

INTERESTING ITEMS FROM THE COLLECTION

Although the second British penal settlement on Norfolk Island (1825-1855) was undeniably harsh, this little book from the Norfolk Island Museum Trust (NIMT) collection demonstrates that at specific times there were some touches of civilization.

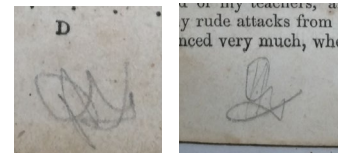
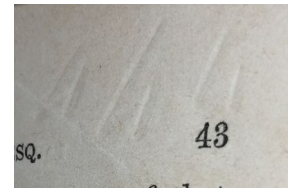
Titled, *Sketches of Eminent Medical Men*, it is the transcription that makes this little book particularly interesting. In its front-cover, in neat cursive handwriting, reads 'No.273 Prisoners School, Norfolk Island 1850'.

The history of books being given to prisoners on Norfolk Island goes back to Alexander Maconochie, a Commandant who served 1840-1844. He described the dismal conditions on Norfolk Island when he arrived noting, 'there were no schools, no books; and the men's countenances reflected faithfully this description of treatment.'¹ While subsequent commandants did not promote Maconochie's reforms, the idea of a prisoner's school did endure. Merval Hoare records that even during the infamous John Price's time as commandant there was an evening school running in October 1849.² Later, an anonymous visitor to Norfolk Island in 1853 described the schoolrooms being situated within the Prisoner's Barracks, writing that, 'the two hours between supper and rest have been spent in the school, and the day has been closed with prayers'.³

The Guard House at Kingston Pier was also converted into a library around 1850. As the date matches the book's inscription it is possible this little book was housed and used there. One other book from the Prisoners School is known and it too is covered in light leather. You can imagine nearly 300 small brown books being organized smartly on shelves in the small space. The little book does show plenty of signs of actually being read and handled. There is three separate impressions of '4' in the top left corners of pages and some corners were dog-eared to mark a page. There is also two pencil markings at two pages 39 and 97, the marks could be signatures or simply scribbles, but appear intentional. Page 126 is soiled and marked



Image 1: NIM5098 Front cover of book from prisoners school.



Images 3-5 : Pencil marking and impressions.



Images 6: Open pages showing use

¹ Maconochie, A 1973, *Maconochie's Norfolk Island 1840-1844*, Hobart, Sullivan's Cove, p.9

² Hoare, M 1988, *Norfolk Island: An Outline of its History 1774-1987*, Brisbane, University of Queensland Printers, p.61

³ Anonymous, *Goulburn Herald and County of Argyle Advertiser*, 'Norfolk Island: From Dickens's Household Words', Saturday 25th June 1853 via Trove
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/101736417?searchTerm=Protestant%20clergymen%20house%20Norfolk%20Island#>

with dirt and smudges indicating it might have been left open at some point or that Doctor Robert Dooch was a favorite story.

If you would like to view this book in person please feel free to ring 23788 or email us at info@museums.gov.nf to organize a time.

Bethany Holland
COLLECTIONS OFFICER

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