

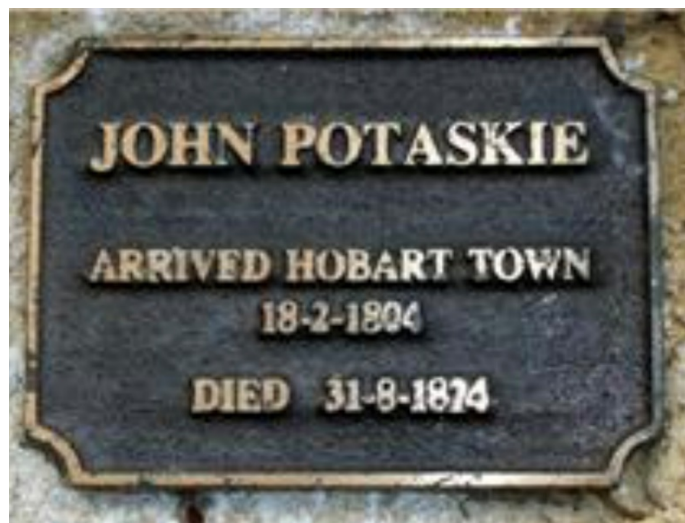
***"Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it."***

(A quote by Spanish-American philosopher George Santayana)

These words are inscribed on a plaque at the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland.



**John Potaski's story  
Australia's first Polish settler**



**Part 1**

## Introduction

Australia is a nation that was founded by convicts, and the oldest prison in modern Australia is Tasmania's Richmond Gaol.

A local gaol was required for offence committers in the new colony of Van Diemen's Land, so the Richmond Gaol started to be built, using convict labour, in 1825. England was also sending a steady supply of convict labour between 1788 and 1853 to this new colony. Its own gaols were overflowing with people for crimes as simple as stealing a handkerchief all the way up to murder.

Originally it was just one building, but as the years passed there was need for more accommodations. In 1833 more structures were built. The gaoler had to be housed along with his family, as did the guards. In 1835 buildings were constructed on the sides and included solitary cells. The complex was surrounded by a large sandstone wall. Constructed in 1825, it's the only remaining jail in Tasmania where it's still possible to tour the life of a 19th-century convict.

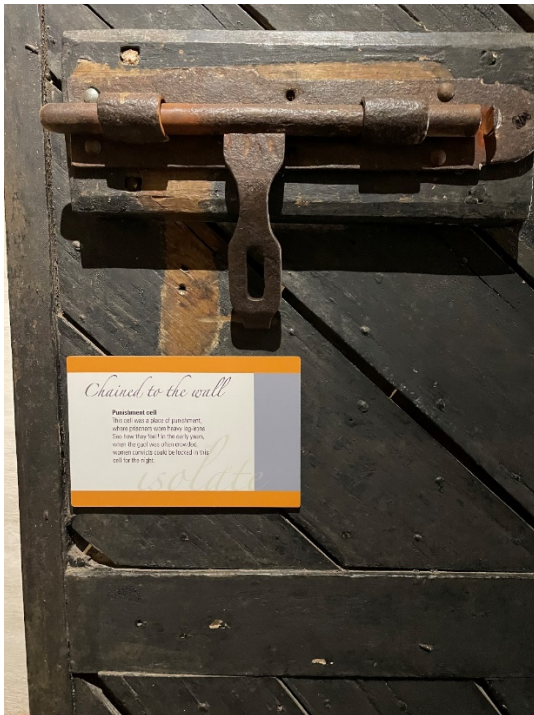




If you step inside a dark cell that was used for solitary confinement, you can feel firsthand why the tiny space was known to trigger insanity.

In the cells, which only measure 2m x 1m, visitors can close the door once inside. In the darkness, imagine being locked in here with only bread and water for nourishment. A bucket for a toilet and a blanket to try to keep warm were the only comforts offered. Prisoners had to remain silent the entire time they were in solitary. I could only stay in there less than a minute and pitied the poor souls who spent days this way.





As I walked through the various buildings here, I tried to imagine what the sounds, smells and sights would have been like when it was operational. Not at all pretty I feel.

On the busy nights when the door clanged shut and the keeper turned the key, dozens of people would have to find space to sleep in this one small building. It was always crowded- chain-gang prisoners, men and women convicts and their guards, Aboriginals brought in from the bush, debtors and people waiting trial- all in together, spilling out of the rooms and cells, sprawling in the passages and hallway.



That's how it was almost ten years until the gaoler's house was built in 1833 and the two side wings were added in 1835, enclosing the prison-yard.

In the cookhouse, the wood-fired ovens would have been working hard to cook bread and food for the prisoners.



If you stand inside the outdoor courtyard with closed eyes, you can feel what was happened back in time with prisoners in this place every morning. In display cabinet you can see the infamous whip called "cat-o-nine-tails" that was used to administer the morning lashings.





According to some, the Richmond Gaol is still haunted by the ghosts of former convicts, and reports of moans and cold chills are much more common than you'd think.

As the shipments of convicts ceased from overseas, the gaol turned into a holding cell for citizens of petty crime, before eventually falling into disrepair in the middle of the 1920s. Today, as a restored and revitalized historic site that's one of Tasmania's best, visitors can not only witness the horrors that convicts had to endure, but also are given a dramatic reminder of why to stay out of jail.

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**Photos:** Danuta and Bogusław Piotrowski