

Heritage Values

Port Arthur Historic Site

Historic Values

The place has heritage value because of its importance in the course, or pattern, of Australia's or Tasmania's natural or cultural history.

The Port Arthur Historic Site is a place of outstanding historic value at local, state and national level. It is a rich and complex landscape, the primary layers of which relate to the convict era (1830–1877). It is an exceptional example of the 19th-century European strategy of using the forced labour of convicts to build global empires.

It demonstrates important aspects of the British strategy of convict transportation to Australia and has a high degree of integrity. In Australia this coerced migration strategy had a major impact on Colonial history, and it has been argued that it has also had an impact on the Australian national character and institutions.

Port Arthur demonstrates to a high degree the adaptation of the 19th-century British penal system to Australian conditions. The system devised by Lieutenant-Governor Arthur and upon which Port Arthur was founded was a unique approach to convict management. Taking its inspiration from the mechanistic fervour of the Industrial Revolution, it sought to mould men into docile and industrious workers. The regime at Port Arthur ensured that men would be punished in an attempt to deter further crime, but it also sought to reform them by offering the opportunity to develop skills that would equip them for a productive and law-abiding life after incarceration.

In pursuit of reform and economic self-sufficiency, Port Arthur was an industrial establishment: convicts were engaged in large-scale timber milling, shipbuilding, foundry work, shoemaking, and the manufacture of a wide range of consumer goods for both government and private markets. The extent of Port Arthur's industrial operations illustrates the importance of 'work' in the penal system and the role of convicts in helping to build the new capitalist colonial economies.

A number of Port Arthur's institutions pioneered new aspects of British 19th-century penal and social ideas and practice in the colonies.

- The Point Puer establishment (1833–49) is the earliest example of a purpose-built reformatory for juvenile male offenders in the British Empire.



- The Port Arthur Separate Prison (erected 1848–52) demonstrates the establishment in the antipodes by the mid 19th-century of ideas pioneered in Pennsylvania (where the term ‘penitentiary’ was first used) and taken up in British and American ideas about psychological punishment, discipline and social reform. It expresses the shift away from the use of physical punishment to deter crime, to an emphasis on psychological manipulation. This was intended to reform criminal attitudes through isolation from contamination, uninterrupted contemplation of personal sin and regular contact with religious and other personnel who were able to offer moral guidance.
- After the cessation of transportation in 1853, Port Arthur also became a welfare institution, demonstrating the toll taken on many of its subjects by the rigours of transportation and the convict system.
- The Paupers’ Depot was one of a number of establishments providing indoor relief for the indigent in the colonies. It differed from the British workhouse by providing a regime not dissimilar to that of the surrounding prison, in which paupers were expected to work but were also provided with opportunities for self-improvement, and with rewards for good behaviour.
- The Lunatic Asylum represents the earliest shift in the colonies away from the simple incarceration of people with a mental illness to an attempt to treat and cure sufferers. It was established along the lines of the then-current 19th-century British ‘Ideal Asylum’, but included important and unique adaptations as a response to its penal context.

While the beauty of the landscape has often been framed as a paradoxical contrast to the tragedy and suffering of the human experience at Port Arthur; it is more appropriately viewed as an essential component of the coercive system. For both convicted and free people the gardens symbolised the kind of societal structure and social behaviour that were to be embraced by all. It was anticipated that this would contribute to the convict reform process, and hence to a convict’s subsequent rehabilitation into the outside world. Attractive in its disciplined and designed aesthetic and good order, the Europeanised landscape made a positive contribution to the quality of social life, as well as signposting to convicts the importance of orderliness, structure and attention to appearance.

After the closure of Port Arthur as a penal settlement in 1877, the first steamer loads of tourists arrived. This established Port Arthur as the cradle of Tasmanian tourism, and of heritage tourism at a national level.

The Soldiers’ Memorial Avenue, established in 1919, is of local significance in enshrining the memory of local men who were killed in the First World War.

The Port Arthur Historic Site has also been at the forefront of heritage management practice at both a state and national level. When it was gazetted a Scenic Reserve in 1916 it became the first historic



place in Tasmania's reserve system, and the first historic cultural heritage reserve in Australia. A regime of professional conservation management was established at the Site in 1980; this was the first in Tasmania and one of the first in the country. For decades the Site has been Tasmania's foremost tourism destination. It is also an iconic place in national terms, representing an important aspect of the foundational penal chapter of the national story.

When a gunman took the lives of 35 people and wounded 19 others at Port Arthur on 28 April 1996 an additional layer of tragic significance was added to the place. A memorial marking the event was created around the site of the former Broad Arrow Café. The event led to changes in Australia's gun laws nationally.

Scientific or Research Values

The place has heritage value because of its potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Australia's and Tasmania's natural or cultural history.

The Port Arthur Historic Site has extensive research potential because of the place's high degree of integrity and the capacity of its material culture to provide unique insights into all historical periods, but primarily the convict period.

In combination, documentary evidence, collections, structures, engineering relics, cultural deposits and landscapes—both terrestrial and maritime—of the Port Arthur Historic Site have unparalleled potential for archaeological research at an Australian historical site. They represent evidence of construction technology, industrial production, use of locally available materials and adaptation of imported traditions to suit local conditions.

Potential research topics include issues relating to human colonisation, physiological and cultural change, health and wellbeing, consumer behaviour, settlement planning, technological adaptation and innovation, and environmental impacts including those of climate change.

The material remains and the landscape at the Port Arthur Historic Site also have the potential to reveal particular aspects of the implementation of the convict system, such as how the Separate Prison, the Lunatic Asylum, the Paupers' Depot or the boys' establishment at Point Puer operated.

Lemprière's tidal benchmark, placed on the Isle of the Dead in 1841, is believed to be one of the earliest benchmarks to record changes in sea level to be installed anywhere in the world. In combination with Lemprière's written records, it has exceptional historical and scientific significance in the field of global climate research.

The Port Arthur Historic Site has been an important site in the development of method and theory in Australian historical archaeology. Port Arthur has pioneered the application of numerous scientific research methods as an aid to archaeological heritage management, including standing structure



matrix analyses, geophysical remote sensing and laser scanning. The Site has been a major training ground for Australian and overseas archaeologists for over 30 years.

Aesthetic Values

The place has heritage value because of its importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group. These relate to sensory perception, i.e. consideration of form, scale, colour, texture, material, smell or sound.

The Port Arthur Historic Site is a prominent visual landmark within the landscape. The topography, native and introduced vegetation, and built elements combine to create a distinctive visual record of a dramatic past.

Point Puer and the Isle of the Dead provide visual and historic focal points in important vistas. Similarly, the Port Arthur Site and its landscape setting are dramatic when viewed across the water from these settlements or from the water. The Church and the Penitentiary have both landmark and symbolic value for a variety of vistas to and within the historic site.

The enclosing land and seascapes impress on the viewer the apparent isolation of Port Arthur as a frontier maritime community, symbolising the enormity of the task of establishing a British convict settlement in this remote setting.

Its ruins and formal layout, in a setting that now strikes most viewers as serene, and the care with which this is maintained, symbolise a transformation in Australian attitudes from revulsion at ‘the hated stain’ to an honouring of and interest in the convict past.

The picturesque quality of its setting and its buildings has been recognised since the early days of the settlement. Many 19th and 20th century artists have taken the place as their subject: these include acclaimed painters such as John Skinner Prout and Simpkinson de Wesselow; gifted amateurs including Colonel Mundy, Owen Stanley, Bishop Nixon, Thomas Lemprière and Thomas Costantini, as well as prominent photographers John Watt Beattie and Charles Woolley. Port Arthur has also held the largest (to date) installation of site-specific art work in Australia—the Port Arthur Project—during the 2007 ‘Ten Days on the Island’ Festival.

Its cultural landscape has inspired literature, including Marcus Clarke's 1874 novel *For the Term of His Natural Life*, Anthony Trollope's record of his visit to the Site and, more recently, *The Curer of Souls*, a 2007 novel by Lindsay Simpson. A number of books have taken the 1996 tragedy as their topic, including works by authors Margaret Scott, Mike Bingham and Carol Altmann.

The Port Arthur penal settlement relied on an 'alien' landscape and seascape to form the bars of the prison. The harbour location, the dense forests and the narrow spit of land at Eaglehawk Neck are powerful reminders of the isolation of the settlement and its fortress-like location.



The parkland qualities of today's Port Arthur, with picturesque ruined buildings and mature English trees strongly contrasting with the native bush, now seem to project an idealised notion of rustic serenity contrasting dramatically with Port Arthur's penal history. This perceived paradox is often remarked on by visitors; however, it is the product of a much misunderstood aspect of the system of authority exerted over both convicted and free persons. The original gardenesque landscape was intended to symbolise for all inhabitants the desired qualities of a thriving society—order, discipline, beauty and obedience. The present landscape contains elements of the original penal landscape design, but over time has been modified to reflect both natural change and to facilitate landscape management.

For all those associated in any way with the tragic events of April 1996, the ruins of the Broad Arrow Café and other areas at the Port Arthur Historic Site associated with the tragedy and subsequent memorial services evoke strong emotional responses.

Technical Values

The place has heritage value because of its importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

Lemprière's tidal benchmark, placed on the Isle of the Dead in 1841, is believed to be one of the earliest sea-level benchmarks installed anywhere in the world. When combined with the written records, it has exceptional technical significance in the international field of climate research.

The planning and built fabric of Port Arthur's Dockyard, flour mill, hydroengineering works and reticulated water systems demonstrate high degrees of creativity in adapting imported industrial practices to local materials and conditions. The convict tramway—the first rail network in the nation, and the semaphore system—a unique system of rapid communication between the Peninsula and Hobart—both represent significant technical and creative achievements.

The collection of built structures from the convict period of Port Arthur is important in demonstrating the labour, skills and workmanship of convicts. Many buildings demonstrate high quality workmanship and period construction techniques, while others reveal both the lack of skills and technical mastery of an involuntary workforce.

Port Arthur represents the introduction to the Australian colonies of certain Western ideas and structures concerned with the management of prisoners, the mentally ill and the indigent that still underpin modern practices. The Separate Prison, the Asylum and the Paupers' Depot were adapted at Port Arthur in a local expression of British and American antecedents. Point Puer demonstrates innovation in the attempts to combine discipline, trades, training and education in juvenile reform programs.

The penultimate Superintendent, Adolarus Humphrey Boyd, presided over the first stage of the closure of the settlement. During his time in this position, a gallery was created of at least 200



photographs of the convicts who remained here still under sentence. This is among the earliest-known instances in Australia of the systematic use of photography in prisons to augment written descriptive records as an aid in convict management. It post-dates its introduction in Britain by only 1–2 years.

Social Values

The place has heritage value because of its strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

Port Arthur is arguably the best-known symbol of Australia's convict past, an iconic site that represents one of the foundation stories in the state's and the nation's history. Beyond that most general of community values, there are a number of 'communities of interest' that value the site in particular ways.

The Tasman Peninsula community

For this community, the site has significance as a former township in which many of them were born and grew up. In addition, some have ancestors who lived at Port Arthur during the penal period and/or who are buried on the Isle of the Dead, or loved ones whose sacrifice is commemorated in the Soldiers' Memorial Walk. Many also have strong emotional attachments to the site of the 1996 tragedy. The site has been, and continues to be, a place of employment (often long-term) for members of the local community.

The heritage community

Many heritage practitioners, particularly archaeologists, have spent formative parts of their careers at Port Arthur over the past 30 years. This community also values Port Arthur as a proving ground for new conservation and interpretation practice. Port Arthur continues to offer opportunities for students, and for emerging professionals wishing to undertake postgraduate study or advance their professional skills.

Descendants and family historians

Port Arthur and the associated convict records evoke powerful associations for the descendants of all those who passed through here, whether convicted or free people.

Visitors

Visitors, including the formal education sector, value the site for many reasons. They include:

- its place in the formation of national identity;
- the messages that it embodies about the history of the convict system;
- the light that this site sheds on contemporary institutions and practices, such as today's prisons and detention centres;



- its aesthetic qualities; and
- the opportunities that it offers for recreation and socialising with family and friends.

For all who visit the Site, the memorial for the 1996 tragedy provides an opportunity to reflect upon that event and its outcomes. For many people nationally and internationally the tragic events of 28 April 1996 remain a strong memory that provides an added layer to community understandings and conceptions of the place.

Special Association Values

The place has heritage value because of its special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Australia's or Tasmania's natural or cultural history.

The Port Arthur Historic Site has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's special association with administrators and convicts from the British Empire in the period 1830 to 1877.

People of outstanding significance with whom the site is associated include:

John Howard, prison reformer, and Jeremy Bentham, philosopher and jurist, were instrumental in the changes to the criminal system in Britain that advocated reform rather than punishment and inspired the probation system and the use of separate cells.

Captain Joshua Jebb designed London's Pentonville prison, one of the first model prisons erected between 1840 and 1842. Pentonville and its separate system were considered to be a success, and thus were adapted at other penal institutions including Port Arthur's Separate Prison (c. 1849).

George Arthur, Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land, was instrumental in framing the disciplinary regimens that gave notoriety to the Van Diemen's Land convict system. Under his auspices Port Arthur was established as a penal settlement and named after him.

The Corps of Royal Engineers were responsible for planning, designing and constructing buildings at Port Arthur after assuming responsibility for structures located at penal stations throughout the Tasman Peninsula in 1835.

Commandant Charles O'Hara Booth, Commandant William Champ, and Superintendent James Boyd were all significant in either the development or the management of Port Arthur as a penal settlement. Several of them had important roles at other places beyond Port Arthur, linked to the wider convict system, or arising from their period at Port Arthur. William Champ became Tasmania's first Premier, while the Comptroller of Convicts John Hampton, instrumental in the building of the Separate Prison, went on to become Governor of Western Australia (1862–68).



Thomas Lemprière was the Commissariat Officer at Port Arthur during the 1830s and 1840s. In 1841, he had a tidal benchmark carved into a north-facing vertical rock on the Isle of the Dead from which he took regular tidal readings until his departure from the settlement in 1848. He also created important art works based on the site and its personnel, which are now held in public and private collections.

William Smith O'Brien, the leader of the Young Ireland Movement who was found guilty of treason for his part in a failed armed rebellion against British rule of Ireland, was a significant political prisoner. He was transported for life to Van Diemen's Land in 1848. He was first sent to Maria Island in 1849, and then later Port Arthur, where he was housed in the cottage that now bears his name. He gained a ticket-of-leave, and left Port Arthur on 18 November 1850.

Notable inmates also include John Frost, Welsh Chartist and leader of the first truly working class movement in Britain, which provided the foundations of the Westminster System of government; Linus Miller, American patriot and a leader of the anti-British forces of the Canadian rebellion of 1837–38;

Martin Cash, notorious bushranger; Mark Jeffrey, author of much-published memoirs that describe his experiences at Port Arthur; Henry Savery, Australia's first published novelist, and Thomas Costantini, an artist who left detailed and unique illustrations of the site in its early years.

George Augustus Robinson passed through Port Arthur on a number of occasions. He had been contracted by the government to gather together all the surviving Aboriginal people from the main island of Van Diemen's Land and remove them to a place of sanctuary. He and his group stayed the night, and an Aboriginal woman died and was buried at Port Arthur. At least two mainland Aboriginal convicts are also known to have served time at Port Arthur. People of Aboriginal ancestry are known to have returned to the Peninsula in the late 19th century, after the penal settlement closed.

Acclaimed 19th-century artists and writers who visited and left a record of their impressions include: John Skinner Prout, Simpkinson de Wesselow, Anthony Trollope, Marcus Clarke, John Watt Beattie, Mark Twain and Bishop Nixon.

Noteworthy craftsmen and tradesmen associated with Port Arthur include master shipwrights John Watson and David Hoy who respectively supervised the shipbuilding industry at Port Arthur in the 1830s–1840s, training some later successful Tasmanian shipwrights in the process. Watson also built a number of famous whalers, yachts, steamers and smaller craft at his own yards.



Indigenous Values

The place has heritage value because of its importance as part of Indigenous tradition.

The Port Arthur Historic Site and its environs contain a range of Aboriginal sites in a cultural landscape that was managed by and meaningful to the Pydairrme band of the Oyster Bay people who historically occupied this area.

The probable burial of one known Tasmanian Aboriginal person on the Isle of the Dead makes the island significant to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community.

The Tasman Peninsula region generally has significance to Tasmanian Aboriginal people because it contains abundant traditional Aboriginal resources. The landscape, which around this site appears little changed, was important to Aboriginal people in the past and provides a connection of importance to Aboriginal people today.

Rarity

The place has heritage value because of the place's possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Tasmania's and Australia's natural or cultural history.

The Port Arthur Historic Site is one of a small group of penal settlements in Australia specifically developed for recidivists. It was established in 1830 as a 'prison within a prison'. Today only Port Arthur, Norfolk Island, Sarah Island and Maria Island are able to demonstrate this aspect of Australia's convict history.

The Port Arthur Historic Site includes several elements that are unique or seminal within the context of British and Australian penal philosophy or practice. These include the satellite settlement of Point Puer, which was established specifically for convict boys. Point Puer is the first purposebuilt reformatory for convicted boys in the British Empire. The Dockyard is one of only three in the British Empire that used convict labour in building both the infrastructure and the vessels. The Port Arthur Dockyard is also arguably the best preserved and most intact.

The Separate Prison and the Lunatic Asylum are rare examples of innovative ways of managing criminals and the mentally ill in the mid 19th-century, interpreting and adapting experimental European ideas of reform. The Paupers' Depot is the earliest example of indoor relief in the Australian colonies.

The Port Arthur Historic Site encompasses elements of geodiversity and biodiversity that are uncommon at a local level. The lithology at Point Puer displays structures that are celebrated at the Tessellated Pavement at Eaglehawk Neck, while the landscape at Point Puer contains stands of Blue Gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*), Tasmania's floral emblem, which is habitat for the nationally endangered Swift Parrot.



Representativeness

The place has heritage value because of its importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of natural or cultural places.

Australia's convict sites share a suite of attributes that stem from their peculiar philosophical, economic, social, strategic and geographic contexts. They exhibit features that reflect aspects of convict management, including: secure stores; accommodation for the civil, military and convict populations based on principles of hierarchy; classification and surveillance; places of health care and punishment; administration and industry, and facilities for religion. The Port Arthur Historic Site is outstanding in demonstrating the principal characteristics of an Australian Convict Site because:

- the physical landscape and setting of the Site retain a high degree of integrity and authenticity, thereby providing important evidence of the way in which convict establishments utilised their landscape industrially and administratively;
- the form and location of elements at the Site display deliberate design and spatial arrangement, reflecting the order and hierarchy of a penal settlement;
- the built environment at the Site displays a large surviving concentration and wide range of 19th-century design, engineering and construction techniques in a range of materials and built forms; and
- the site represents important aspects of Australia's convict system including changing attitudes to punishment, reform, education and welfare.

