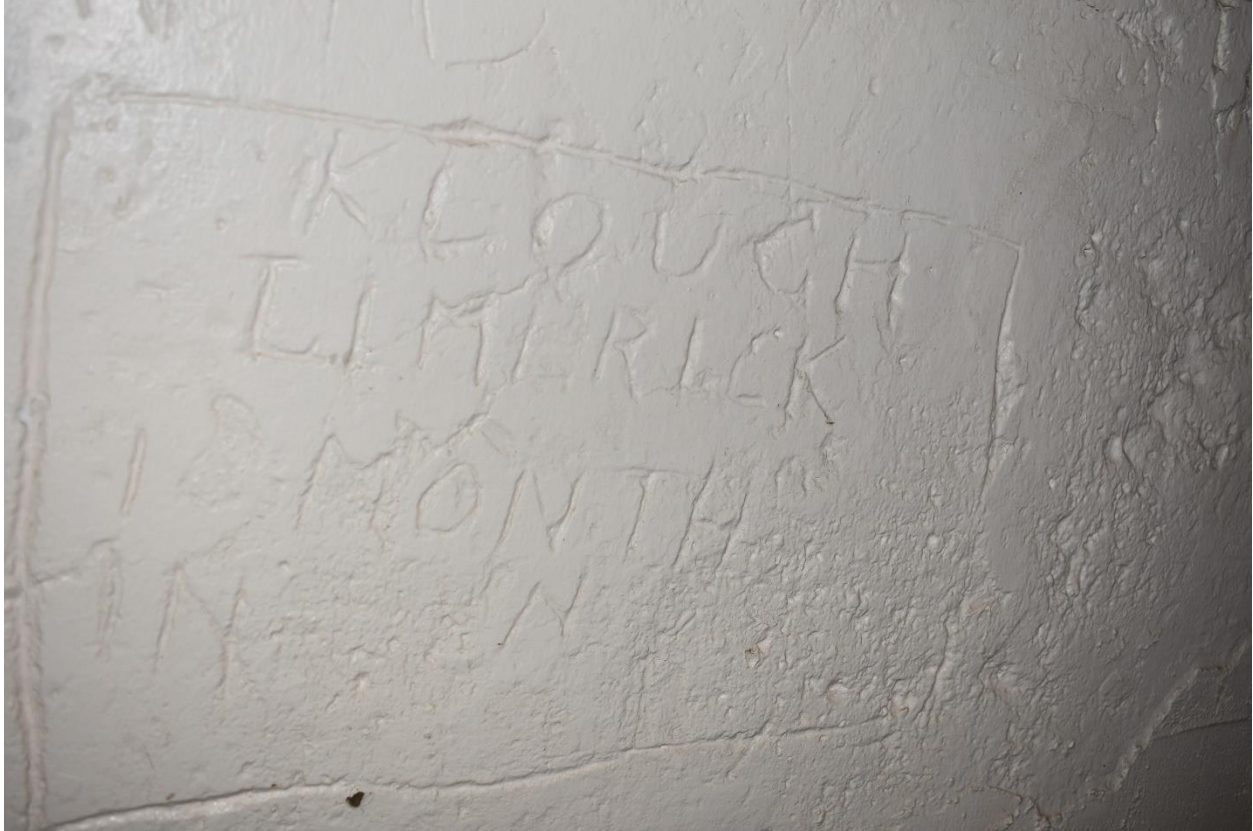


Many of the inscriptions on the Mens Ward wall are impossible to trace; some are just initials, some common names (eg T Smith), some are just too hard to decipher. But, some of the more enterprising inmates really put some effort into their graffiti. Of these, a few common attributes emerge. Most of them have incised a box around their graffiti, essentially carving out their own piece of real estate on the wall. In their boxes, these convicts have usually included name, place of birth (or where they lived), and a reference to the sentence they were under at the time.

One of the best examples of this is John Keough:



As you can see, Keough has included surname, first initial, place of birth (Limerick) and term of punishment (18 months in chains). This is more than enough to identify him; what follows is his story.

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### **John Keough from Limerick**

John Keough was born ca 1821 in the town of Limerick, County Limerick, Ireland. Keough appears to have been part of the wave of emigration from Ireland in the mid nineteenth century; he bought his ticket out by enlisting in the army. By 1846 he was stationed at Trichonopoly in Madras, India (annexed by the British in 1801). Army returns from the time show that a high percentage of rank and file soldiers on duty in Madras were Irish.



Alphonse Dousseau, *Limerick* (1830)





*The Rock at Trichonopoly, Madras, with the Barracks – Francis Swain Ward ca 1773*



*The Town and Fort of Trichonopoly (engraving, 1847)*

Keough's conduct record gives us something of a glimpse into his career as a soldier. By 1846, he had been court martialled six times, flogged and spent time in solitary confinement. His offences covered the usual range of soldierly misdemeanors – being absent without leave, being drunk, and worse still, being drunk on post. Then, in January 1846, Keough (age 25) faced a court martial in Trichonopoly for striking a Sergeant Thomas Montgomery of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, E.L. Infantry. Given his already turbulent record, Keough was sentenced to seven years transportation 'beyond the seas'. Since he was already 'beyond the seas', this effectively meant transportation to Van Diemens Land.

John Keough arrived on the convict ship *Phantom* in November 1846. He was sent to the probation station at Dover, where things appear to have gone smoothly; he emerged as a probation pass holder exactly one year later and found private employment with a Mr Patterson. Unfortunately this didn't go quite as smoothly, and following a refusal to work, Keough was punished with two months on the Glenorchy road station. After this punishment he found work as a constable, although drinking and absconding continued to be a problem.

Authorities lost their patience with Keough in early 1849, when he was caught twice in two weeks for absconding from the Oatlands Gaol. Sadly, the Oatlands Petty Sessions records for this year have not survived, so all we know are the bare facts. In early 1849, Keough was working as a Javelin Man at the Oatlands Gaol. On 22 March 1849, Keough was sentenced at the Oatlands Court house to 18 months imprisonment in chains for absconding; on 22 March 1849 – whilst awaiting removal to Picton to serve his sentence – he absconded *again*, this time receiving another 18 months imprisonment in chains. In fact, this is almost certainly the '18 month in c\_\_ns' which he included in his inscription on the Spring Hill watch house wall, inscribed by Keough on his way to a lengthy sentence of hard labour.

Keough ended up serving his time at Port Arthur, and after his release became a constable in Campbell Town. He couldn't have known it but time was running out for John Keough from Limerick; on the 5<sup>th</sup> September 1853, he died at the Launceston Hospital aged 32. There are no records of Keough marrying or producing children in Van Diemen's Land; all he left behind was his inscription on the walls of the Spring Hill Watch House in May 1849:

## J Keough / Limerick / 18 months in chains