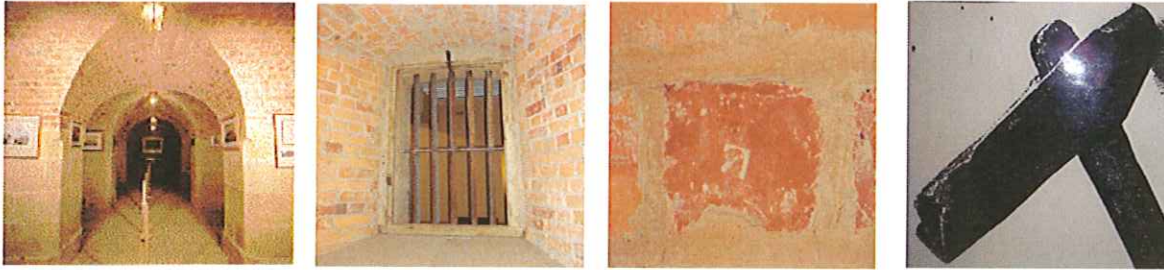


Parliamentary Museum, Parliament House, Hobart



The designer of this Georgian-style Custom House was Civil Engineer and Colonial Architect John Lee Archer (see reverse). The name "Custom House" was chiseled off and replaced at federation time by the Royal Coat of Arms. The term "Custom House" had been in use since 14th Century, and in 1671 Christopher Wren completed a new Custom House after the Great Fire of London (1666). The variation "Customs House" with an 's' was also used, and in colonial times England and America used both Custom and Customs.

Upon Archer's arrival in Tasmania he almost immediately began prospective drawings for a New Wharf area, although it was assistant architect-draftsman J.G. McNeilly who actually drew up the final plans. From 1830 these plans included a Custom House, to replace one existing on the corner of Salamanca Place and Davey Street.

Work on the basement began on 3 January 1835 after the 'marsh was drained and levels raised several feet above the original.' Many of the convict workers came from the hulk *Duke of York* (ex *Sophia*) moored nearby since 1830; some were also locked up in parts of the basement (completed in March 1836). In April 1835 Archer revised his plans and by 1838 the building was ready for its roof. Customs staff occupied the building in September 1840 and stored items, such as rum awaiting payment of customs duty. This room was designated the King's Store. The rum alone helps explain the four iron-barred windows, which were originally backed by internal wooden shutters, for which the casing remains in place.

Apocryphal stories have convicts tapping the rum barrels, but the workmanship of the basement of Parliament House commands attention. Daniel Herbert, a convict stonemason originally sentenced to death for highway robbery, but now famous for the images on Ross Bridge, worked as 'overseer' until withdrawn to Ross. Although Herbert was paid just 1 shilling per day, because of his skills the basement is adorned with excellent quality barrel-arched foundations, with scabbled-edged pillars. The groove in the floor has been described in many ways, including being lined with iron and filled with grease or fat to help move barrels, but was most likely simply used for drainage. On 2 December 2006 a time capsule was set into the sandstone flagging floor to commemorate 150 years of self-government.

Convict-hewn sandstone blocks were used to create the basement walls, and handmade convict bricks create twenty vaulted arches that are practically unique in Australia. The Parliamentary Librarian converted this area into the Museum in 1990s. This work included water blasting to remove the lime-based whitewash and selecting the most suitable light fittings available for an underground area without artificial light. While few bricks (if any) bear convict thumbprints, more easily spotted are the broad arrow stamps used to impress the 'monarch's mark' into the bricks. A special hammer was used to stamp each brick as government property (a bar code of that era). The Broad Arrow symbol was widely used to mark government property — including convict clothing — and had been in use since the 17th Century when Henry Sidney, Earl of Romney was Master of Ordinance (1693-1702).