

Historical Developments Handout

65000BC: **First human inhabitants** populate Australia. Indigenous Australians develop complex, diverse cultures and social structures across the continent.

1788: British colonisation begins with the arrival of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove; **convicts** will be transported to New South Wales (1788-1850), Tasmania (1804-1853), Victoria (1803; 1826-1828; 1844-1849), Queensland (1824-1839) and Western Australia (1850-1868). South Australia, established 1836 as a free settlement, is the only colony not to receive convicts directly, although some later migrate there from the other colonies.

1791: 27 ex-convicts are given land at Prospect Hill, and muskets that they are told to use to 'disperse' the Aboriginal inhabitants of the area. Frontier violence, including the **massacre** of large Aboriginal groups, continues to be used by colonists to take control of land into the 20th century.

1831: The first **railway** in Australia is built, a privately-owned line at Newcastle. The construction of railways across the Australian colonies increases between the 1850s and 1880s, and again between the 1920s and 1930s, greatly improving mobility within and between colonies.

1851: Victorian **gold rush** starts at Ballarat. The population grows from 29,000 to 500,000 over the next ten years as migrants arrive from around the world. The gold rush continues into the late 1860s and the colony enjoys great financial prosperity as a result, with the capital becoming known as 'Marvellous Melbourne' due to the rapid expansion of its institutions, infrastructure, amenities and commercial enterprises. New South Wales experienced a gold rush across the same period as Victoria; Western Australia will have a gold rush of its own in the 1890s.

1853: Australia's first **telegraph** line is erected between Melbourne and Williamstown. Electric telegraphs are introduced across the other colonies across the 1850s and 1860s, greatly increasing the speed of communication within and between them.

1854: Miners at Ballarat start a campaign of civil disobedience known as the Eureka Rebellion in response to unfair taxation and lack of voting rights, then restricted to men who owned property. While the rebellion was quickly put down, mass public support for the rebels' cause led to continued agitation for **universal suffrage for Anglo-Australian males**. Succeeding years saw all men of British heritage aged over 21 years gain the right to vote in South Australia (1855), Victoria (1857), New South Wales (1858), Queensland (1872) Western Australia (1893) and Tasmania (1896).

1864: The UK introduces the Contagious Diseases Act, which aims to control the spread of **venereal diseases** within the armed forces by allowing police to arrest suspected **prostitutes** and forcibly subject them to regular medical examinations. If they failed these, they would be imprisoned in a 'lock hospital' until recovered. Several British colonies, including Queensland and Victoria, introduced their own versions of this legislation during the nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, similar measures were again introduced under Venereal Diseases legislation enacted in response to the spread of such infections among Australian soldiers during the two World Wars.

1870: The term larrikin enters popular speech to describe a delinquent **youth subculture**. Larrikin gangs or 'pushes' committing robberies and violence remain a major concern into the early 1900s.

1880: Infamous bushranger Ned Kelly is hanged after a protracted police pursuit. **Bushranging**, which began in the early transportation period when escaped convicts would survive by living in the bush and robbing passers-by, thereafter declines as a distinct form of criminal activity in Australia.

1891: A severe **economic depression** hits Australia, with Victoria particularly heavily affected.

1894: South Australia becomes the first Australian colony to grant women the right to vote and stand for Parliament. **Female suffrage** is soon extended to Western Australia (1899), the newly-formed Commonwealth of Australia (1901), New South Wales (1902), Tasmania (1903), Queensland (1905)

and Victoria (1908). The successes of first-wave feminism stimulate considerable social anxieties about female behaviour and changing gender norms.

1895: Waltzing Matilda, which will become Australia's unofficial anthem, is first sung in public. It tells the story of an itinerant rural worker (swagman), who steals and kills a sheep (jumbuck) to eat, then commits suicide to avoid arrest when confronted by the mounted police (troopers). This song was part of a growing national **popular culture** that often celebrated underdogs.

1896: The first **automobiles** are sold in Australia. Car manufacturing increases from the 1920s, accompanied by a range of automobile-related offences (car theft, joyriding, traffic offences).

1901: Federation joins the separate Australian colonies into the nation of the Commonwealth of Australia. One of the first pieces of legislation passed by the new federal parliament is the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act, which formed the basis of the '**White Australia policy**' that would persist until the early 1970s. The Act enabled the government to exclude any immigrant considered 'undesirable' – principally those of non-European background – by enabling the government to administer a dictation test to any person seeking entry to Australia. The test could be administered in any European language, not necessarily English, chosen by the government official administering it; all they had to do was choose a language unknown to the migrant, as failure was cause for immediate deportation.

1914: Australian soldiers enter **World War I**, with the first AIF departing Australia in November. Over the course of the war, 421,809 Australians serve in the military, with 331,781 serving overseas. Over 60,000 Australians are killed and 137,000 are wounded. Many return home with lifelong physical or psychological effects. On the home front, the war sees a 13 per cent increase in female employment. The war also negatively impacted the Australia economy, bringing about a rise in the cost of living while per capita income declined.

1916: Wartime concerns about **alcohol** sees the introduction of early closing hours, with hotels in most states now forced to close at 6pm. This started a phenomena known as the 'six o'clock swill' in which Australian men (women were prevented from drinking in the main bars of hotels) would rush to buy as many drinks as possible between finishing work and the hotel closure. Early closing was gradually abolished across the states between the 1950s and 1960s.

1929: The **Great Depression** begins with the Wall Street Stock Market Crash in late October, and Australia is affected by high unemployment, low profits, deflation and plunging incomes. In 1932 unemployment reaches a record high of 30 per cent. The nation's economy slowly recovers across the rest of the decade.

1930: Champion racehorse Phar Lap wins his only Melbourne Cup on 4 November. **Gambling**, long a popular pastime in Australia, becomes even more entrenched in national culture during the interwar and depression years. Much of this gambling activity is illegal; in horse racing, for example, bets could only be made at the race track itself, so illicit SP (starting price) bookmakers run betting pools for those who cannot attend race meetings in person.

1939: Australia enters **World War II** on 3 September. Over the course of the war, 730,000 Australians served in the army branch of the military alone. Just under 29,000 Australians are taken as prisoners of war, and these account for significant numbers of the 27,073 Australian military members killed in the course of hostilities. On the homefront, the number of Australian women in paid employment increases by 5 per cent. The war also marked the beginning of an extended period of economic growth due to the expansion of the Australian manufacturing sector.

1946: The government introduces a large-scale **post-war immigration** scheme to attract migrants from Europe, although immigration will gradually been opened up to other nationalities as the White Australia policy is slowly repealed across subsequent decades. Between 1945 and 1985, some 4.2 million immigrants arrive in Australia.