



# Moreton Bay

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRE

*Inspiring Champions for the Bay*

## St Helena Stories

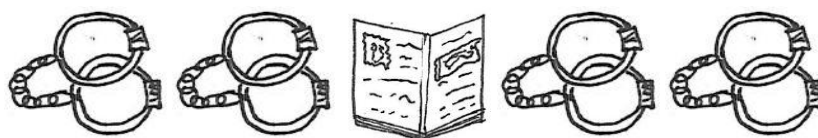
Birdcage of the Bay

## Teacher / Parent / Carer Information



*The Moreton Bay EEC team love having students, teachers and adult helpers join us on-board Inspiration on Moreton Bay (Quandamooka) and exploring St Helena Island for the St Helena Stories Program. The program has been adapted to become a virtual exploration to complete at home or at school.*

*Being connected to place and engaging in hands-on experiences, inspiring curiosity and thinking is always best. We hope that you can join us on St Helena Island in the future to be transported back to colonial times for exploration and discovery in this historic place.*



## Overview

*St Helena Stories- Birdcage of the Bay* is designed to be a self-directed unit of work following the story of the St Helena Island Penal Establishment in colonial Australia in the 1800s. St Helena Island Penal Establishment is used as an example of the establishment of a colony in Australia and many parallels can be drawn. This booklet has been written as a story in chapters, with the activities in each chapter being covered at the students' own pace.

*St Helena Stories- Birdcage of the Bay* is aligned to the year 5 HASS Unit 2 of the Australian Curriculum and provides an opportunity for students to consider the following inquiry questions:

1. What do we know about the lives of people in Australia's colonial past and how do we know?
2. How did an Australian colony develop over time and why?
3. How did colonial settlement change the environment?
4. What were the significant events and who were the significant people that shaped Australian colonies?

Exploration and discovery is intertwined throughout this program through primary sources such as photographs, ledgers, maps, artefacts, drone footage and secondary sources such as archaeological reports, historian recounts and a virtual reality tour.

This program has been developed in partnership with the Queensland State Archives and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. This story's name comes from the following quote. "Prisoners received visitors in a hot, mosquito-infested building known as the 'birdcage' "(QLD State Archives).

## Learning Intentions

Students, in the role of historians will:

- Interrogate historical sources of information to determine Aboriginal and European use of St Helena Island
- Comprehend the significant events that led to the development of St Helena Island Penal Establishment
- Examine ways the St Helena Penal Establishment settlement changed the environment
- Analyse the diverse perspectives of different social groups in the Colonial period
- Evaluate the importance of St Helena Island as a significant historical site in Moreton Bay, Brisbane and Queensland

## Curriculum Intent

### Inquiry and Skills

- Locate and collect relevant information and data from primary sources and secondary sources ([ACHASSI095](#))
- Organise and represent data in a range of formats including tables, graphs and large and small scale maps, using discipline-appropriate conventions ([ACHASSI096](#))
- Sequence information about people's lives, events, developments and phenomena using a variety of methods including timelines ([ACHASSI097](#))
- Examine primary and secondary sources to determine their origin and purpose ([ACHASSI098](#))

### Knowledge and Understanding

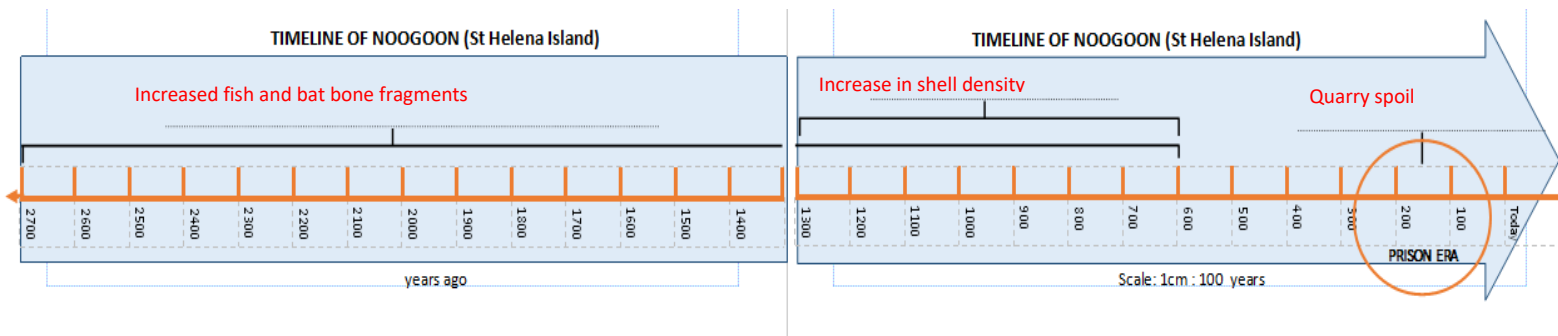
- Reasons (economic, political and social) for the establishment of British colonies in Australia after 1800 ([ACHASSK106](#))
- The nature of convict or colonial presence, including the factors that influenced patterns of development, aspects of the inhabitants (including Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples) and how the environment changed ([ACHASSK107](#))
- The impact of a significant development or event on an Australian colony ([ACHASSK108](#))
- The role that a significant individual or group played in shaping a colony ([ACHASSK110](#))

**Tip for use:** used in conjunction with the student booklet, please have your learners watch the videos on YouTube when directed. [The St Helena Stories- Birdcage of the Bay Introduction video can be viewed here before beginning the booklet.](#)

## Chapter 1 – Quandamooka

Moreton Bay's colonial past is preceded by a long history of occupation by the Quandamooka language group. Birdcage of the Bay program explores the colonial period through a timeline acknowledging Indigenous past and future impacts.

The intent of this chapter is for students to comprehend that the Aboriginal use of the island spans a much greater time than the years following colonisation. Students will be asked to examine an archaeological study which highlights the Aboriginal and European uses of St Helena Island, spanning back many thousands of years. This data will then be transferred to the timeline diagram at the bottom of the page, which will be repeated in later chapters in the booklet as students discover more significant dates and events in the island's history.



Links

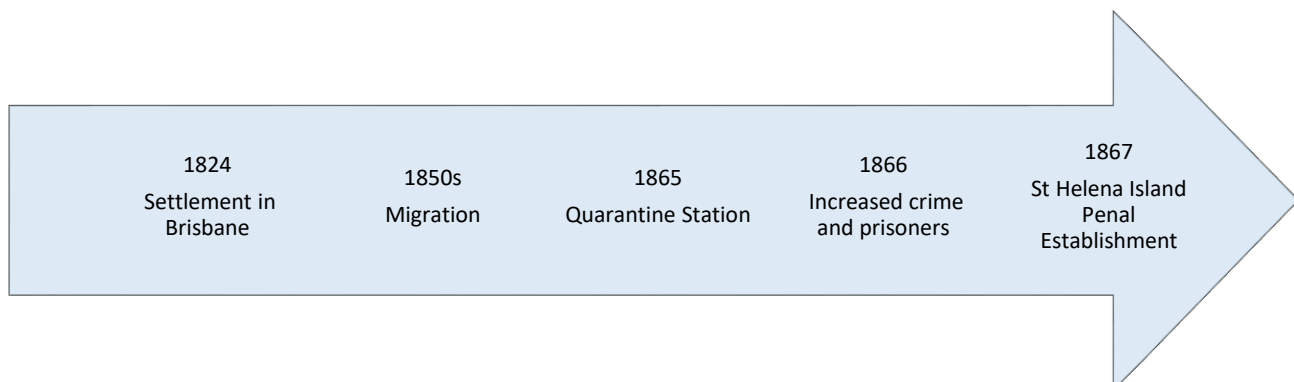
[Discover local Indigenous culture, traditions and lifestyle from Matt Burns, Quandamooka Cultural Officer](#)

## Chapter 2 – Colonial Australia during the 1800s – Pre-prison Era

Moreton Bay Penal Colony began in 1824 with the arrival of convicts and explorer Mr John Oxley to establish another colony. With the arrival of immigrant ships in the mid-1800s with typhus-ridden passengers, quarantining became crucial. St Helena Island was ideal as a quarantine station due to its location, fresh water table and good soil. Moreton Bay Settlement became inundated with immigrants. Due to limited job opportunities the jails became overcrowded and the decision was made to convert the Quarantine buildings into a prison.

For this chapter, students will need to refer to 'The Flow on Effect' on page 19 located at the back of the booklet.

The activity involves cutting out the events and evidence and gluing them on the timeline in the order in which they happened. A useful tip to get started is to look for the dates in the paragraphs to place them in chronological order.



## Chapter 3 – Development of colonies – St Helena Island Penal Establishment

*St Helena Island Penal Establishment is an example of how an Australian colony developed over time and how this settlement changed the environment. Due to its isolation, self-sufficiency was required such as food production, building of the prison and wells for fresh water. As a result of forward thinking by Superintendent John MacDonal, warders working at the prison were employed for their technical skills in a range of trades. These skills were taught to prisoners and the prison experienced economic profits through selling excess goods to the mainland.*

**Students add significant dates and events to the timeline using the information given. Dates and events include:**

- |                              |                            |                                 |                                    |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| • 1867<br>Prison established | • 1868<br>Land was cleared | • 1879<br>Stone jetty was built | • 1890<br>Stockade expansion began |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|

Three links are provided for students to choose their own virtual adventure through the prison. Please note one of the links requires google earth to be downloaded. None of these links are essential for students to achieve the learning intentions in this chapter, they are provided for interest and further visual exploration.

### Links

\* [VIRTUAL REALITY TOUR: Follow along on this YouTube video tour of the prison stockade as it was in colonial times](#)

\* [BIRDS-EYE VIEW: Follow the drone in this YouTube video. See if you can spot the remains of any of the buildings mentioned above](#)

\* [INTERACTIVE TOUR: Using Google Earth, find your own way around St Helena Island Prison as it exists today](#)

**Works best with google chrome as the browser**

**The activity in this chapter is similar to the last, with students referring to the “recipe for a colony” on page 21 at the back of the booklet.** The ingredients and methods will be cut out and glued on the outline in the order required to establish a colony. For example, finding fresh water is the first step as it is essential for survival, followed by finding food and so on.

The impacts may be linked to each other and will not match specifically with the methods and ingredients, however encourage thought and conversation about the vast impacts of colonisation on the existing environment and Quandamooka people. You may like to discuss these impacts with the students to deepen their own understanding. For example, clearing fields for food crops would impact the existing environment and Quandamooka people by deforestation of native trees, leading to loss of habitat for flying fox and loss of a food source, as the Quandamooka people hunted flying fox. Students examine two stockade plans from different years (1867 and 1894) and answer questions. Examples of possible student responses include:

How many years were there between the two stockade plans? **27 years**

List the main changes you notice in the stockade plans between 1867 and 1894

- **Four more yards were added (C, D, E, F)**
- **A school was added**
- **The exercise yard is smaller**
- **There are more shops- carpenter’s, blacksmith’s, tailor’s, tinsmith’s, butcher’s**

In 1867, St Helena Penal Establishment housed 60 prisoners. Using information from the stockade plans and graph, determine how many prisoners were housed in 1902? **266 prisoners**

What changes were made to the stockade to allow for more prisoners to be accommodated? **The addition of more yards, availability of jobs for prisoners.**

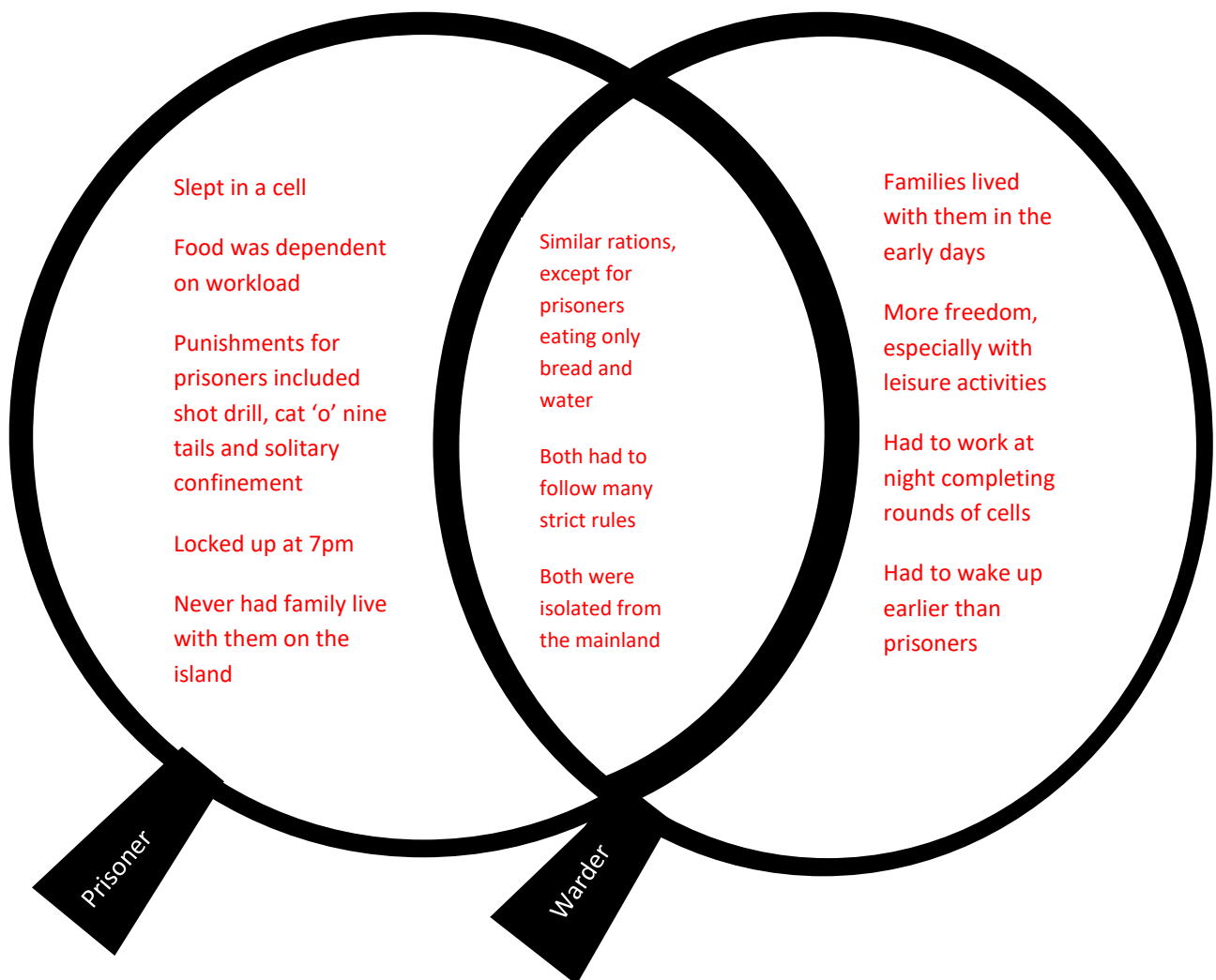
When the prison opened in 1867, many prisoners could not read or write. Did the education of prisoners may have improved over time? What evidence can you find from the stockade plans and graph to justify this?

**According to the graph, 193 prisoners could read and write with only one not able to read or write in 1902. The stockade plans in 1894 suggest that prisoners had more opportunities to learn as there was a school room for prisoners. The addition of many shops would have improved the skills of prisoners also as they were required to learn a new trade.**

## Chapter 4 – Daily Life in a colony

*Life on St Helena Island somewhat mirrored life on the mainland. Life for a prisoner and a warder saw many parallels. As a prisoner in the Birdcage of the Bay, daily life included work, meals, rules, recreation/leisure, punishment and isolation. Work for a warder was much the same. However, experiences of prisoners differed depending on circumstance. Life was hard, successful escapes were few, but many attempts were made.*

This aim of this chapter is for students to compare the lives of prisoners with the lives of warders. Using a Venn diagram (see below), students will discover that daily life was not so different for each of these groups. They will need to translate some of these experiences to write a postcard from the perspective of a prisoner on St Helena Island.



### Links

Watch the following video clips of historians sharing stories of prisoners and warders:

- \* [The Telltale Clock](#)
- \* [The Murder of a Warder](#)
- \* [Frederick Hamilton's Escape](#)
- \* [Punishment of Walter O'Hara](#)

## Chapter 5 – Significant events and people in shaping a colony - People of the Prison

*As social attitudes changed on the mainland, these translated to the prison establishment. The Shearer's Strike of 1891 demanded better pay and conditions for workers, causing a shift in the political climate of the time. This significant event led to the incarceration of political prisoners on St Helena Island. Despite the intended isolation of these prisoners, support from the mainland remained strong. One prisoner in particular, William Hamilton, recognised as the leader of the strike, helped educate other prisoners in reading, writing and music. William Hamilton was a significant individual during the colonial period, and upon release, helped to shape politics in Queensland.*

Students consider alternate realities in the “what if” activity. Refer to student booklet on page 16 for William Hamilton’s full story. This activity is designed to encourage creative thinking and some possible responses include:

**What if William Hamilton had admitted his actions were unlawful and was released from prison?**

Striking for better pay and conditions would not be taken seriously in the future and may never improve for workers. Fellow shearers may ridicule him for “scabbing on his mates”.

**What if free labourers had not been brought in to do the shearing?**

Wool supplies in Brisbane would suffer. The incident at Barcaldine where strikers harassed police officers may not have occurred.

**What if William Hamilton hadn't been arrested?**

Many prisoners on the island would not have benefited from William Hamilton teaching them new skills.

**What if the shearers had accepted defeat and continued to work under poor conditions?**

The labour party would not exist.

## Chapter 6 – Significance today - Post-prison Era

*As a reflection of the changing political landscape after federation in 1901, reform came to St Helena Island Penal Establishment. This saw long term prisoners and trades workshops being transferred to Boggo Road Goal. The prison was down-graded to a prison farm in 1925 with inmates dismantling the prison. An honour system was introduced which allowed prisoners to take responsibility for their work while improving attitudes and personal qualities. The last prisoners left the island in 1932. Afterwards the Island was used for a short time as a tourist destination and many years as a farm. In 1979 it was declared St Helena Island National Park. As a significant place, St Helena Island was proclaimed as Queensland's first historic site in 1980.*

Students add significant dates and events to the timeline using the information given. The dates and events are:

- 1901 Federation
- 1925 Prison down-graded to farm
- 1932 Last prisoners left island
- 1979 Island was declared a National Park
- 1980 St Helena Island was proclaimed as Queensland's first historic site

Throughout the activities within the chapters, students have examined various sources of information. The final task is to choose four of these (they can be anywhere within the student booklet), name them and decide whether they are a primary or secondary source. Note: all sources are clearly labelled.

**Primary sources:** photographs, ledgers, maps, artefacts, drone footage

**Secondary sources:** archaeological reports, historian recounts and a virtual reality tours

## List of Sources

Sources of information scattered throughout the chapters within the student booklet have been numbered with their source origin included. A summary of the sources used include:

- Source 1:       Aboriginals at work (Reproduced from T. Dick collection, The Australian Museum)
- Source 2:       Tom Petrie’s Early Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Petrie, C. Angus and Robertson , 1904, p.89)
- Source 3:       Aboriginal Midden (St Helena Island Archaeological Report by Gillian Alfredson)
- Source 4:       John Oxley (Queensland Museum)
- Source 5:       1850s Sailing Clipper (Bill Wood, Museums Victoria)
- Source 6:       Quarantine Station building plans (QPWS)
- Source 7:       John McDonald St Helena Island Prison’s first Superintendent (L. Penny)
- Source 8:       Making a canoe (Reproduced from T. Dick collection, The Australian Museum)
- Source 9:       Hulk, Proserpine (The St Helena Story, J. Finger)
- Source 10:      Clearing of native vegetation by prisoners (1868. John Oxley Collection)
- Source 11:      Choose your own adventure videos  
                  A: Virtual reality tour (Queensland State Archives)  
                  B: Birds eye view (Mette and Neils Julle)  
                  C: Interactive tour (Google Earth, MBEEC)
- Source 12:      Stockade Plans (QPWS)
- Source 13:      Details from Comptroller General’s 1902 annual report (QPWS)
- Source 14:      A day in the life of Warder Bob Murrie Snr (Life for Warders on St Helena. L. Penny)
- Source 15:      A day in the life of prisoner William Hamilton (In Gaol on St Helena. L. Penny)
- Source 16:      Videos of Historians sharing stories of prisoners and warders (Queensland State Archives)
- Source 17:      Warder watching over prisoners in the saddlery (Merv Beitz Collection)
- Source 18:      Shearer’s Strike Prisoners (1891. Queensland State Archives)