

The Economic Impact of Convict Transportation on the WA Economy 1850–1900: An Archaeological Investigation

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The introduction of the convict system in 1850 into the Western Australian (WA) economy resulted in a large injection of capital into the colony, the dissemination of which cannot be overlooked when considering the transformative effect of the convict system on the WA colony. This injection resulted from the purchase of goods and services by the penal system, which ultimately transferred money from the British Crown into the local market; the breakdown of which would have necessarily resulted in certain industries receiving larger benefit than others. This thesis was a pilot study to consider the potential of using archaeological evidence in conjunction with economic models to consider the transformation caused by the capital injection. Using a two-scaled approach and focusing on the time period between 1850 and 1900, a combination of historical and archaeological data was used to develop an understanding of the breakdown of spending by the penal system. Two artefact assemblages from Fremantle Prison formed the basis of the analysis, with one representing institutional purchases, while the other related to wage-based spending. By considering whether purchases represented local commodities or imports, it was possible to see how capital transferred to the local economy and how much of that spending leaked out of the economy through imports. In doing this, the thesis highlights the range of methods through which capital entered the colony, and how the agency available to specific aspects of the penal system altered how the capital was spent and ultimately who was impacted by the capital injection.