on the website of the author,
www.kerryfarmer.info/courses/AustImmigration/

Websites

- Ancestry.com.au – www.ancestry.com.au
- Australia's Red Coat Regiments (*archived website*) – <https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/tep/100162>
- Bounty Immigrants Index 1828-1842 – www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1542665
- Find my Past – www.findmypast.com.au
- Immigrant Communities in Victoria – <https://origins.museumsvictoria.com.au>
- Irish Famine Orphan Girl Database – www.irishfaminememorial.org
- (The) Log of Logs Volumes 1, 2 and 3 (*by Ian Nicholson*) – <https://zenodo.org/record/6901#.XVOxl-gzZPa>
- Mariners and ships in Australian Waters – <https://marinersandships.com.au>
- Museums of History NSW (*formerly NSW State Archives*) – mhns.wa.gov.au
- National Archives of Australia – www.naa.gov.au
Good British stock: child and youth migration to Australia –
www.naa.gov.au/help-your-research/research-guides/good-british-stock-child-and-youth-migration-australia
- (The) National Archives UK – www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
Surgeons at Sea (Royal Navy Medical Officers' journals) –
webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20230801163143/https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/surgeonsatsea/
- Northern Territory Archives Service – <https://dtsc.nt.gov.au/arts-and-museums/northern-territory-archives-service>
- Passenger Ships to Australia (*Australian National Maritime Museum, comparison of voyage times*) –
www.sea.museum/collections/library/research-guides/passenger-ships-to-australia
- Passengers in History 1836 (*South Australian Maritime Museum*) – <https://passengers.history.sa.gov.au>
- Public Record Office Victoria – <http://prov.vic.gov.au>
- Queensland State Archives – www.qld.gov.au/recreation/arts/heritage/archives
- Scottish emigration records – www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/guides/emigration-records
- State Records of South Australia – archives.sa.gov.au
- State Records Office of Western Australia – www.sro.wa.gov.au
- (Libraries) Tasmania Names Index – https://libraries.tas.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/names/
Arrivals, immigration, and departures – <https://libraries.tas.gov.au/family-history/Pages/Arrival-departure.aspx>
- Trove (*digitised newspapers and much more*) – <https://trove.nla.gov.au>