

The heads of a plan

Business



The Heads of a Plan document is a key primary source in determining why Britain founded the NSW colony. What does this document tell us about the rationale to establish a European settlement in Australia? The 'Heads of a Plan' is an undated and anonymous document supposedly written in the year 1786. It was attached to a letter in which Lord Sydney who was Home Secretary in the government of William Pitt informs the Treasury of the government's decision to establish a penal settlement at Botany Bay. The 'Heads of a Plan' briefly outlines the reasons for establishing the convict colony in Australia and even though it seems as if it would be straightforward, there have always been debates about what this document really tells. Some believe the reason indeed was to solve the problem of the overcrowded prisons in Britain which had been growing due to the loss of the American colony after War of Independence. Others, on the contrary, do not support the traditional argument but believe that there was more behind the decision to colonize such a barren, remote and greatly unknown land.

The possible motives are either of commercial, strategic or military nature. This essay will focus in particular on the two dominant theories concerning the establishment of the colony as well as on the arguments for both of them, delivered through an analysis of the crucial document 'Heads of a Plan'. There have been two different theories about the reasons for establishing a colony in Australia. The first one agreeing with the official reason and the second one believing there would be an underlying reason; this could be either commercial, strategic or military benefits. Explain both of them in detail and mention some of the defenders and opponents of each of the theories.

Blainey's theory. He rejects the official reason since he believes that Australia was too far away for such a project and the costs would have been too high. Consequently, his opinion is that the major motives for the establishment of the settlement were timber and flax. Outline his theory in detail; argue with given examples from the final paragraphs of the document 'Hheads of a Plan', as well as from Matra's proposal and the instructions sent to Governor Phillip. Abbott's interpretation of the document. He supports the official reason.

Describe his theory and compare his interpretation to other scholars, such as Martin and Frost. Here use in particular the material provided in Abbott's and the primary source 'Hheads of a Plan'. Abbott, Blainey and other scholars focused mainly on the final paragraphs of 'Hheads of a Plan'. Concentrate on the first twelve paragraphs, underlying the document's emphasis on the alarming conditions in Britain's prisons. Take into consideration what else is mentioned in the document, apart from timber and flax (e. g.

Asiatic productions). Critique on Blainey's theory. Stress out the importance of focusing on the 'Hheads of a Plan' document in its entirety. Argue that there certainly were potential added benefits, but based on the documents, Botany Bay was established as a penal colony to send convicts to. The Governor Phillip's Instructions are a primary source from the year 1787. It lists instructions which should be followed by Governor Phillip when travelling to Australia and establishing a colony there.

Remarkably, among other instructions, Governor Phillip was told to send home samples of the flax plant for further evaluation as it 'ultimately may

become an article of export'.¹ Moreover, the securing of Norfolk Island in order to prevent it from being occupied by any other European power is mentioned, what raises the question of the real purpose of the colony and demands investigation. This primary source is a letter from James Maria Mantra to the British Government in the year 1783. James Mantra accompanied James Cook on his journey to the South Seas in 1770 and thus learned about the conditions in Australia. This proposal was the origin of the idea of a settlement in Australia, although originally no convicts were mentioned.

In this document Matra discusses the potential commercial advantages to Britain of a settlement in New South Wales. He mentions the good soil, advantages of flax cultivation, trade with China and others, the availability of timber for ships masts and Sir Joseph Banks support.³ Moreover, he argues that the establishment of a colony at Botany Bay would have significant military potential concerning interfering with Spanish or Dutch shipping in time of war.⁴ Remarkably, the part, where the advantages of flax and timber are mentioned is very similar to the crucial document 'Heads of a Plan'⁵, therefore this article is of immense interest and usefulness. This secondary source provides the theory that Botany Bay was established as a colony for the supply and cultivation of flax and naval timbers. It was highly speculative and provided the basis on which in the 1960s a lively debate concerning the motives of the establishment of the colony commenced amongst historians.

Blainey's position that Botany Bay was settled for reasons other than to dump convicts, stems from his opinion that Australia was too far away from <https://assignbuster.com/the-heads-of-a-plan/>

Britain for the project to be viable; the cost and time involved being major deterrents. 7 However, he mainly puts the focus on the last paragraphs of the ' Heads of a Plan', failing to analyse the document in its entirety. This secondary source provides a very interesting article which supports the traditional argument. Not only does G. J.

Abbott favour the original idea of founding a convict colony solely in order to solve the problem of overcrowded prisons in Britain but also he offers a direct analysis of a number of articles written by scholars as Blainey, Martin or Frost, who all supported the theory of additional reasons for the establishment. Especially of my interest are his arguments against Blainey's thesis and his conviction that ' The documents on which the traditional explanation is based do not support the explanation of the Botany Bay decision that Blainey proffered in the Tyranny of Distance.'⁸, as well as his claims of Blainey's theory being ' imaginative'. This secondary source gives a detailed overview over the historical events and locations concerning the establishment of the convict colony as well as the different so called flax theories¹⁰ connected to it. Mollie Gillen notes that there were numerous rejections of the Botany Bay proposal¹¹, but on the other hand people involved were likewise aware of some of the benefits of the location. ¹² Interestingly, she summarizes that in the end there was no other option to deal with Britain's convict crisis remained¹³ and she concludes that the mentioning of flax and timber supplies in the ' Heads of a Plan' rationalised the plan to colonize Botany Bay, as the promise of gold did for Das Voltas Bay¹⁴, making the article of high interest for my purposes.