

City's harsh past revealed in *Life in Irons: Brisbane's Convict Stories*

Moreton Bay penal colony was established by the British Government to "... reinstate transportation as an object of real terror to all classes of society". It succeeded.

Museum of Brisbane's upcoming exhibition, *Life in Irons: Brisbane's Convict Stories*, 18 May – 28 October 2018, provides a vivid insight into daily existence in the settlement from 1824 – 1839 using original documents, new research and personal accounts brought to life with immersive technologies that literally gives a voice and face to the past.

Chairman Sallyanne Atkinson AO said Museum of Brisbane is the city's storyteller and revealing our convict history deepens understanding of our modern city.

"From place names to a lingering sense of isolation, Brisbane's convict history shapes our city's contemporary culture," Mrs Atkinson said.

"*Life in Irons* is particularly exciting as, due to our partnership with Queensland State Archives, it features precious, rarely-seen, original documents from the settlement that are part of the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register."

Director Renai Grace said *Life in Irons* conveys the brutality and isolation of life for the 3,000 men and women imprisoned here from Moreton Bay's founding in 1824 to the penal colony's closure in 1839 by complementing the official documents and historical objects with artwork commissions and performance.

"We have commissioned international sound artist, Brisbane-based Lawrence English, to create a new soundscape that will resonate throughout the exhibition space conjuring up the heat, isolation, danger and loneliness of the settlement," Ms Grace said.

"Acclaimed artist and Queenslander Danie Mellor has also created new works for the exhibition that explore the impacts of colonisation by highlighting a lush sub-tropical environment that recalls the landscape surrounding the settlement in his signature style.

"Danie's works are complemented by a map of Aboriginal campsites in Moreton Bay, researched by historian Ray Kerkhove, which strikingly illustrates how the penal settlement sat like 'an island in Aboriginal lands'.

"Working closely with historians, actors and graduates from the Aboriginal Centre for Performing Arts (ACPA) we have also recorded 23 personal accounts of life in the penal colony from individuals as varied as Commandants, convicts, officers, a military wife, child and Aboriginal leaders.

"Queensland chamber orchestra Camerata will also be our artists-in-residence during this exhibition, composing and then performing a new work in situ that will respond to the objects and stories of *Life in Irons*.

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“This vibrant collection of original artefacts, contemporary art, performance, new research, personal stories and technology will give every visitor an enriched sense of our past and a greater appreciation for the enduring legacy of our convict stories.”

Ms Grace said the Museum also had an exciting program of talks, tours, workshops and children’s activities planned.

“From talks exploring convict tattoos, plein air painting classes at historical convict sites, a Dead Letter Club creative writing event, family history workshops and a conversation series headlined by Brisbane authors and exhibiting artists, there is truly something for every interest in this program,” she said.

Historical objects in the exhibition include convict and regimental uniforms, and official documents from Queensland State Archives comprising: five registers from 1824 – 1842 that detail rations and harvests, illnesses and death, employment and transgressions; original architectural plans and maps, many prepared by convict George Browne, that show the footprint of the penal settlement prior to the opening of Brisbane Town as a free settlement in 1842; and the *Book of Trials* which logs the crimes and punishments meted out within the settlement.

For more information visit museumofbrisbane.com.au

Life in Irons is presented in partnership with Queensland State Archives with support from Liquid Interactive and the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland.

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About Museum of Brisbane

Museum of Brisbane brings our city’s vibrant art, culture and history to life through our exhibitions, workshops, tours, talks and children’s activities.

Located in City Hall, the Museum is part of the living history of the city, examining how Brisbane and its people change over time and how our individual and collective stories reveal our character and create our identity. We are also the keeper of City Hall’s rich heritage, and visitors can experience a bird’s eye view of Brisbane from the top of the iconic Clock Tower on one of our popular tours, as well as learn the stories behind City Hall during an insider’s tour of the 90-year-old building.

Museum of Brisbane is an avid supporter of the city’s artists, designers and artisans. We are dedicated to transforming their artistic vision into a stunning reality through our exhibitions and artist-in-residence programs. The work of Brisbane’s artists, designers and chefs can also be found at the Museum Shop which stocks a bespoke range of jewellery, fashion accessories, home-wares, design objects, books, artworks and gourmet food products.

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