

# 7

## Doing Historical Archaeology in Australia

Historical archaeology studies the colonial past of Australia—the places and artifacts that have been left behind by over two hundred years of non-Indigenous activity. Britain officially colonized Australia in 1788, when the First Fleet landed in Sydney Cove carrying 717 convicts, 191 marines and 19 officers. There had been contact between Indigenous people and Europeans long before this date along both the northern and western coasts of Australia (see Chapter 2), but 1788 heralded the first influx of foreign people desiring permanently to colonize the Australian continent. An enormous range and variety of people from many different countries have since settled either temporarily or permanently in Australia, so much so that until 1880 the majority of white Australians were immigrants, rather than native born (Camm & McQuilton, 1988:142). Throughout the nineteenth century these immigrants were drawn from places as diverse as the UK, Japan, Russia, Poland, Italy, Greece, Germany, China, Pakistan, India, Turkey and the Pacific Islands. As a result, historical archaeology deals with the varieties of material evidence that have resulted from more than two centuries of this colonial occupation and is much more than just the archaeology of British colonization.

The present day system of states and territories in Australia was established in the twentieth century, after Federation in 1901 created a Commonwealth government to take control of affairs that affected the entire nation, including defence, postal and customs matters. Prior to that date all settlements were known as colonies and each had their own systems of law and government (Figure 7.1). New South Wales was the original colony, although its borders have changed several times over the past 220 years. The Swan River Colony in Western Australia became the second settled area of Australia when it was proclaimed in 1829. By contrast all of the other colonies were originally part of New South Wales. South Australia became a colony when it was established in 1836 by the South Australian Company. Its current western boundary was fixed in 1861. Victoria was part of NSW until 1851, and Queensland was established as a separate colony in 1859. Its current boundaries were fixed in 1862. The Northern Territory was annexed to South Australia between 1863 and 1911, after which it was declared a Commonwealth territory. The Australian Capital Territory was created in 1911 as the location of the national capital, Canberra. If you are working on a site from

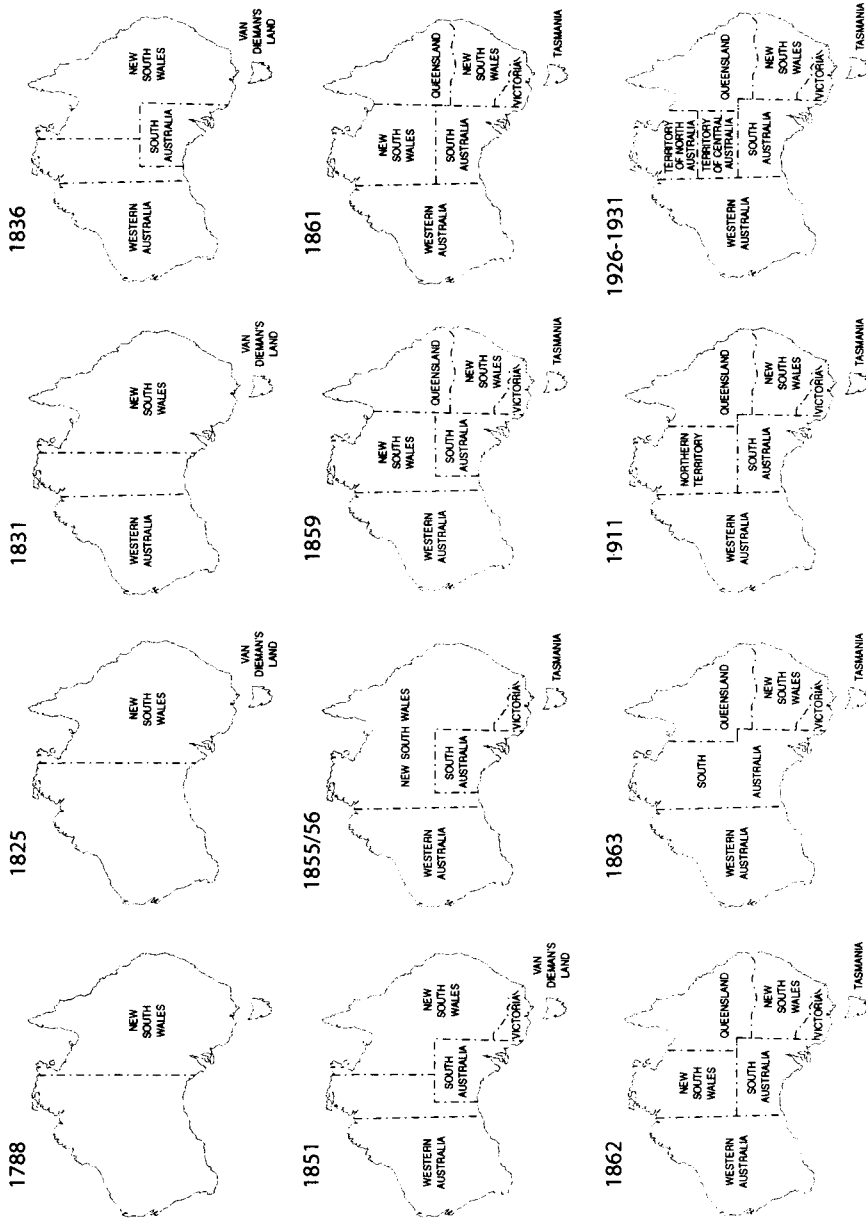


FIGURE 7.1. Historical development of Australian colony, state and territory boundaries.