

# Before the rush

Before the Europeans arrived in 1788, 600 Aboriginal nations lived in organised societies, each with a system of laws based on care of land. After 1788, the lives of Aboriginal people changed forever. The British brought British laws, and their own concept of ownership of land. At first, Aboriginal people fought against the **occupation**, but they were overcome. As the years passed, the British population grew and the Aboriginal population fell. As their land was taken, Aboriginal societies began to break down. Entire clans were destroyed because of war, **massacres** and European diseases.

## 6 Spread of European settlement

By 1851, much of the south-east corner of the continent, south-western Western Australia and the coast of Queensland was occupied by Europeans. Wherever they took over land, they cleared it and built fences. Aboriginal owners were killed or forced to move to drier areas inland belonging to other Aboriginal nations, and so traditional life broke down as clans had to merge with other clans.

Most land was used to raise sheep for the wool industry, and to farm cattle and grow wheat. The wool industry was important because it raised money for the colonies by providing a product they could sell overseas.

MILESTONES IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

## No longer penal colonies

Free settlers and **emancipists** began to see Australia as a place to live away from the **squalor** of overcrowded Britain. From the 1820s, protests against **transportation** increased, but the New South Wales Government and landowners (who used convicts as slave labour) wanted it to continue. Transportation peaked during the 1830s. In 1838, a report found that convicts were treated too harshly, and that their punishment did not deter them from crime. Transportation to Sydney ended in 1840, and to Tasmania in 1852. Suffering a labour shortage, Western Australia accepted convicts from 1850 to 1868.

## Life in Australia before 1851

European settlers struggled against the extreme climate, Aboriginal resistance, and isolation from England. Great distances and lack of roads made transport difficult. In the country, many people lived in rough huts made from timber slabs with thatch (straw) or bark roofs. Rich people built stone or brick houses with shingled (tiled) roofs. In the towns and cities, poor people lived in crowded terrace houses, and rich people lived in large houses or mansions.



## An Aboriginal perspective

Aboriginal writer Burnum Burnum describes the spread of European settlement into the lands of the Birpai, Ngamba and Ngaku nations, on the mid-north coast of New South Wales. 'These nations had initially shown a peaceful front to the invaders, but the relentless push to take over their land, water and food supplies drove them to war with the settlers in a final act of

despair. Starving and outcast in their own country, they fought back from the green fortress [thick rainforest areas] in the Falls Country, to raid settlements for sheep and cattle and challenge the muskets of the invaders.'

From Burnum Burnum, *Burnum Burnum's Aboriginal Australia*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1988.

