

Bentham and Australia: Convicts, Utility, and Empire

11–12 April 2019, Bentham House, University College London
Faculty of Laws

The philosopher and reformer Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) was one of the most important contributors to the debates surrounding the colonization of the Australian continent, in the first place as a destination for transported convicts and later by free settlers. Bentham's writings on Australia encompass the topics of crime and punishment, colonialism, and imperialism, and were drawn upon by opponents of convict transportation who sought to influence and alter the penal policy of the British government.

The Bentham Project (UCL Faculty of Laws), together with UCL History, are delighted to announce a conference, to be held on 11–12 April 2019, to mark the forthcoming publication of Bentham's *Writings on Australia*, a forthcoming volume of *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham*. The conference will explore themes such as the influence and impact of Bentham's ideas on the theory and practice of punishment in convict Australia, on advocates and opponents of convict transportation and colonization, and the relationship between Bentham's writings on Australia and his penal theory more generally, as well as their place in the development of his political radicalism.

Bentham's engagement with Australia is embodied in several major published works, as well as substantial and hitherto unpublished material, which will appear in the critical edition of his *Writings on Australia*. The volume will contain:

- The 'New Wales' fragments of 1791, Bentham's first substantive consideration of the New South Wales penal colony.
- A body of correspondence from 1802, primarily between Bentham and his ally Charles Bunbury MP, which puts into context Bentham's reasons for the production of his writings on New South Wales.

- Two 'Letters to Lord Pelham' containing Bentham's exposition of how and why New South Wales failed against every standard of a good penal system, and in particular against his panopticon penitentiary scheme. Bentham had them privately printed in 1802 but they were not published until 1812 as part of *Panopticon versus New South Wales*.
- The hitherto unpublished third 'Letter to Lord Pelham', written in 1803, in which Bentham extended his condemnation of British penal institutions to the hulks and local prisons.
- 'A Plea for the Constitution', in which Bentham concludes that New South Wales was illegally and unconstitutionally founded. It was privately printed in 1803 but not published until 1812 as part of *Panopticon versus New South Wales*.
- The 'Colonization Company Proposal' of 1831, which effectively constitutes Bentham's commentary upon the National Colonization Society's *Proposal to His Majesty's Government for Founding a Colony on the Southern Coast of Australia*.

[Preliminary versions of Bentham's Writings on Australia are available to download by visiting http://bit.ly/Bentham-Australia](http://bit.ly/Bentham-Australia)

Speakers at the conference include:

- Professor Hilary Carey (Bristol)
- Professor Margot Finn (UCL)
- Professor Barry Godfrey (Liverpool)
- Professor Zoë Laidlaw (Melbourne)
- Professor Kirsten McKenzie (Sydney)
- Professor Hamish Maxwell-Stewart (Tasmania)
- Dr Gwenda Morgan (Newcastle)
- Professor Deborah Oxley (Oxford)
- Professor Philip Schofield (UCL)
- Dr Tim Causer (UCL)

We also welcome proposals for papers on Bentham's interventions in the histories of Australia, convict transportation, and colonialism, in the form of 300-word abstracts, which should be sent to Dr Tim Causer (t.causer@ucl.ac.uk) by 31 December 2018. Please also direct any other queries about the conference to the same address.