

# JRF Report

**Dr Meg Foster**

Mary Bateson Research Fellow

## **A Criminal Inheritance?**

### **British Highway Robbery and the origins of Australian Bushranging.**

**October 2020-April 2021**

#### **Research Milestones**

Completed a preliminary survey of the literature in this area, and delved into primary source material on early Australian bushranging.

Created a database to record the life course histories of British convicts who were sent to Australia after being convicted of highway robbery.

Created a database to record all cases of highway robbery before the New South Wales Supreme Court between 1824 and 1835 (the peak years of Australian bushranging).

Commenced research into the legal definition of Australian bushranging, which resulted in the article 'Freedom Bound: vagrancy, bushranging and the contours of colonial liberty', *Law and History Review* (under review). For more details see 'Research Outputs' below.

Uncovered connections between early Australian bushranging and piracy, maritime culture, Aboriginal resistance strategies and settler colonisation. These connections indicate the adaptive nature of bushranging (contrary to pre-existing scholarship, it is already clear that bushranging was not simply British highway robbery transplanted to colonial soil).

#### **Special Distinctions**

Appointed a Visiting Fellow at the School of Humanities and Languages, University of New South Wales.

This post was granted in recognition of my intellectual achievements, and is intended to provide resources and networks to further my Newnham fellowship project.

#### **Research Outputs**

*Boundary Crossers: hidden history of Australia's other bushrangers* (Sydney: New South, 2022 forthcoming).

I have signed a contract with NewSouth (an Australian academic publisher) for the publication of my first book, *Boundary Crossers: hidden history of Australia's other bushrangers*. The book is due to be published in Australia in November 2022, and will also be published in the UK at a later date.

'Freedom Bound: vagrancy, bushranging and the contours of colonial liberty', *Law and History Review* (under review).

This journal article examines how early bushranging law and vagrant legislation shaped the parameters of freedom in colonial New South Wales.

'Unprecedented Times?: COVID-19 and the lessons of history', in Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton (eds.), *Writing With History: making something with the past* (Sydney: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2021 forthcoming).

This chapter explores how history has been harnessed by historians the the general public in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and what this can tell us about the use of the past in times of crisis.

with Toni Burton, Mark Finnane, Carolyn Fraser, Peter Hobbins and Hollie Pich, 'A History of Now: historical responses to COVID-19', *Public History Review* vol. 27 (2020), pp. 86-115.

This peer reviewed journal article is based on a roundtable that I convened for New South Wales History Week in 2020. It explores how history is being used to understand and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

'Texture, Light and Sound: a sensory history of early Sydney', *Australian Historical Studies* vol. 51, no. 3 (2020), pp. 344-347.

This review article analyses the Hyde Park Barracks museum in Sydney as a site of sensory history.

'Pathfinders: a history of Aboriginal trackers in New South Wales by Michael Bennett', *Aboriginal History* vol. 43 (2020).

This review situates a new book on Aboriginal police trackers in histories of crime and settler colonialism in Australia.

### **Academic Community Engagement**

Elected member of the Newnham College Valuable Possessions Committee, 2021-2023.

I was nominated for this post by Dr Amy Tobin and seconded by Dr Judy Quinn.

Member of the Newnham College 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee, 2021.

I have volunteered to be a member of the open program working group.

Supervisor, *Paper 30: Islands and Beaches: the Pacific and Indian Oceans in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Faculty of History, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, October 2020-May 2021.

I have conducted over 20 supervisions for this third year history course. Supervisions have spanned such diverse topics as piracy, Tahitian, Australian and New Zealand history.

'A Worldly Bandit? The transnational life of a black bushranger, 1817-1892', *Cambridge World History Seminar*. University of Cambridge, Cambridge (6 May 2021).

This paper, presented at the Cambridge World History Seminar, explores the transnational life of African-American bushranger, Black Douglas.

'The End of History? History in post pandemic Australia', "This Changes Everything": Australia and the post pandemic world virtual symposium, Australian Studies Institute. Australian National University, Canberra (24 October 2020).

I was asked to speak at this conference as a public intellectual, for my opinion on the future of academic and public history in Australia.

*Imperial Genealogies of Crime* Conference (forthcoming, May 2022).

This two day, international conference is under development for May 2022. The aim of the interdisciplinary conference is to explore global histories of crime and imperial history through the lens of genealogy (exploring such themes as legacy, inheritance, connection and rupture).

Although the development of this conference is in the early stages, the project has already secured significant support. The conference will be a joint venture between Newnham College and the International Criminology Research Unit at the University of Liverpool, and will be co-

convened by Dr Katy Roscoe from that same institution. We are planning a series of workshops for ECR scholars alongside the formal conference to foster innovative approaches and methodologies among early career scholars. We are currently applying for Royal Historical Society funding for this endeavour, but also plan to apply for funding from other institutions such as the Social History Society, the Institute of Historical Research and the British Society of Criminology.

### **Public Engagement**

On screen historian for the TV series *Who Do You Think You Are?*, 2021.

I was an onscreen expert for this series, sharing information about nineteenth century colonial history with an Australian celebrity. This program has a wide audience and is broadcast in Australia and Britain as well as other countries.

On screen historian and consultant for the TV documentary series *Our African Roots*, 2021.

This documentary explores the history of African people in Australia. For the project, I discussed the life of 'Black Caesar', Australia's first bushranger. I also connected this history to the absence of people of colour from bushranging history and the Australian national mythos more generally. The documentary will be broadcast on SBS (the Special Broadcasting Station in Australia) later this year.