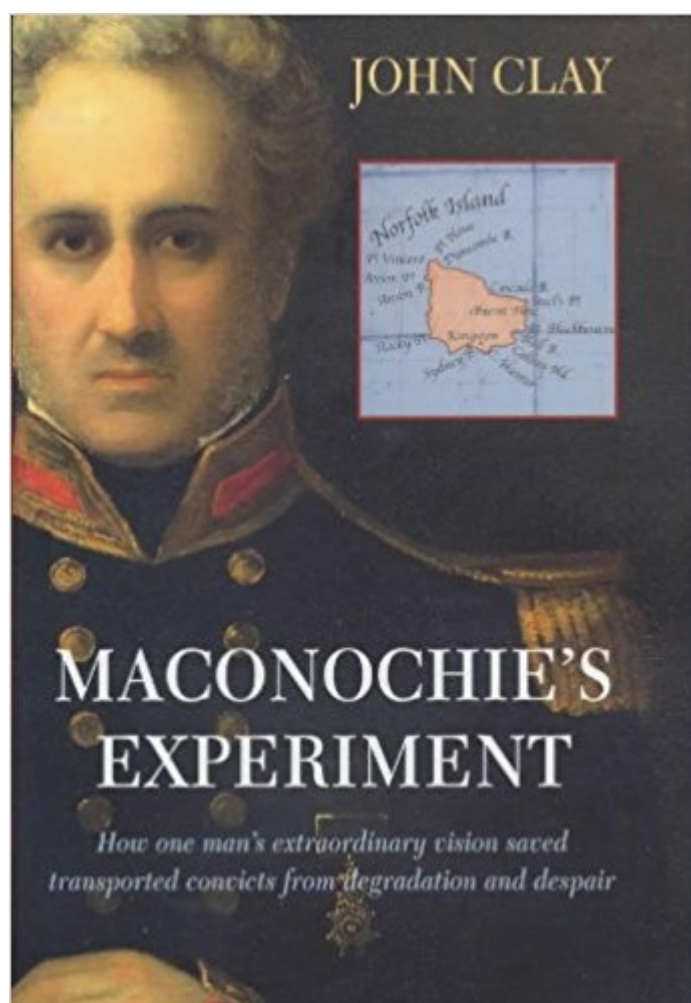


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Maconochie's Experiment: How One Man's Extraordinary Vision Saved Transported Convicts From Degradation And Despair



Synopsis

In 1840 Australia was full of transported convicts, and Norfolk Island, a thousand miles out in the Pacific, was its prison of ultimate terror. Prisoners there were repeatedly flogged, their backs crawling with maggots as they lay in their own urine to relieve their sores.;Alexander Maconochie arrived as their new Governor. He was appalled by the brutality. Maconochie introduced a mark system, whereby prisoners could reduce their sentences by good behaviour and hard work. Let us offer prisoners, not favours, but rights, he said. They have claims on us also...the more sacred because they are helpless in our hands.;He called the prisoners together and explained his ideas. They listened in disbelief. Maconochie began the experiment by celebrating the young Queen Victoria's birthday. The prisoners were freed for the day and Maconochie and his family walked among them unprotected. The new regime was launched.;After three years the puzzled authorities sent in a commission. Its report was highly favourable, but the ship taking the report to London passed another in mid-ocean bearing news that Maconochie had been ousted by a new Colonial Secretary. His experiment was over. But out of the 920 prisoners Maconochie released from Norfolk Island, only two were ever convicted again.

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Customer Reviews

John Clay has written several books, including biographies of John Masters and R. D. Laing. He was a founder member of Peper Harow, the therapeutic community for disturbed adolescents, in the 1970s. He lives in London and now also works as a Jungian analyst.

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