

The new Bimberi Youth Justice Centre is also an attempt to lower the rate of crime in the ACT. Bimberi includes residential, education, training and recreation facilities enclosed by a secure perimeter in an attempt to create spaces in which young offenders can come to understand, address and take responsibility for their offending or risk taking behaviours.¹⁴ It replaces the outdated Quamby Youth Detention Centre which was the subject of a 2005 report on human rights. The report criticised practices such as the inappropriate mixing of detainees of various age, sex and sentence type, and the lack of sufficient recreational facilities largely due to the physical limitations of the Quamby site.

As the Canberra region has grown from a small rural community to a city and the nation's capital, so too have the types and amount of crime in the region. The ACT now has its own police force and brand new, human rights-based corrections facilities which should give offenders the best possible chance of turning their lives around. Perhaps, although it is a lofty ambition, we can aspire to return

to the days when the most serious police work was dealing with towels stolen from local hotels.

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¹ The 1828 census did not include Aboriginal people.
² There were very few non-indigenous women in the region at this time. Most were wives and daughters of landowners or squatters.
³ 1988, *Police & gaols, 1835-1836*, Popinjay Publications, Woden [ACT], p. 332
⁴ "When Canberra was young...and wild!" *The Argus Weekend Magazine*, March 26, 1938, p.3
⁵ ABS, 3105.0.65.001 – Australian Historical Population Statistics, 2008
⁶ *The Canberra Times*, Friday 20 January 1928, p.7
⁷ Gibbney, H. J. & ACT Administration (Australia). Central Office. 1988, *Canberra 1913-1953*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, p.115
⁸ Richards, Edward (1962) "Origin of our police force", *ACT Police Association*, March 1962, p.9.
⁹ Memorandum to the Attorney-General from the Director, Investigation Branch, 22 June 1928.
¹⁰ H.E. Downes (Medical Officer of Health) (1942) *Inspection of Police Prisoner Cells and Area*. Richards, p.9.
¹¹ Masters, Adam (1995) "A short history of the Australian Federal Police", *AFP Museum*.
¹² Human Rights Commission (2007) *Human Rights Audit on the Operation of ACT Correctional Facilities under Corrections Legislation*, p.23.
¹³ ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, <http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/ocys/bimberi> <Accessed 8th July 2009>
¹⁴ Human Rights and Discrimination Commissioner (2005) *Human Rights Audit of Quamby Youth Detention Centre*, ACT Human Rights Office.

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IMAGE CREDIT:
 (this page from top) 'Women Against Rape in War' demonstration, 1981. Courtesy ACT Heritage Library, The Canberra Times collection. *Police badges*. Photos by RLDI.
 (front cover) *ACT policewoman*, 1975. National Archives of Australia: A8746, K24/3/75/71

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On 31 December, 1926 (admittedly, a slow news day in any year) *The Canberra Times* broke this story on page one:

TWO TOWELS FROM HOTEL CANBERRA – POLICE COURT CASE

At the Queanbeyan Police Court yesterday morning, before Mr. C. G. Carr-Boyd, P.M., Robert King, a waiter at No. 1 Mess Camp was charged with having stolen two towels, the property of the Federal Capital Commission.

Many people would argue that this is about the extent of crime in Canberra – apart from the crime of being a politician, of course. Like any community, however, Canberra has



a long history of criminal activity, policing and punishment; longer than many would believe. Moreover, the types of crime committed throughout Canberra's history tell us much about the way the region, and its people, have developed.

Nowadays, Canberra has all the crime associated with living in a modern city – traffic and drug offences, robbery, assault and murder. The city has a dedicated police force to prevent and solve crime, and the corrective services facilities to punish and rehabilitate those who commit it. But long before the city existed, crime was still being committed and criminals punished.

Canberra's pastoral beginnings, like much of Australia, were largely dependent on the convict system. The census of 1828, only four or so

years after the first European men came to live in the region, recorded that 126 people were living in the County of Murray, of whom 73 were convicts.¹ These men outnumbered the local pastoralists to whom they were assigned to work.² Moreover, it was the convicts who built the roads, cleared the land and worked as shepherds and stockmen.

Some convicts chose to escape their life of hard labour by taking to the bush, whether because of harsh treatment or simply the desire for freedom. These convict bolters stole horses, food and weapons from settlers and travellers to help them survive in the bush. Bushrangers, as they came to be called, were generally caught by locals or mounted policemen and given harsher sentences. Sometimes assigned convicts even helped catch

bushrangers in the hope of being rewarded with a ticket-of-leave or conditional pardon. Later bushrangers, from about the 1850s, were largely native-born men who held up travellers, local landowners and coaches transporting gold during the gold rush era.

The types of crime in the region in this early period were therefore those of a sparsely populated, rural society in which convicts were forced to work in conditions which were far from the scrutiny of the government in Sydney. Police magistrates, usually a local landowner, were appointed to regional areas. They were assisted by mounted police and reported to the Superintendent of Police in Sydney. Thus, the earliest policing in the region was shared between the mounted police and local police magistrates.

In an 1835 report on policing in New South Wales (NSW), Terence Aubrey Murray, Magistrate for the Limestone Plains and Monaro region, reported that he was assisted by one constable and a scourger (who carried out sentences of lashing), with the closest mounted policemen being stationed at Goulburn. He had no lock-up and was forced to confine prisoners in a strong room in his own house.³ Complainants had to travel up to 100 miles to see him and he would hear about seven or eight cases a week.

Alured Tasker Faunce was appointed as the first Police Magistrate at

Queanbeyan in 1837. The court and lock-up operated from the property *Canberry* located at modern-day Acton before moving closer to Queanbeyan in 1839 when purpose-built premises were completed. By the 1860s the Queanbeyan Police District was served by seven policemen. Ginninderra Police Station, established in 1883 and staffed by one constable, was the first formal police station within the boundaries of what is now the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

The Canberra region continued to be policed by NSW even after the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) was created in 1911. Police were still stationed at Ginninderra, and also at Molonglo (now Fyshwick) from 1922 and Acton from 1926.

Early in Canberra's history, the lives of the local policemen were relatively quiet and much the same as any other country town in NSW. Sergeant Philip Cook, who arrived from NSW to police the district in 1923, recalled that there was never any 'serious crime'. Mostly he mediated neighbourhood disputes in the construction camps, dispersed vagrants and dealt with sly-grog sellers in the supposedly 'dry' capital.⁴

The Territory's population grew rapidly when construction work began seriously in the period after the First World War, tripling between 1923 and 1928 to over 8000 people.⁵ Crime and police work grew correspondingly. While it was still



IMAGE CREDITS:
(previous page) *FCT Police in front of Acton Courthouse* (detail), c.1927. ACT Heritage Library, donated by Patricia Frei.
(this page from top) *Frank Gardiner's pistol*. Photo by George Serras, National Museum of Australia. *Ben Hall* by John Meredith, c.1865. National Library of Australia. *Garrett Cotter*, c.1860. Courtesy of the Cotter family. *ACT policeman*, 1970. National Archives of Australia: A8763, KN23005.
(next page) *Bimberi Youth Justice Centre*, 2008. The Canberra Times.

mostly petty crime and minor assaults, the first reported homicide in the Territory occurred at Red Hill Camp in December 1926 during a brawl over a game of two-up.⁶

The ACT (then the FCT) finally received its own police force in 1927 under the leadership of Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Edward Jones. It was determined that the Territory needed its own force with both police barracks and a lock-up, but no gaol as prisoners would continue to be sent to NSW.⁷ Sergeant Cook was formally transferred from the NSW force as Sergeant 1st Class in the new FCT Police, and ten Peace Officers were transferred to make up the new force.⁸

The police premises at Acton were largely unsuitable, with two constables living in a room that was only 10 x 12 feet in 1928.⁹ Even after the police were moved to a wing in Hotel Acton in 1940, the lock-up still had a non-secure exercise yard so that prisoners had to be supervised at all times.¹⁰ Police headquarters were finally moved to the former Census Building in Civic, now the site of the Jolimont Centre, in 1946.¹¹

The police force underwent many name changes and configurations during the twentieth century. Under H.E. Jones it was known as the Commonwealth of Australia Police or the FCT Police. In 1958 the name was changed to the ACT Police and in 1979, somewhat controversially, ACT Policing became a branch of the new Australian Federal Police.¹²



After Canberra's population boom of the 1960s, Canberra finally built its own juvenile detention centre (Quamby) in 1962, and a remand centre at Belconnen in 1976. Belconnen Remand Centre was originally designed for 18 detainees, but was progressively expanded over the years until its capacity was 69 detainees in 2007. It was described by the BRC medical clinic's doctor as incorporating "...all of the worst features of a gaol without having any of the ameliorating facilities available to provide the detainees with meaningful employment, occupations or recreations".¹³

After decades of debate over whether the ACT needed, or wanted, its own prison, all ACT prisoners were finally moved to the new Alexander Maconochie Centre

in 2009. Until this time, Canberra's sentenced prisoners had been sent to New South Wales gaols. The ACT's first prison is a 300-bed facility which can accommodate both male and female, remand and sentenced prisoners, from low to high security classifications, therefore negating the need to send any prisoners interstate.

One of the main arguments for building the prison was that sending sentenced prisoners to NSW gaols, more than 100km away from their family and friends, was a major factor in the failure to rehabilitate criminals. With an emphasis on rehabilitation, compliance with human rights principles and adherence to the 'Healthy Prison' concept, it is hoped that the recidivism rate will fall accordingly.