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CASE STUDY 4 BACKGROUND: THE RISE OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN AUSTRALIA

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⚙ **The rise of the British empire in Australia**

Britain's first contact with Australia came with Captain Cook's voyage in the ship Endeavour. He landed in Australia in 1770 and claimed it as a British territory. The process of colonisation began in 1788. A fleet of 11 ships, containing 736 convicts, some British troops and a governor set up the first colony of New South Wales.

Image 1



Captain Cook's voyage to Australia, painted in 1774 by J Gilbert
(PRO ref: ADM 55/107 f205)



It was an incredibly risky idea. The government had very little idea about what the colonists would find. They did not even know much about the climate. However, the risks paid off. By colonising Australia Britain gained an important base for its ships in the Pacific Ocean. It also gained an important resource in terms of being somewhere to send convicts. Until the American Revolution Britain could send convicts to the Thirteen Colonies. However, this ended when the Americans declared their independence. Transportation was an important part of the legal system in Britain, and by the 1780s there were large numbers of convicts in Britain who had been sentenced to transportation and had nowhere to go! New South Wales presented the ideal opportunity for Britain to get rid of its convicts and in the next 60 years about 160,000 were transported to Australia.

Image 2



British Map showing Port Jackson in the early stages of the British convict colony of New South Wales of Australia, 1796
(PRO ref: CO 700 New South Wales 15)

Thousands of other British settlers also migrated to Australia. They were attracted by the easily available land (which led to conflict with the aborigines). They could make a living raising sheep or by catching seals and whales. In 1826 settlers began colonising Western Australia. The colony of South Australia was set up in 1834. A whole new wave of migration was sparked off in the 1850s by the discovery of gold and the white population of Australia rose by around half a million in 10 years (while the Aboriginal population decreased).

⚙ **Links**

Australia's story

<http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/>

Official government web site with timelines, documents and links



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BRITISH EMPIRE

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Background source one

Captain Cook's voyage to Australia, painted in 1774 by J Gilbert

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Background source two

British Map showing Port Jackson in the early stages of the British convict colony of New South Wales of Australia, 1796

(PRO ref: CO 700 New South Wales 15)



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