# PAHSMA EDUCATION PROGRAM ONSITE EDUCATION ACTIVITIES Teacher Notes CONVICT BRICK MAKING



# TEACHER NOTES

### FACTS ABOUT CONVICT BRICKS

**The colour** – The bricks at Port Arthur are lots of different colours.

The different colours are because the clay the convicts used to make these bricks all came from different places. The colour depends on where the clay came from.

**The texture** – A lot of the bricks at Port Arthur have almost eroded completely away.

Most of the bricks are very rough and some have nearly disappeared – they have worn away over time. When a brick has cure (to dry slightly before firing), it is put in a kiln. When these bricks were made, the convicts sometimes could not make the kiln hot enough to harden or fire the bricks properly, because they used wood fires to get the kiln hot. This meant that the water that was in the brick mix did not dry out enough. Over time, the water in the brick, with the help of rain, sun and wind, made the brick weaken and break apart and wear away. Sometimes, there was salt in the water they used and this also helped the bricks to break apart, to erode. When salt crystals get wet – they get bigger, they expand. When they are dry, the crystals shrink again. when this happens, over a long time – just like here at Port Arthur, drying and getting wet and drying again, the bricks start to fall apart. There are a lot of those here.

**Thumbprints** – Not all the bricks have these.

When the bricks are in the buildings it is very hard to see if there are thumbprints in the bricks because they are laying flat. If the bricks fall out of the wall or a building has fallen down, it is a lot easier to see them. As the brick is pushed out of the mould, usually a thumb is diagonally placed at each of two corners, sometimes the clay is a little harder to push out, so the thumbprints get left behind. If the clay was easy to get out, there were no thumbprints.

#### The Brick Mix -

The clay used for the activity is different to the clay used by convicts. It is made from a mixture of air dry clay, and crushed up convict bricks and water. This means the clay can be taken home as a brick and dried in a warm, sunny spot at home. The bricks we have crushed are the ones that have fallen apart and can't be used again.

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## Identifying old and hand - made bricks -

- After the bricks have been turned out of the mould, they are sat on their side, and lined up to cure, which means to get a little harder before going into the KILN.
- When you look at hand-made or old bricks, you will see a ridge along the side. The
  wet clay has been pushed up between the bricks as they have been stacked.
- The thumb print is another way to tell a handmade brick.

## Footprints in the bricks -

One day, when there were some bricks curing outside, the Reverends children, from the Parsonage next door to the Education Centre, let the pigs out – the pigs then ran straight over the bricks as they were drying. We know this happened, because of documentary evidence, it was written about when it happened and then, about 4 or 5 years ago, our stonemason found bricks with pig prints in them in a building that was being repaired. Those bricks are up in the museum.