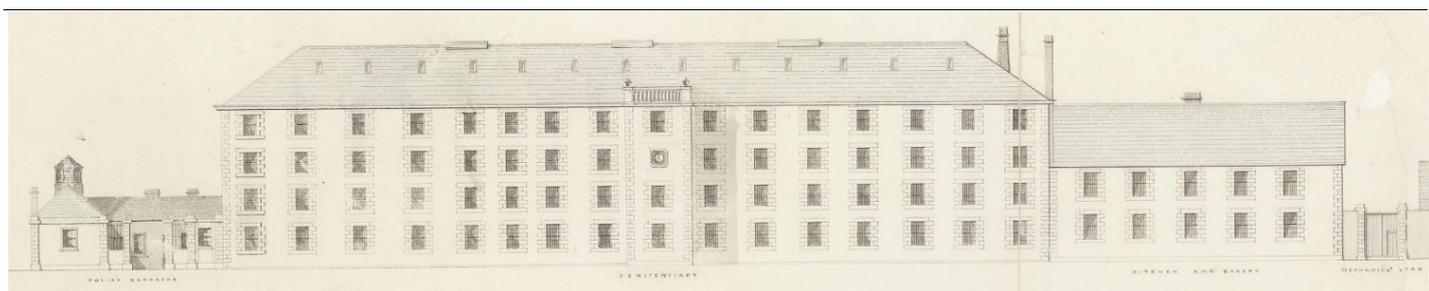


FACT SHEET

Port Arthur Penitentiary Precinct Conservation Project 2013-14



The Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority (PAHSMA) is undertaking a major program of conservation works on the site's most emblematic ruin – the Penitentiary. Recent engineering surveys have revealed that the building, once the largest in Tasmania and still one of the most recognisable, is vulnerable, particularly to forces of high winds.

History

Originally built as a flourmill and granary in 1843, it was converted to operate as a Penitentiary from 1856-1877. The building housed 136 separate cells on the lower floors and partitioned dormitory berths in the upper level, as well as work and service areas. The ovens of the kitchen and bakehouse provided sustenance for the convicts while the library of over 12,000 books and Catholic chapel offered fuel for the mind.

After the penal settlement closed in 1877, much of the land was offered for public sale over the next decade. The Penitentiary was not sold in the 1889 land sales, the asking price of £800 being considered too high. The option of alternate uses was taken out of everyone's hands when the Penitentiary was gutted by fire on 31 December 1897. This destroyed much of the structure's timber frame, leaving the walls as the self-supporting ruins evident today. During the 1980s a timber boardwalk and stabilising steel frame were inserted to allow visitor access to the ruin and support the exterior walls.



The Conservation Project

In 2011 a Conservation Management Plan for the Penitentiary Precinct was completed. A number of structural assessments indicated that the interior support framework has deteriorated and requires replacement. Subsequent engineering reports confirmed that the walls need stabilisation, setting the stage for the large scale conservation project now underway.

As a World Heritage site, our next step was to gain the necessary heritage approvals to carry out the proposed project. This involved Commonwealth and State permissions, and with these in place we were ready to move into the next stage of the project, the archaeological investigations.

FACT SHEET

Archaeology

With significant ground disturbance required to allow for the footings of new stabilising columns, a program of archaeological excavation was planned to generate new information that is not available from other sources.

In particular, the excavation has been used to gain a better understanding of the conversion of the granary into the Penitentiary (including bakehouse), as well as investigate any granary or earlier infrastructure that may remain.



Archaeologists at work excavating in the area of the granary's water wheel pit.

Major works – February-December 2014

With the archaeology completed, the heavy, difficult and delicate work of the old walkway and support structure will begin. Access for the necessary heavy machinery and vehicles will be provided by removing part of the wall at the front of the building that was reconstructed in the mid-20th century.

With large trucks, cranes and steel moving around the site, the precinct will not be open to the public, but if you are interested in seeing what is going on in the Precinct we recommend you make your way high up onto Settlement Hill behind the Penitentiary and take a peek over the site hoarding. We will also have staff and detailed information on the project available on the ground floor of the Visitor Centre for the duration of the project.

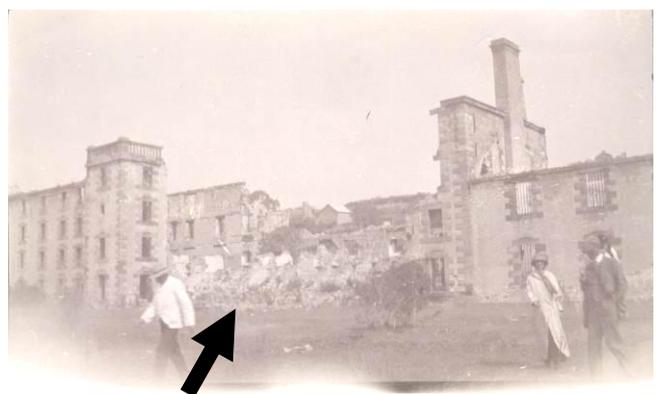
“Sounds expensive” we hear you say...

The stabilisation stage of the project is estimated at more than \$6 million and we anticipate a completion by Christmas 2014. The next stage is to interpret the



interesting stories of the Penitentiary area. Our responsibility is to ensure that this amazing and significant structure survives for generations to come, and that we can continue to tell the story of what happened here.

But in order for that to happen we need your help ...you can contribute to this vital conservation project by making a donation, no matter how small. There are donation boxes around the site including in the Visitor Centre. If you'd like to make a more substantial contribution, there are donation forms available, or speak to a staff member. You can also visit www.portarthur.org.au/support



Much of the lower section of the Penitentiary's front wall had collapsed by the turn of the 19th century; it was used as access to clear the building of rubble in the mid-20th century and rebuilt.

For more information:

Ask a staff member if you have any questions or alternatively there is more information available in ground floor of the Visitor's Centre. Or contact us at;

Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority
Arthur Highway, Port Arthur TAS 7182

Phone 03 6251 2300

Email info@portarthur.org.au

www.portarthur.org.au