

---

'Doing Trade': A Sexual Economy of Nineteenth-Century Australian Female Convict Prisons

Author(s): Eleanor Conlin Casella

Source: *World Archaeology*, Vol. 32, No. 2, Queer Archaeologies (Oct., 2000), pp. 209-221

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/827866>

Accessed: 14/11/2009 13:29

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=taylorfrancis>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



Taylor & Francis, Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *World Archaeology*.

# **‘Doing trade’: a sexual economy of nineteenth-century Australian female convict prisons**

Eleanor Conlin Casella

## **Abstract**

Within all penal institutions, networks of black market exchange circulate luxuries throughout the inmate population. Both material objects and sexual encounters fuel these systems of illicit barter. This paper presents some archaeological implications of such exchange. Exploring documentary and material records of the Ross Female Factory, a nineteenth-century Australian colonial prison for transported British female convicts, I relate the differential distribution patterns within the button assemblage to sexual dynamics of the convict black market. What were the same-sex implications of this ‘trade’? What was the nature of these encounters? Can same-sex relationships be archaeologically interpreted?

## **Keywords**

Colonial archaeology; Australia; women’s sexuality; buttons; trade.

## **Introduction**

This paper considers the materiality of sexual exchange within the female convict prisons of Van Diemen’s Land, a nineteenth-century British penal colony in Australia. Within these penal institutions, recovered artefactual evidence suggests the presence of illicit barter networks. What was the nature of this exchange? How did female inmates engage in sexual and economic ‘trade’? Can archaeological evidence illuminate the ‘hidden transcripts’ of sexual barter and black market exchange that fuelled the underground economy of this Australian penal colony?

## **Historical background**

From 1803 to 1854, over 74,000 British convicts were transported to the Van Diemen’s Land penal colony (Eldershaw 1968: 130). Approximately 12,000 of these felons were



women, primarily convicted of petty theft of goods stolen from their domestic employers (Oxley 1996). Upon their arrival, most spent time incarcerated within the Female Factory System, a network of prisons scattered across this island colony (Brand 1990). These penal institutions were designed as probation stations, where upon entry women were assigned to the 'Crime Class', and incarcerated for a minimum of six months. While serving this probationary sentence, the convicts were intended to 'reform' through Christian prayer and forced training in acceptably feminine industries, such as sewing, laundry, and cooking. Recalcitrance by any Crime Class inmate was punished through lengthy periods of confinement in Solitary Cells, accompanied by severe reduction of food rations. Once they successfully served their probationary period, the 'reconstituted' women were reclassified into the 'Hiring Class', and awaited assignment to local pastoral properties, completing their convict sentences as domestic servants for free colonists (Ryan 1995; Oxley 1996; Damousi 1997; Daniels 1998).

Located at the edge of the Ross township within the rural midlands region of the island, the Ross Female Factory establishment operated from 1848 through 1854, when Britain ceased convict transportation to the Van Diemen's Land colony (Scripps and Clark 1991). The site was then transferred to civilian management, and experienced a series of municipal and domestic occupations. It was gazetted as an historic reserve in 1980, and is now administered through the Cultural Heritage Branch of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service.

From 1995 through 1999 I directed historical, geophysical, and archaeological investigations of the Australian heritage site through the Ross Factory Archaeology Project (Casella 1999). As part of this multi-stage research project, 104 square metres were excavated, divided between three different areas of the site: the Crime Class, the Hiring Class, and the Solitary Cells (Fig. 1; see Casella 1997). These units investigated archaeological remains from the three different probationary states experienced by female convicts within this penal institution.

In this paper I discuss patterns of differential distribution within the recovered button assemblage to consider material evidence for trade networks within the prison site. I then situate these archaeological data within contemporary historical perspectives on convict 'trade' to consider some sexual implications of economic barter within the Van Diemen's Land penal colony.

### **On the distribution of buttons**

Stratigraphic data identified a number of female convict period deposits within the excavated trenches; their artefactual contents were subjected to further study as part of the Ross Factory Archaeology Project. This paper presents results of analysis of the sixty-seven buttons recovered from these female convict-related deposits. Since my research considered the possibility of non-clothing-related functions for the button assemblage, I developed an abstract typological system for artefact classification (Table 1). This three-tiered system enabled the categorization of buttons by their fabric type, their fastener type, and their diameter dimensions in millimetres. I then examined the spatial distribution of the button types through the three wards of the Factory site.

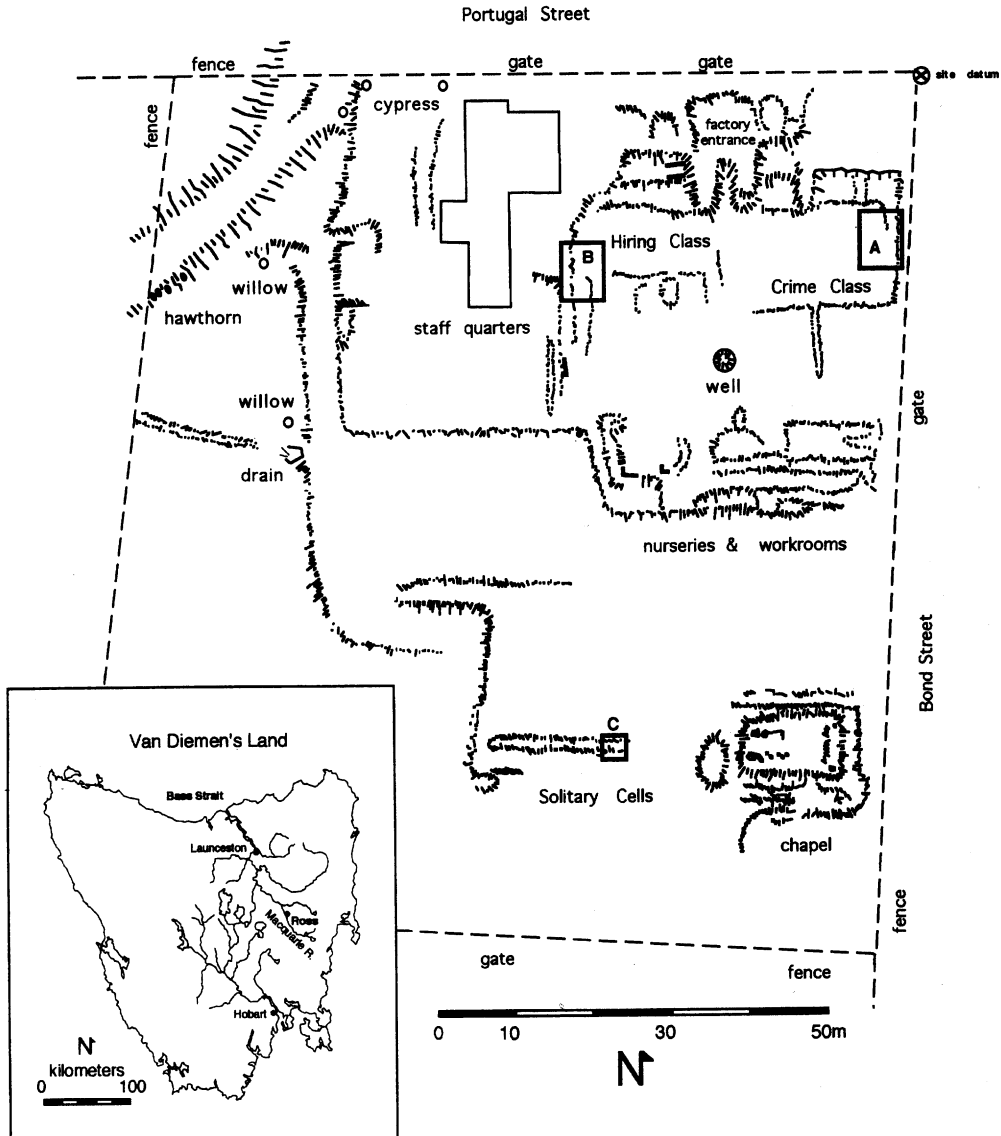


Figure 1 Ross Factory, plan of surface features.

Constituting 47.7 per cent of the Ross collection, the two most prevalent button types were both large four-hole sew-through buttons, typically manufactured as fastenings for men's trousers and shirts, and woollen jackets worn by either men or women (Lydon 1993, 1995) (Table 2). The third most common type consisted of small shell, mother-of-pearl four-hole buttons, objects identified within industry catalogues as providing fastening for both men's shirts and women's dresses (Claassen 1994; Iacono 1996). Whether used in the standard regulation convict uniform or related to non-uniform clothing, these buttons could easily have entered the site on laundry contracted from the local free community. Their presence might have represented accidental deposition during taskwork. The

*Table 1* Button typology.*Three-tiered coding system**1) Fabric type*

- 1 Ferrous
- 2 Copper-alloy
- 3 Bone
- 4 Shell
- 5 Glass
- 6 Other

*2) Fastener type*

- a 4 hole
- b 3 hole
- c 2 hole
- d 1 hole (button core)
- e 5 hole
- f shank loop
- g shank sew-through (pedestal)
- h unknown

*3) Diameter dimensions*

- i 8–12mm
- ii 13–16mm
- iii 17–20mm
- iv 21–24mm
- v 25–28mm
- vi 29–32mm
- vii diameter undetermined (broken or too decayed to measure)

simple presence of these buttons at the Ross Factory site is in itself rather unremarkable. However, the artefact distribution pattern is potentially more revealing.

The largest number and greatest diversity of buttons were recovered from Area B. It contained both the Hiring Class and the Assistant Superintendent's Quarters. The packed-earth floors of this latter structure contained evidence of mixing between pre- and post-Factory periods of site use (Casella 1999). Erected in 1833 to accommodate male convict labourers during construction of a local bridge, the brick and thatch structure was subsequently re-occupied by the Factory Assistant Superintendent following minimal modification of the original earthen floors. In addition to artefacts related to both pre-Factory and Factory periods of use, an 1866 Victorian penny was also recovered during excavation of these floors. Thus, artefacts from Area B could be least strongly related to the specific Factory period of site occupation.

In contrast, stratigraphic, architectural, and documentary evidence from Areas A and C suggested that the Crime Class Dormitory and Solitary Cells both contained a number of floor and underfloor deposits more directly associated with the Female Factory period of site occupation (Casella 1997: 83–4; 1999). Extensive modifications of the Crime Class Dormitory floors during establishment of the Female Factory directly linked underfloor

Table 2 Button distribution analysis results.

<i>Description</i>	<i>Area A</i>	<i>Area B</i>	<i>Area C</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Ferrous large 4-hole trouser buttons (1.a.iii)	3	1	10	14	20.9
Ferrous other		1		1	1.5
Copper 4-hole 'sinkies' (2.a.ii & 2.a.iii)	1	2	1	4	6.0
Copper shank loop (2.f.iii)	1	1		2	3.0
Copper 2-hole base for textile buttons (2.c.ii)		2		2	3.0
Copper other		2		2	3.0
Bone large 4-hole trouser buttons (3.a.iii)		17*	1	18	26.8
Bone small 4-hole shirt buttons (3.a.i)	1	2	2	5	7.4
Bone small 3-hole (3.b.i)			3	3	4.5
Bone 1-hole core (3.d.i)			1	1	1.5
Bone 5-hole (3.e.ii)		1		1	1.5
Bone other		1	1	2	3.0
Shell small 4-hole shirt buttons (4.a.i)	3	2	1	6	8.9
Shell small 2-hole shirt buttons (4.c.i)		3		3	4.5
Shell shank loop (4.f.ii)			1	1	1.5
Shell other		1		1	1.5
Glass small 4-hole shirt buttons (5.a.i)		1		1	1.5
Totals	9	37	21	67	100

*Note* Fifteen of these artefacts constituted special find 575

deposits of this structure to the Female Factory occupation period. Archival documents indicate that construction of the Solitary Cells occurred in Area C during the Factory period; no historic or archaeological evidence was recovered to suggest substantial re-use of the cellblock after closure of the Factory in 1855. Thus, artefactual assemblages recovered from Areas A and C could be stratigraphically related to the female convict inmates with a reasonable degree of certainty.

Returning to Table 2, if results from Area B are disregarded because of problems with stratigraphic association, the remaining data suggest that both a greater quantity and a greater diversity of buttons were recovered from the Solitary Cells compared to the Crime Class Dormitory of the main penal compound. As only 16 square metres were excavated in Area C, compared with 48 square metres in Area A, these results could also suggest a greater density of buttons was present within the Solitary Cells.

As detailed earlier, a landscape of disciplinary segregation divided interior locales of the Ross Factory into strictly defined functional regions. The work rooms were isolated from living and punishment quarters by a series of locked gates, courtyards, and 9-foot high timber post and rail fences. Given this landscape of social, temporal, and spatial control, the presence of non-uniform-related buttons in substantial quantities in the Crime Class Dormitory and Solitary Cells may reflect intentional transport and possession, rather than accidental deposition during taskwork.

Particularly the Solitary Cellblock, by virtue of its intrinsic purpose, was strictly segregated from the work-related wards of the prison. While undergoing 'separate treatment' the female convict was supposed to be silently engaged in moral reflection and disciplinary social isolation. She was not engaged in laundry or sewing-related taskwork. Thus, the

significant presence of buttons, particularly non-uniform decorative buttons, in the Solitary Cells may represent evidence of non-clothing related functions for this artefact assemblage.

It is significant to note the presence of two particularly unusual button types within the Solitary Cells. The one isolated occurrence of a bone button core within Factory-related deposits was recovered from Area C. These single-holed disks were used as the rigid core of a silk-thread decorative button, the colourful threads wrapped around the core, and a few loops left dangling for attachment to the article of clothing. Furthermore, all three specimens of an intentionally modified, non-uniform three-hole small bone button (Type 3.b.i) were recovered from occupation layers inside the Solitary Cells. Preliminary comparative examinations of contemporary Australian archaeological sites have located occurrences of this unusual button type only within Van Diemen's Land settlements occupied by convicts, ex-convict labourers, and/or Aboriginal communities (Birmingham 1992; Greg Jackman, Nadia Iacono, Susan Lawrence, personal communications).

In her 1992 report on archaeological excavations at Wybalenna, the 1840s Tasmanian Aboriginal settlement on Flinders Island in the Bass Straits, Judy Birmingham argued that the high frequency of bone and ferrous four-hole sew-through buttons in occupation contexts related to the buttons' function as gaming tokens (Birmingham 1992: 110). By interpreting this particular function, Birmingham offered an alternative social and economic function for this class of artefacts. Extending this idea of the buttons as socio-economic objects, could they have held an exchange value in themselves? Could they have served as economic tokens? And if the buttons are trade tokens, what was the nature of the encounters. What forms of 'trade' may have fuelled this black market economy?

### **'Doing trade': the sexual nature of barter**

This material evidence presented an intriguing paradox: that very ward of the prison intended for punitive isolation and deprivation held the greatest concentration of materials associated with barter and smuggling. How were these illicit objects arriving in the earthen floors of the Solitary Cells? Although archaeological evidence for increased numbers of buttons could merely reflect the lack of alternative storage options within these dark, isolated, damp, 4- by 6-foot cells, a social explanation can also be offered as an interpretation through consideration of the sexual economy that operated within the Female Factories.

Recent historical studies of the Australian convict system have argued that, as places of ultimate punishment, Solitary Cells were architecturally fabricated to discipline repeat offenders or, typically, women located at the apex of inmate hierarchies and underground networks within the Female Factories (Daniels 1993; Damousi 1997). The higher frequencies of non-uniform buttons within the Ross Factory Solitary Cells could therefore represent the presence of illicit trade within this edifice of confinement and punishment. While under 'separate treatment', the factory 'incorrigibles' continued to maintain their access to blackmarket activities, relieving the monotonous boredom, cold, and hunger of disciplinary confinement by trading for extra food rations and diverting luxuries. This interpretation is supported by the recovery of an 1823 George IV British copper farthing buried

within the packed-earth floor of the Central Cell (Casella 1999: 207). Furthermore, excavation of the Western Cell revealed a stash pit containing sheep bones, a kaolin clay pipe stem fragment, an olive glass alcohol bottle base, and a highly decayed square ferrous artefact tentatively identified as a food container (Casella 1999: 115).

Thus, data from Table 2 could archaeologically suggest a central node within the black-market economy of the Factory. While inmates of the Crime Class actively engaged in sexual and economic 'trade,' the most potent covert paths of this penal world may have led directly to the Solitary Cells.

Within the Van Diemen's Land penal colony, female sexual activity transformed into a mode of exchange, as it inextricably intertwined with dynamics of access, allocation, and distribution of resources (Oxley 1996; Daniels 1993; Dixon 1976; Perrott 1983; Summers 1975). Given that men outnumbered women ten to one in this penal colony, attempts by colonial authorities to regulate convict sexual activity immediately commodified female sexuality as a quantifiable, scarce, and desired focus of acquisition (Byrne 1993: 39, 50; Daniels 1984, 1993; Damousi 1997). Both heterosexual and homosexual encounters involving female convicts were historically correlated with the illicit exchange of money, indulgences, food, clothing, and transportation (Daniels 1993, 1998; Oxley 1996). 'Trafficking', or participation in the convict blackmarket, assumed the nature of an illegal sexual economy, with 'trade' consisting of both material and sexual exchange. The presence and distribution of olive glass alcohol bottles and clay tobacco pipes within the Ross Factory could have resulted from local dynamics of this black-market sexual economy. Perhaps unsurprisingly, material exchanges accompanied both casual short-term sexual encounters and longer-term sexual relationships.

Furthermore, the strict nineteenth-century moral and social regulations enforced within Van Diemen's Land by reform-minded Methodist and Anglican colonial administrators ensured that women's sexual expression remained both opportunistic and fluidly defined. Convicts did not possess 'sexual identities' or exclusive 'persuasions' (Simes 1992: 32–3). Categorization of sexuality into defined 'straight' or 'lesbian' activities only emerged through the 'sexology' studies of *late* nineteenth-century sociologists and psychologists, such as Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud, Iwan Bloch and Magnus Hirschfeld, all of whom worked a generation after the cessation of British penal transportation to Australia (Casella 2000). Although particular fascination and condemnation was certainly reserved for occurrences of same-sex interactions, Convict Department administrators and superintendents considered all forms of female convict sexual activity inherently deviant. The copious number of archived reports and court transcripts indicate the opportunistic and fluid nature of female convict sexuality. This paper will now consider various aspects of the same-sex and opposite-sex encounters that fuelled illicit material trade.

### **Casual encounters**

Before the advent of sociological and criminological studies of urban prostitution in the 1860s, sexual 'trade' was seen as a temporary means of alleviating financial stress, rather than a committed and deviant lifestyle (Walkowitz 1980). Low-waged needlework trades were particularly linked to incidents of casual prostitution (Rule 1986: 200). This correlation



was particularly significant in Van Diemen's Land, where Female Factory inmates were required to learn these occupations in order to provide them with a morally acceptable alternative to prostitution, thereby creating a rather circular social dynamic. Historical studies of workplace resistance exerted by female convicts directly connected sexual trade to the existence of a black-market economy within the Factories. Historian Kirsty Reid recently noted that:

women sent to be punished at the House of Correction [Factory] for [absconding] fed their earnings from prostitution into the informal economy which flourished in such institutions – trading for privileges which substantially lessened the severity of their punishment.

(Reid 1997: 114)

Thus, documentary evidence linked casual sexual activity by female convicts to the exchange of illicit objects, most commonly extra food rations, alcohol, and tobacco. A particularly spectacular riot occurred at the Cascades Female Factory a few months after its establishment in 1829 (Rayner 1981: 24–5). This rebellion was incited when a group of soldiers from the 40th Regiment responded to the calls and sexual promises of Crime Class inmates by tossing gifts of food over the Factory walls, thereby attracting the attention of the Overseer and Superintendent. The incident ultimately resulted in a dramatic conflagration of parts of the First Yard of the Factory. Similarly, in her analysis of court records in Hobart from 1850 through 1854, historian Kay Daniels noted the variety of sex crimes that emphasized a link between prostitution and access to illicit objects (Daniels 1998). These offences included 'taking the master's son to a pub', 'dancing in the taproom (public house)', and 'being found in bed with another woman, two male convicts and quantities of alcohol in a common brothel'. Thus, transient sexual encounters provided female convicts with access to valued illicit objects either through direct barter or through payment in currency. By enabling the material exchange, prostitution fuelled the black-market economy of Van Diemen's Land.

Mid-nineteenth-century court transcripts document two startling incidents of same-sex casual encounters between inmates of the Female Factory prisons. In 1841, inmate Ann Fisher reported on her bunkmate's nocturnal activities to the Committee of Inquiry into Female Convict Discipline (French 1993: 15). Within this deposition, she claims that, at some time after the 8 pm lock-down, inmate Eliza Taylor visited the hammock she shared with inmate Jane Owen. Assuming Fisher to be either complicit or asleep, the two women 'talked together in an indecent and obscene manner' until near dawn. Having arranged the terms of their exchange, the following evening Fisher was again awakened when Owen invited Taylor to the hammock, and 'after some time . . . Taylor asked Owen to give her that [which] she asked her for the night before' (AOT CSO 22/50). After further negotiations, 'Owen said to Taylor that she never had been nailed before'. Fisher then defined the term 'nailing' for the gentlemen of the Committee as 'indecently using their hands with each others persons'. She noted that 'Owen made use of her hands on the person of Taylor indecently' and that 'they behaved in this indecent manner for four or five minutes'. After this period, some object was passed to Owen, and Fisher left the hammock, calling Taylor 'a nasty beast'. Both Owen and Taylor were punished for their same-sex encounter by a period of separate treatment within the Solitary Cellblock. This

account is highly significant for both its explicit record of the exchange, and its documentation of contemporary colloquial homosexual language.

A second incident occurred in the Wash House of the Ross Female Factory during 1851. In her report to the Campbell Town District Police Magistrate, inmate Margaret Knaggs described her interactions with prisoner Agnes Kane:

she used to follow me about everywhere to prevail upon me to let her do something to me, that she would show me the way. I told her I did not want to do any thing of the Kind. . . . That sort of conversation is common among 6 or 7 of the women in the building. On Wednesday 10th April I was in the Water Closet, Agnes Kane wanted me to let her come to me, she had often asked me before, she tried to put her hand under my clothes but I would not let her . . . she wanted to argue. I walked away because I knew she was after me, because she used to follow me and ask me to sit down with her, and walk with her. I would not because I heard she had the name of being bad behaved & spoken – I used to shun her. I did not let her destroy me. I did not give her the opportunity. If I did she would. She told me she had six or seven girls and they liked her, that I had no courage in me or I should do it – I told her I would not have that sin upon me – she said it was no sin.

(ML 111 15163/2)

Despite Knaggs claim of uncompromised virtue, inmate Bridget Grady, a witness to the incident, reported that promises of gifts had caused Knaggs to yield to Kane's desire:

On Tuesday morning when we were mustered out of our bedroom the 10th April. Shortly afterwards I went into the Water Closet . . . I saw the Prisoner Agnes Kane and Margaret Knaggs in the Closet. When I made a rush in Knaggs was in the act of letting down her clothes . . . the Prisoner told her to hold her tongue, when I entered Kanes hand was under Knaggs clothes having connexion with her. Yesterday we were picking wool, I watched them go into the Water Closet again. Knaggs appeared very ill. She said to the Prisoner that she had destroyed her on Wednesday morning. [Kane] laughed it off and said it would not be anything and not to let any body hear her, and went again into the wash-house.

(ML 111 15163/2)

### **The maintenance of convict relationships**

As an economic exchange of valued objects, trafficking provided the incarcerated women with essential resources and diverting luxuries. In addition, trafficking materially linked male colonists to both their female convict partners and illegitimate children incarcerated within the Female Factories. In October 1847, a letter was intercepted by the Matron of the Cascades Female Factory. Written by inmate M. A. Clark, this rare surviving narrative requested her husband to provide for his convict family, and gently reprimanded him for straying from his domestic commitments:

My Dear Fred:

It is with pleasure I now write these few lines to you with my sincere love hoping you

will not forget to send me five shillings as you know I had none when I was taken and you know it is of use to me in here. you can send to me by *the Preist* [sic] he will bring me anything you send. Dear Fred I hope you will be steady till I come out as I intend to keep sober and steady and if you send in a Memorial you can get me out and go to our child in the Orphanage in town. she is in town now. Dear Fred send to me by Father Woolfrey. I shall expect an answer by next Friday. Dear Fred I am suprised [sic] to think you should spend you hard earned Money with that [other] woman old enough to be your Mother. but I hope Dear fred you know better for the future. do not forget to write to me and send me some money. I now conclude with my love to you. yours. M. A. Clark.

Addressed to Fred Tring, a Tailor of Hobart Town.

(ML 90, 8770; original author's emphasis)

Evidence of smuggling also emerged from the Launceston Female Factory, located in the northern colonial town. In 1841, a letter from inmate Maria Turner was intercepted before reaching her male partner. After declarations of affection and enduring attachment, the letter reminded Steven to remember 'the "tobaco and pipes and . . . a bottle of rum", and instructed the package to be sent "in some way so as it cannot be seen"' (Daniels 1998: 137).

Similar dynamics operated as black-market trade nurtured same-sex relationships between female inmates. In an 1848 letter to the Comptroller-General of the Convict Department, Ross Factory Superintendent Dr William Irvine characterized 'The English Vice' as it was known within the penal colony (Brand 1990):

these young girls are in the habit of decorating themselves, cleaning themselves scrupulously, and making themselves as attractive as they can before resorting to the 'man-woman,' if I may so style her, on whom they have bestowed their affections: I believe a large proportion of the quarrels which too frequently occur amongst the women . . . take their rise from disagreements concerning the choice of a pseudo-male, or jealous feelings consequent on some of these disgraceful transactions. To my certain knowledge several disputes have arisen here, from these causes there have been letters intercepted and shown to you, which will prove the warmth and the impetuosity of the feelings excited in the women towards each other, when allied in such unholy bonds.

(AOT MM 62/31/13859)

In this same letter, Superintendent Irvine also explained the romantic rituals by which female convicts wooed each other's sexual desire:

the most passionate appeals are frequently made by the women, as contra-distinguished from the pseudo-males, when they have suspected the last named parties of infidelity or fickleness; indeed an amount of jealousy seems to be aroused as great as possibly could be if an actual 'male' was in question. Promises, & threats are alike lavished on the objects of their love, & they are habitually in the practice of making numerous presents to their 'lovers', so that an individual who acts the infamous part of a pseudo male, is most comfortably provided for, by the presents bestowed, with every procurable luxury.

(AOT MM 62/31/13859)

In her 1997 book, Joy Damousi described a frenzied 1842 revolt at the Launceston Female Factory. This particularly violent riot became infamous for its demonstration of 'a remarkable degree of unity and solidarity amongst the women' (Damousi 1997: 82). Kay Daniels linked the origins of this rebellion to a steadfast sexual relationship between two long-term inmates, Catherine Owens and Ellen Scott (Daniels 1998: 147–8, 155–6). After seizing control of the prison for two days, the 185 women of the Crime Class were finally subdued when fifty prisoners from the adjacent male convict barracks were enlisted to restore order to the institution. Testimony to a court of the Convict Department later revealed that the prison revolt had been provoked by Ellen Scott who had been enraged by the prolonged solitary confinement of her lover, Catherine Owens. These two women were identified by the Convict Department as 'ringleaders', as habitual and recalcitrant offenders with long and violent records of recidivism. Both occupied central nodes of the convoluted knot of black-market networks that operated throughout the factories of Van Diemen's Land. Their penal conduct records documented frequent sentences of solitary confinement for possession of forbidden substances, particularly alcohol.

Although these accounts of women's same-sex desire, when filtered through the institutional gaze of male authorities, remains worthy of critical deconstruction (Casella 1995, 1999, 2000), a basic material dynamic endures within these official transcripts. Through both heterosexual and homosexual relationships, female convicts nurtured romantic commitment and enticed sexual desire through the materiality of exchange.

## Conclusion

Thus, the illicit objects – both the coins and non-uniform buttons archaeologically recovered from the Ross Female Factory Solitary Cells, and the alcohol bottles and clay tobacco pipes reported within historical sources – could materially represent the internal operation of a black-market economy. Given the nature of 'trade' within Van Diemen's Land, such shadowy barter could simultaneously have represented the resistant dynamics of unsanctioned female sexuality. Through trafficking, convicts repossessed and recreated the social meanings of these illicit objects. Inhabitants of the Ross Female Factory occupied a landscape of strictly regulated and hierarchically organized locales, designed to channel inmates spatially and morally from penal damnation to institutional redemption and final social reintegration. However, the ideal regime of this British penal colony was only partially realized. Archaeological evidence from the button assemblage suggests that an alternate sexual economy simultaneously coexisted at the Ross Factory site. As noted by the French architect Henri Lefebvre,

[W]alls, enclosures and facades serve to define both a scene (where something takes place) and an obscene area to which everything that cannot or may not happen on the scene is relegated: whatever is inadmissible, be it malefic or forbidden, thus has its own hidden space on the near or the far side of a frontier.

(Lefebvre 1991: 36)

Through the covert landscape of barter and exchange, female convicts transgressed the prison barriers by moving illicit objects around the segregated wards and cells, alleviating

the misery, deprivation, and loneliness of prison life. As inmate Mary Haigh noted in her 1842 deposition to the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry, 'I have been in the dark Cells. That is bad punishment but even there Tea Sugar etc [sic] can be obtained' (AOT CSO 22/50). Black-market exchange not only threatened the convict system through redistribution of illicit objects throughout the institutionally controlled environment of the Female Factories, it also reappropriated the meaning of the objects themselves. Trafficking transformed the objects of trade into valuable tokens of enticed desire and illicit sexual expression.

*School of Art History and Archaeology, University of Manchester,  
Manchester, M13 9PL, UK*

## References

- Archives of Tasmania (AOT) CSO 22/50. Colonial Secretary's Office. 1841–3 Committee of Inquiry into Female Convict Prison Discipline.
- AOT MM 62/31/13859. June 1850. Report from Superintendent W. J. Irvine, MD to Visiting Magistrate R. P. Stuart.
- ML (Mitchell Library of Sydney) Tasmanian Papers, No. 90, 8770. 29 October 1847. Letter and attachments from A. B. Jones, Superintendent of the Cascades Female Factory to J. S. Hampton, Comptroller-General of Convicts.
- ML Tasmanian Papers, No. 111, 15163/2. 10 April 1851. Trial of Prisoner Agnes Kane for Assaulting Prisoner Margaret Knaggs.
- Birmingham, J. 1992. *Wybalenna: The Archaeology of Cultural Accommodation in Nineteenth Century Tasmania*. Sydney: The Australian Society for Historical Archaeology Incorporated.
- Brand, I. 1990. *The Convict Probation System*. Hobart: Blubber Head Press.
- Byrne, P. J. 1993. *Criminal Law and Colonial Subject*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Casella, E. 1995. 'A woman doesn't represent business here': negotiating femininity in 19th century colonial Australia. In *The Written and the Wrought: Complementary Sources in Historical Archaeology* (eds M. D'Agostino, B. Prine, E. Casella & M. Winer). *Kroeber Anthropological Papers*, No 79: 33–43.
- Casella, E. 1997. 'A large and efficient establishment': preliminary report on fieldwork at the Ross Female Factory. *Australasian Historical Archaeology*, 15: 79–89.
- Casella, E. 1999. Dangerous girls & gentle ladies: archaeology and nineteenth century Australian female convicts. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley.
- Casella, E. 2000. Bulldaggers & gentle ladies: archaeological approaches to female homosexuality in convict era Australia. In *Archaeologies of Sexuality* (eds B. Voss and R. Schmidt). London: Routledge, in press.
- Claassen, C. 1994. Washboards, pigtoes, and muckets: historic musseling in the Mississippi Watershed. *Historical Archaeology*, 28(2): 1–145.
- Damousi, J. 1997. *Depraved and Disorderly*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Daniels, K. 1984. *So Much Hard Work: Women and Prostitution in Australian History*. Sydney: Fontana/Collins.

- Daniels, K. 1993. The flash mob: rebellion, rough culture and sexuality in the female factories of Van Diemen's Land. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 18(Summer): 133–50.
- Daniels, K. 1998. *Convict Women*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Dixon, M. 1976. *The Real Matilda: Women and Identity in Australia 1788–1975*. Ringwood: Penguin.
- Eldershaw, P. R. 1968. The Convict Department. *Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, 15(3): 130–49.
- French, R. 1993. *Camping by a Billabong: Gay and Lesbian Stories from Australian History*. Sydney: BlackWattle Press.
- Iacono, N. 1996. Cumberland/Gloucester Streets Site Archaeological Investigations 1994: artefact report, miscellaneous. Unpublished report for the Sydney Cove Authority, Godden Mackay Heritage Consultants.
- Lefebvre, H. 1991. *The Production of Space* (trans. D. Nicholson-Smith). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lydon, J. 1993. Task differentiation in historical archaeology: sewing as material culture. In *Women in Archaeology: A Feminist Critique* (eds H. du Cros and L. Smith). Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, the Australian National University. *Occasional Papers in Prehistory*, No. 23: 129–33.
- Lydon, J. 1995. Boarding-houses in the Rocks: Mrs. Ann Lewis' privy. *Public History Review*, 4: 73–88.
- Oxley, D. 1996. *Convict Maids*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Perrott, M. 1983. *A Tolerable Good Success: Economic Opportunities for Women in New South Wales, 1788–1830*. Sydney: Hale & Iremonger.
- Rayner, T. 1981. *The Female Factory at Cascades*. Hobart: National Parks & Wildlife Service, *Tasmania Occasional Paper*, No. 3.
- Reid, K. 1997. 'Contumacious, ungovernable and incorrigible': convict women and workplace resistance, Van Diemen's Land 1820–1839. In *Representing Convicts: New Perspectives on Convict Forced Labour Migration* (eds I. Duffield and J. Bradley). London: Leicester University Press, pp. 106–23.
- Rule, J. 1986. *The Labouring classes in Early Industrial England 1750–1850*. Harlow: Longman.
- Ryan, L. 1995. From stridency to silence: the policing of convict women 1803–1853. In *Sex, Power and Justice* (ed. D. Kirkby). Melbourne: Oxford University Press, pp. 71–81.
- Scripps, L. and Clark, J. 1991. *The Ross Female Factory*. Tasmania, Australia: Department of Parks, Wildlife & Heritage.
- Simes, G. 1992. The language of homosexuality in Australia. In *Gay Perspectives: Essays in Australian Gay Culture* (eds R. Aldrich and G. Wotherspoon). Sydney: Department of Economic History, University of Sydney Occasional Papers, pp. 31–58.
- Summers, A. 1975. *Damned Whores & God's Police*. Melbourne: Penguin.
- Walkowitz, J. 1980. *Prostitution and Victorian Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.