



WADJEMUP ONLINE DATABASE

A history of Aboriginal incarceration at Rottneest Prison 1900-1931

Information flyer

The Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC) Aboriginal History division (AHWA) has completed research for an historical project on Wadjemup (Rottneest). Families and community members with ancestors who were imprisoned there are invited to participate in this initiative by contacting us.

Background

Wadjemup has been a part of the story of West Australian for over 30,000 years. Between 1838-1931 the island was used to incarcerate many Aboriginal people from across the state who were convicted of committing a crime, such as stealing a loaf of bread or more serious crimes. Some were sentenced under the legislation at the time while many were sentenced for offences committed under the *Aborigines Act 1905*. Some offences related to tribal acts including payback or other cultural practices that were offences under Western Law but not so within the cultural groups of the offenders. Irrespective of the conviction, the sentencing of an Aboriginal person to Wadjemup was often seen as an opportunity to remove them from a location.

What is the project?

The DLGSC Aboriginal History division (AHWA) has completed research focusing on the history of Wadjemup in an online database which identifies and provides a detailed snapshot of the 386 men, three boys and one woman who were sent to the island between 1900-1931. The project is unique to previous publications in that it incorporates a thematic overview, a comprehensive database and over 100 individual photographs, collectively providing an insight into the lives of the prisoners during the final 31 years of the prison.

What type of information is included in the database?

Included in the database are details about where each person was sent from, their admission and discharge dates, offences committed, occupation and occurrences while on the island, a photograph where possible, and what happened to them after their release. The information also includes birthdate, place of birth, family connections and other notes.

Research process and historical archives

The research process has involved examining hundreds of historical archives, such as Fremantle Prison Registers, Convict Establishment Records, Police Occurrence Books, newspaper articles and much more. These archives are publicly available, open access items that have been retrieved from the State Records Office of Western Australia and JS. Batty Library. Some information is restricted and will only be accessible to the direct descendants through a Family History Application process.

Where can I find the Wadjemup project?

The project will be formally launched and published on the Department's website in November 2020. In the meantime, we will be providing regular updates and information on the AHWA website at www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au/wadjemup.

Register your interest

Families and community members who have an ancestor that was imprisoned at Wadjemup are encouraged to participate in this initiative by registering their interest to:

Duane Kelly, Research and Administration Officer, AHWA

Ph: 08 9427 3473

Email: duane.kelly@dlgsc.wa.gov.au

Please share this project!

Please share this flyer with your family and community.



Department of
Local Government, Sport
and Cultural Industries