

European workers in Australia - 1

Who were they?

Most of the Europeans who came to work in Australia were younger men from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, but many came from Germany, Italy and other European countries. Some had enough money to pay for their passage, others had government assistance or paid nothing.

Why did they come?

Gold was the attraction for the greatest number of men, but there were other reasons. Some wanted the opportunity to own land, work for themselves and make money. Others were attracted by the open spaces and the freedom. Many just wanted to be able to find a job and to live a better life ... and of course there were those who saw it as an exciting adventure.

Many came to escape war, natural disaster, poverty, famine or other misfortunes in their home countries. The industrial revolution in Europe had changed many people. Some had to work in factories and live in dirty, crowded industrial cities. Others who had been crofters (farmers) had been removed from their plots of land to make way for sheep farming. This was because wool was needed for the many fabric mills. Some crofters were allowed to stay on smaller plots, but they faced starvation when a disease destroyed potatoes, the only crop they could grow on the small parcels of land they rented. Some Lutheran settlers from Germany came to South Australia to escape religious persecution and some northern Italians escaped here to avoid being persecuted by Austrians.

Workers were needed to develop the country. Convict labour had originally been used, but the end of transportation and the discovery of gold changed everything. Australia had to look overseas and encourage workers and their families to come to live and work here.

What was the experience like?

It was a hard life for many Europeans, especially if their working conditions were very different from home. Some, like many Italians, enjoyed the

climate, while others found it very difficult. But as many workers found out, there were great rewards for those who were prepared to work hard and to help each other. Many described it to their family and friends at home as 'a land of opportunity', encouraging them to join them.

Many acquired land, developed it and did very well. Some, known as 'squatters', had huge sheep and cattle properties. Others set up successful businesses. There was plenty of work for tradesmen and other workers. Some were able to live and even save money on what they were paid, although others didn't manage quite so well.

How did they contribute to Australia?

Europeans worked hard to explore and develop Australia from the first coastal settlements to the vast inland. They built homes, schools, churches, public buildings, railways, roads, bridges, telegraphs, farms, factories, businesses, communities and a way of life. Workers arrived from many places with skills they used and adapted. They learnt and developed new ones too as they worked together to shape and prepare Australia for Federation in 1901.



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The reasons people migrated to Australia from Europe and Asia, and the experiences and contributions of a particular migrant group within a colony. (ACHHK096)

WORKERS FROM OVERSEAS