

Get Thee to Church: hard work, Godliness and tourism at Australia's first rural reformatory

GREG JACKMAN

Established in 1833, the Point Puer settlement represents a seminal experiment in nineteenth-century penology, occupying a unique position in the transition from penitentiary to reformatory-style institutional management of young male offenders. Its operation spanned a period of significant transformation in philosophies and techniques of penal discipline, coinciding with changing cultural perceptions of childhood, youth and adulthood. Unlike celebrated European institutions like Mettray and Parkhurst the Point Puer settlement was largely unplanned, structures were erected and spaces appropriated as needs and fashions dictated. Evolving models of punishment and reform are closely mirrored in the organic spatial and archaeological characteristics of the site.

Recent work at the site of the Chapel/Schoolhouse has yielded insights into the regimens of labour, discipline and education within the establishment, and provides an opportunity for studying critical aspects of nineteenth-century British penal philosophy and practice. The significance of former spatial demarcations and landscape iconography has profound implications for future interpretation and tourism at Point Puer, representing a challenge to prevailing modes of tourism management at the parent site of Port Arthur.

INTRODUCTION

Point Puer is a narrow and low headland framing the east side of Carnarvon (formerly Opossum) Bay on the Tasman Peninsula and falls partly within the expanded boundaries of the Port Arthur Historic Site (Figure 1). Approximately two-thirds of the National Estate registered convict boys' settlement site is managed by the Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority (PAHSSMA), the precinct forming an integral component of the Port Arthur nomination for World Heritage status as part of the Australian Convict Sites Serial Listing. The remaining portion of the site is on Crown land leased to the Tasman Council for the purposes of operating a golf course.

ORPHANS OF EMPIRE

The Point Puer settlement was established in December 1833 for the reception of juvenile male convicts transported to Van Diemen's Land from Britain. Creation of the settlement was a colonial response to the failure of the prevailing assignment

system to satisfactorily absorb increasing numbers of young unskilled male offenders, transported primarily for petty offences against property, following augmentations to the English Criminal Code during the late 1820s (Ignatief 1978: 184).

The changes to the crime laws to include a range of minor offences against property, including theft, trespass and vagrancy, followed a period of unprecedented population growth and mobilisation from rural to urban centres throughout Britain in the wake of economic industrialisation. Large populations of the young, unemployed and disenfranchised pooling in the cities represented a potential challenge to the established economic and social order, engendering a climate of suspicion and fear among the middle classes. It was within this context that the great debates of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries over crime, punishment and reform took place, implemented through an expanded criminal code, associated enlarged magisterial jurisdictions and ultimately, a suite of experimental penal strategies that included exile through transportation. Central to the re-calibration of social controls during this period was the emergence of the paternalistic State with its moral and political mandate for enforcing a new industrial model of societal order and stratification.

It has been estimated that the population of Britain had doubled during the decade prior to 1821, by which time some 50 percent of the population was under the age of 19 years (Kociumbas 1997: 25). Subjugation and control of this burgeoning young and socially dislocated demographic, arguably the principal constituent of the so-called 'dangerous classes', was the prime focus of the legal and penal enhancements.

Of foremost interest to the penal reformers were the children of the poor. Street-wise and resourceful through necessity, these children challenged the growing sentimentalisation of 'childhood', that conceptualised state of naive innocence and impressionability then being constructed by the more 'respectable' classes. The consequent perception was of a rising tide of spiritual orphans, victims of parental neglect and abuse, at constant risk of moral corruption and therefore suitable, if not essential, subjects for interventionist protection and reform. This perceived need for rescue, discipline and training provided the principal pretext for the involvement of a benevolent State in the welfare of juveniles thought predisposed to or found guilty of petty crime, and was

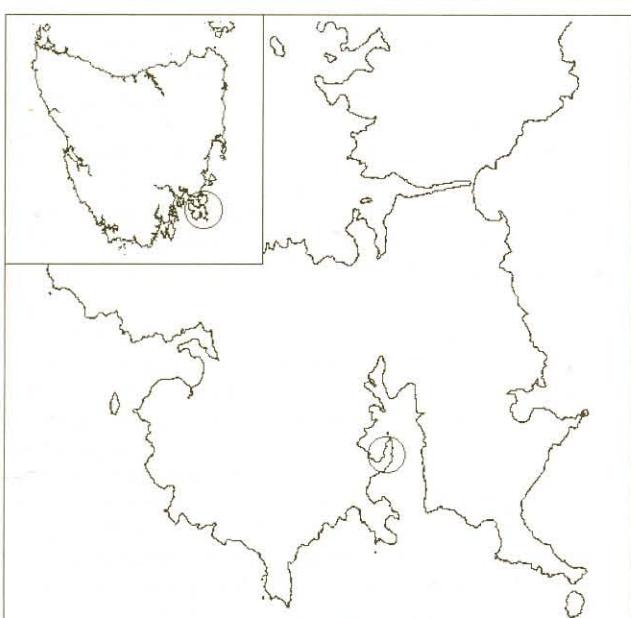


Figure 1 Point Puer Location Plan

at first formally executed through the existing devices of collective institutionalisation.

While the aim of the measures, as applied to juvenile males, may have been to attempt to disrupt the pattern of offending at the earliest possible age, the practice of incarcerating young 'apprentices' and 'old hands' together in the bridewells and penitentiaries, undertaking punishment labour, was observed to have largely the opposite effect. For those whose transgression resulted in transportation to the Australian colonies the situation was little different. Youths between the ages of nine and 17 years were transhipped with adult felons as unsorted human cargoes to await, on disembarkation, common barracking in advance of the vagaries of assignment into service (Dyster 1988).

Despite colonial demand for adult convict labour remaining high during the 1820s and 1830s, demand for juveniles was typically low. A few boys with agricultural or limited commercial skills were taken up by the private sector, however on the whole, colonial employers were reluctant to feed and house children and receive in return only a proportion of the labour they could expect from adult convicts. Beyond a few openings for errand boys, the public sector also had little use for child labour. With the convict ration being fixed at a minimum level little opportunity existed for making the assignment of juveniles a more tempting proposition. The inevitable result was that the colonial government found itself left with large numbers of unemployed boys, requiring to be fed, clothed and housed at considerable expense, with little prospect of making their labour profitable.

The evident failure of the policies of collective incarceration and assignment to produce suitably contrite, rehabilitated and economically useful adolescents prompted further reformist calls for increased retraining and segregation of the young from their more intractably criminal adult counterparts. Early moves in this direction were made during the 1820s in the case of males under 16 years of age, as evidenced by the setting aside of two hulks in London's Thames River, as well as the establishment of Carters' Barracks in Sydney (Humphery 1997: 25). As another response to the problem, during the late 1820s and early 1830s, a number of apprenticeship programmes were established for a small number of juvenile male convicts at penal stations within Van Diemen's Land, including Macquarie Harbour and Port Arthur.

Moves towards the segregation of male convicts according to age coincided with general calls for prison reform to have a moral rather than an essentially economic focus, depending for its efficacy on increased classification and surveillance of prisoners in order to avoid 'contamination' and recidivism. While experiments in age segregation, re-training and/or the application of evangelical religious and secular reformist principles were beginning during the 1820s, it was not until the advent of the establishment for boys at Point Puer in 1833 that these facets of discipline were combined at a separate, purpose-built institution. The creation of the settlement coincided with similar experiments at the Rauhe Haus in Germany and preceded by four and six years respectively the British Government's own juvenile establishment of Parkhurst on the Isle of Wight (Evans 1982: 393) and the celebrated Colonie Agricole at Mettray in France (Foucault 1991: 293).

THE CHILD MECHANIC

Although official concern at the rate of unskilled convict youths entering Van Diemen's Land had been expressed since the mid-1820s, it appears that a particularly conspicuous pooling of unassigned boys at the Hobart Prisoner Barracks during the course of 1833 provided the catalyst for the

establishment of the settlement at Point Puer. The colony's chief administrator, Lieutenant Governor George Arthur, hastily authorised the move, which was left up to the Commandant of the Port Arthur Penal Station, Charles O'Hara Booth, to implement with neither plan nor additional resources. Temporary barracks were put up by Christmas Eve and the first intake of 68 boys was received on 13 January 1834. The rough huts were replaced by a more commodious structure the following year, complementing adjacent workshops wherein instruction was given in a range of trades, including carpentry, blacksmithing, nailmaking, tailoring, shoemaking and bookbinding. Boatbuilding, coopering, turning and stonemasonry trades were added later, while for a sizeable number of inmates agricultural labour, stone quarrying, felling and sawing timber, making roads and clearing land for the use of the settlement remained the predominant work experience.

The new barrack building, a large but unremarkable hall of timber construction, doubled as a mess room, schoolroom and chapel. This multifunctionalism was required because of the undercapitalisation of the settlement and permitted because of the unspecialised nature of the building's internal space, and facilitated by such ingenious devices as collapsible forms and demountable hammock anchorages that also doubled as shelves for bedding (Backhouse 1834). Notwithstanding its flexibility, growing numbers of inmates soon led to overcrowding, resulting in its extension, first in 1837 and again six years later.

Meanwhile, at Arthur's direction, the daunting task of spiritually reforming the boys had been given to the Wesleyan Home Mission, with The Reverend John Manton as its first Chaplain (Hooper 1967: 18). Arthur himself was an evangelical Christian who had previously raised the ire of the Colonial elite by providing both establishment grants and private donations to a range of unfashionable denominations, including Presbyterians, Wesleyans, Independents, Baptists

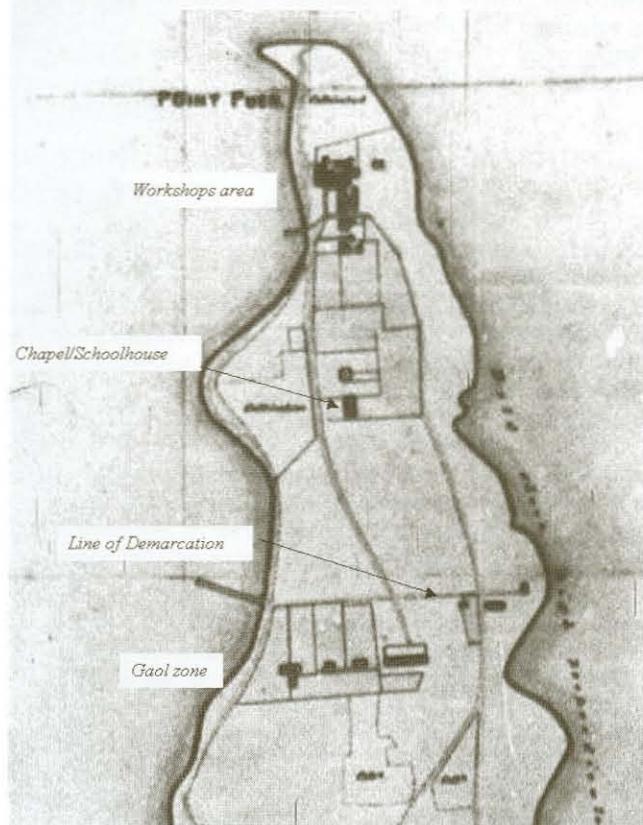


Figure 2 Point Puer settlement block plan, October 1845. M.P.G.
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and Roman Catholics, effectively undermining the privileged position of the Church of England. Arthur was a keen advocate of government support for school and church building in an effort, if only through saturation and osmosis, to lift the moral and social tone of the penal colony as it struggled to purge the ‘convict taint’ and evolve into a free society. However his goals were hampered by instructions from the Colonial Office which still saw Van Diemen’s Land as a gaol, with a gaol’s primary requirements for places of confinement and punishment. In an attempt to circumvent the lack of authorisation, he shrewdly embarked upon a scheme of constructing multi-purpose buildings that could serve as muster stations while providing other convict or civil services as well as religious functions. Arthur effectively created a system of decentralised civic-centre-cum-chapels serviced by laymen catechists—not unlike the barracks at Point Puer (Robson 1983: 279).

The constant increase in prison population ultimately exposed the inadequacies, both in terms of logistics and in enacting the reform agenda, of indiscriminately combining so many functions within a single space, prompting Commandant Booth to request permission to construct a designated Chapel and Schoolhouse in 1837.

A HOUSE DIVIDED

The site of the boys’ prison had been selected as a compromise between geographical isolation and administrative efficiency, if nothing else. The fledgling industrial reformatory was isolated from the parent establishment at Port Arthur by the waters of Opossum Bay, with a military-patrolled line of demarcation to the south across the narrow peninsula to prevent escape as well as unauthorised contact with adult convicts. Beginning in 1837 the nature of the settlement changed irrevocably, with the

construction beyond that line of a punishment precinct (Figure 2). This was in alignment with notions of increased classification, surveillance and control as the somewhat *laissez-faire* assignment system was dismantled and replaced, at least in Van Diemen’s Land, by a probationary system of convict management. The line of demarcation thus became, not an outward but an inward control measure, preventing the juvenile institution from communicating with itself, and enforcing a strict separation between training and penal zones. The military patrol was retained. Officially, the only way a prisoner could cross the line was by virtue of a complex system of rewards and sanctions, administered in response to his demonstrated receptivity, or otherwise, to the settlement rules.

In truth, positions within the trades section were limited by resources and teaching skills, never being available to more than half of the prisoner population at any one time, a statistic that required a diabolical and repressive code of rules to maintain. A settlement divided was the conceptual and organisational framework within which the new Chapel and Schoolhouse was erected.

Completed in 1839 the new limewashed weatherboard building measuring 22.5 m by 12 m, sat on a raised platform midway between the trades and penal divisions, an allegorical nexus between the counterpoints of industry and reward and transgression and punishment (Figure 3). Elevated and central, its prominence was possibly intended to convey that all were equally in reach of salvation—as well as divine retribution. Secular and religious training was considered to be the very basis of the reform process, an idea reflected at least in the daily routine of the boys which saw one hour of school per day, morning and afternoon prayers, as well as two hours of school or Sunday School and Divine Service twice on Sundays.

By the time the new facility was completed however, the settlement patron, Arthur, had departed and the evangelical zealotry of the Wesleyans had been supplanted by the less confronting orthodoxy of the ‘establishment’ Anglican Church, under the patronage of Arthur’s successor Sir John Franklin. The division of the settlement into two halves also became reflected in a duplication of reform effort, with school lessons and daily devotions also commencing in the gaol for those in the Crime Class. Divine Service appears to have been the only function to remain unassailably associated with the new building, and therefore the only opportunity for communion of the two divisions. This lasted until the mid-1840s when a chapel was created for Roman Catholics in the junior ward of the gaol. By this stage the schism had also afflicted the secular programme with segregated school lessons, amounting to 1fl hours each day, being held throughout the week for the different disciplinary classes (Hooper 1954: 11).

The teaching system used was roughly based on the English National or Lancastrian system, which relied on a hierarchical system of monitors to disseminate the lessons of the teacher to small groups under their tutelage. In 1843, British prison inspector Benjamin Horne was sent out to report on the settlement, with a view to standardising and potentially integrating the programme with that of the recently constructed Parkhurst reformatory. He observed:

The school is under the ‘Superintendence’ of the Catechist assisted by two prisoners who are called Schoolmasters, and about 40 monitors chosen from among the boys themselves without regard to any other qualification than that of being rather more advanced in the rudiments of knowledge than their companions. (Horne 1843)

The lessons involved basic reading, writing and

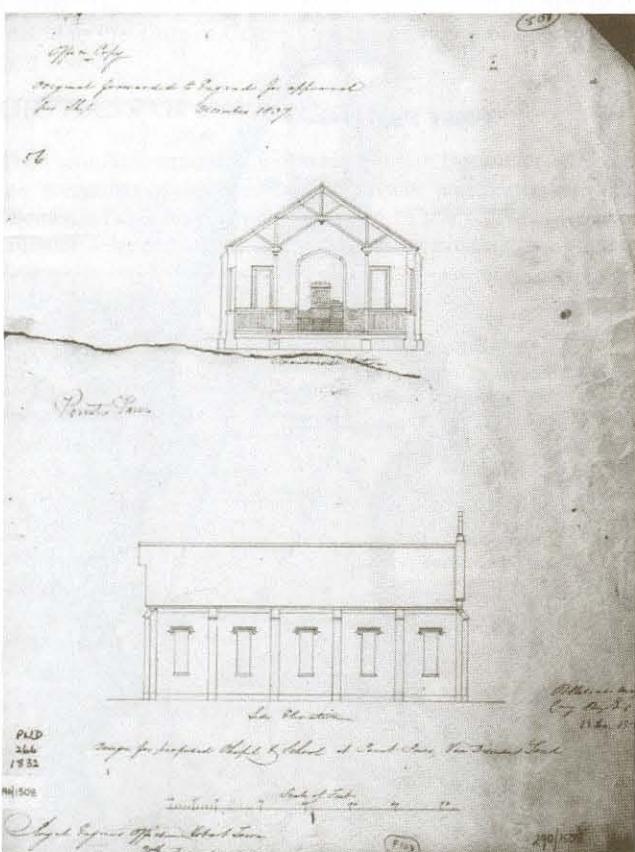


Figure 3 1837 Royal Engineers Office design proposal for Chapel/Schoolhouse, not ultimately realised. H 290/1508

arithmetic. Much to Horne's chagrin resources were either so stretched or the basics of teaching so misunderstood as to allow even the advanced reading class only two texts: a basic speller and 'The Good Book'. By virtue of its conspicuous overuse, many of the lessons could more properly be considered Bible classes. Mathematics fared little better in Horne's eyes:

Comparatively little progress has been made in this branch of knowledge and if there had it would have closely bordered on the miraculous. The boys sit with slates at the desks for some part of the time daily, and scrawl a few figures or work a few sums from a book; but they are never taught collectively nor instructed in the first principles of the science. (Horne 1843)

In summing up the apparent malaise affecting the reform programme, Horne went on to lament:

There is never I believe any attempt made to give them a lesson orally, or to teach them to apply the doctrines and moral precepts of the Gospel to their own case, except in the printed Sermon which is read on Sundays...With regard to the school the conclusion to which I have reluctantly come is that it is of little benefit to the boys themselves in a secular point of view and that as a means of religious and moral improvement it is almost worthless. (Horne 1843)

The evident failings of the instruction-by-rote method, unaccompanied by any attempt at aligning the lesson to the experiences of the boys, perhaps justified Arthur's reluctance to deploy chaplains whose call to minister had the aspect of 'a liberal university education' rather than stemming from personal revelation (Robson 1983: 272). In Arthur's eyes the 'established' church had a poor record of conversion.

THE REDUNDANT EXPERIMENT

Whilst it had started as an open prison, with lots of common space and communal activity, by the 1840s attempts were being made to restructure the settlement along the lines of segregation then becoming fashionable in Britain. Blocks of separate apartments were constructed and the system of classification became increasingly complex. It was on the eve of its transformation into a full penitentiary system, in the guise of the newly constructed facility built at nearby Safety Cove on the lines of the Parkhurst model, that transportation of juveniles to Van Diemen's Land ceased and Point Puer closed.

The anti-transportation propaganda that facilitated the



Figure 4 northwest corner of Chapel/Schoolhouse site after removal of collapse debris

demise of the convict system in that colony poured scorn on the reforming aims of the Point Puer boys' settlement. This was not just a local response, as the reaction against prison reform was gathering momentum in Britain just as the new reformatory schools were starting to be built. Journalists Peter Mayhew and John Binney observed in 1850, in relation to the boys section of the Tothill Fields prison in London:

Those who think that boys of criminal propensities are to be made a thought better by such schooling...must be as deficient in their knowledge of human nature as zealots usually are... (Mayhew and Binney 1862: 429)

Yet, between 1840 and 1879, 52 agricultural colonies along the lines of Mettray had been built in the French countryside, and in England, 65 reformatory farm schools, based on the Parkhurst example, were in use by 1870 (Evans 1982: 393).

The principle of reform, the interventionist mantra, was predicated upon the notion that it was nurture rather than nature that was responsible for a person's criminal tendencies, that the basic condition of a human was a plastic neutrality, susceptible to influences both good and bad. By the 1880s, the emerging science of psychology was beginning to undermine the basis for the reformist argument, instead suggesting that criminality was indeed ingrained and instinctive within a portion of the population, and therefore incurable by either architectural or moral means.

Notwithstanding this argument, and difficult though it must have been in such an overfamiliar environment as the Point Puer barracks to have had a meaningful religious or learning experience, some boys at least appear to have been affected. Lady Franklin observed in her journal of 1837 that 'The Rev. Butters [was] producing an extraordinary effect on some of the boys, bordering upon or even tending towards fanaticism' (cited in MacFie & Hargraves 1999: 22–23). While some of the transformations may have been opportunistic and short-lived for the purposes of manipulating the system, for others the practice of separating themselves from their comrades at play time for prayer vigils was no doubt a risky undertaking, transgressing as it did the prison subcultural tenets of solidarity and mutual resistance to authority.

WEEPING, WAILING AND THE SMASHING OF SLATE!

The ruins of the convict boys' establishment comprise numerous terraces, stone walls, low-level building remains and landforms, spread over the narrow Point Puer peninsula. At its geographic centre is the site of the combined Chapel/School: a large elevated earth and rubble platform retained by decaying mudstone walls. The feature is the dominant landmark within the area and is suffering rapid deterioration resulting from structural collapse of the retaining walls and erosion of the exposed internal earthwork. Conservation action has been commenced to prevent irreversible loss of structural and archaeological fabric and associated cultural values, while retaining as far as possible the integrity of the ruinous feature (Schmidt, 1999: 67).

As a preliminary component of the conservation programme, an archaeological investigation was made of the collapsed northern section of the feature during February 2000. The primary aim was to recover sufficient information and structural material from the collapse to enable limited rebuilding of this portion in order to retard the overall rate of decay of the formation, and protect the cultural deposits contained within. These include, at the surface, a deposit containing substantial quantities of broken writing slate, slate pencils and other artefactual material related to the 1840s educational and religious programme, and which therefore

provides a tangible link with the learning experiences of the boys. Exposed on the surface over the entire platform, as a result of burning off during the 1990s, this deposit is considered to be the only remaining surficial convict-period occupation deposit left at Port Arthur, and arguably one of very few remaining in the country.

In an attempt to recover as much information as possible to facilitate structural repair, a methodology has been developed that involves systematic disassembly and recording of the collapse debris to aid modelling and analysis prior to reconstruction (Figure 4). Substantial use of digital technology is made to this effect, including total-station surveying of individual masonry rubble elements, digital photo-mosaics and photogrammetry. By understanding the structural devolution of the building platform it should be possible to undertake a limited amount of least-conjecture anastolytic reassembly, bringing the structure into a state which matches, as closely as possible, a pre-existing, more stable ruinous form. This contrasts dramatically with the standard practice applied elsewhere in Tasmania, of uncritically removing collapse debris as a single deposit in order to rapidly expose residual solid masonry. This is routinely done by works contractors operating entirely without archaeological supervision and quite often by mechanical means, without any regard for the information that the collapse holds about the way in which the site was formed, or of earlier forms of the progressively collapsing structure—of critical importance to the integrity of any restoration or reconstruction work.

The objective at the Chapel/School site is to reinstate the badly affected wall sections to a degree able to be substantiated through rigorous archaeological analysis and collapse modelling, before backfilling and topdressing the exposed and eroding earth formation behind. Individual collapsed masonry elements have been numbered, dimensioned and orientated in the field and recorded on a computer database to facilitate virtual rebuilding.

The technique of investigating the taphonomic processes associated with abandonment and decay was also used on the site of the Point Puer bakehouse and stores complex in 1998 (Figure 5). The bakehouse excavation resulted in the identification of six discrete stages of collapse, of critical importance in the subsequent partial reconstruction of one of the underground storage vaults to a c.1900 configuration.

As yet the work on the Chapel/School site is still in progress. At least seven phases of major structural collapse of the northern end have been identified, punctuated by numerous erosive pulses of the retained sandy earthwork (Figure 6). Digital orthophotographic elevations are being produced to facilitate the virtual reassembly of the collapsed retaining walls within a 3D CAD environment, and a structural reinforcement system is being designed to hold them in place. The favoured system makes use of a combination of tension bars built into the rubble coursework, fastened to uprights spaced around the inside perimeter of the masonry skin, which in turn are anchored by ties set deep into the baulk (i.e. Beckmann 1994: 111; Starosta 1999: 89). All works are designed to be executed using modest hand and air percussion techniques and should not be detectable from outside the structure.

As anticipated, considerable quantities of slate, pencils and other artefactual material have been recovered. Most are inscribed with sets of parallel guidelines for writing and arithmetic. One enigmatic fragment appears to be a form, divided into fields, with the word 'Master' at the top, and the word 'Boy' repeated at regular spacings beneath. Its purpose is not yet clear, although it is likely to be some kind of classroom control aid, possibly reflecting the small group hierarchies and rote regurgitation that characterised the monitorial system. Indeed the presence of so many



Figure 5 Bakehouse vault during reconstruction

fragmented slates and broken pencils invokes images of morose teenagers, hunched in their pews and staring glumly at the cryptic etchings before them as they ponder the relevance of it all to their lives.

HISTORY, HERITAGE AND TOURISM

What then is the enduring legacy of the combined Chapel/Schoolhouse at Point Puer? At this stage it is difficult to tell as the research is only just beginning. What can be said with some certainty, is that regardless of how apparently pragmatic and bureaucratic its origin, its creation at the heart of the convict establishment was nonetheless an attempt to structure, concert and uplift a rambling collection of structures and intentions that had developed organically in response to the needs of the moment. Never an architectural essay—considered, designed and clinically executed like Parkhurst or Mettray, Point Puer was always a work in progress, an untidy piece of building graffiti—the product of a dynamic intercourse between its inhabitants: prisoner and guard. The evolution of its structures and spatial organisation was the informally negotiated consensus. This then must contribute to its value today, as the record of this dramatic interplay of reformist ideals and convict responses is woven deeply into the archaeological landscape.

What is also apparent, at least from its historical position if not yet proven by an understanding of its archaeology, is that the 'Point Puer experiment' did not end with the decommissioning of the settlement. Its revolutionary mixture of geographical separation, economically driven penal labour, technical, religious and scholarly instruction, bounded play, monitorial and incentive systems was at the cutting edge of the debate over juvenile penal reform, and subsequently became the mainstream formula used in juvenile institutions throughout the English speaking world. Through the inadequacies exposed by the indiscriminate application of adult standards of judgement and regimens of penal discipline to the young at Point Puer, the case for a separate set of juvenile justice standards within Tasmania also became clear—and was ultimately realised.

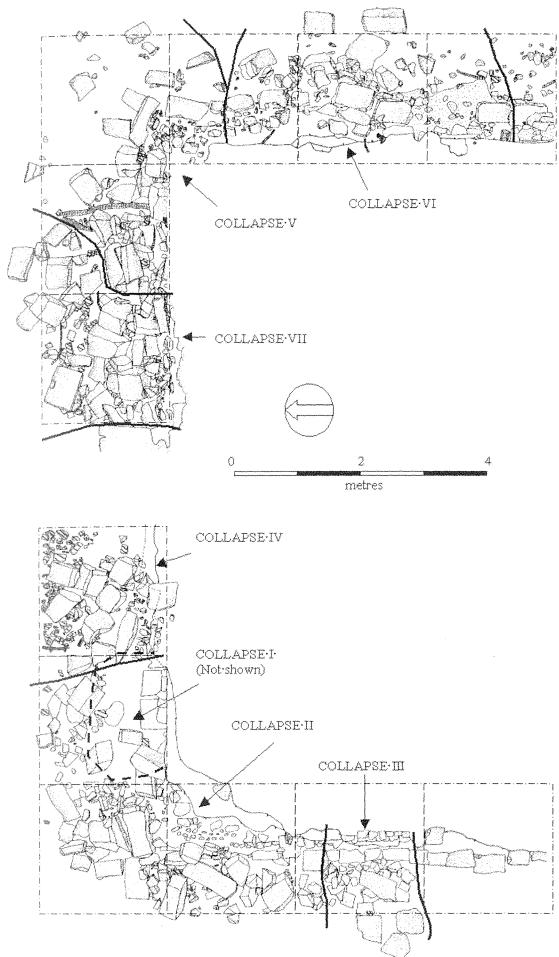


Figure 6 Chapel site mid-excavation schematic. Drawing by A. Miller

If Point Puer is historically important because it represents an early form of an essentially modern attitude to juvenile-crime management, then it presents us with the challenge of interpreting its contemporary resonances to the general public. This is where conservation management and interpretation at the parent site of Port Arthur, within view across the bay, has failed in the past. It has been said that the bushfires that swept through the place at the end of the nineteenth century were the best thing that could have happened for both Tasmania and its heritage tourism industry. The ‘cleansing flames’ enabled the institution which epitomised the link between Tasmanian privilege, wealth and the exploitation of unfree labour to be safely cauterised and disconnected from contemporary exploration by being relegated to a ‘brutal past era’.

In comparison, the conservation approach proposed for the Point Puer Chapel/Schoolhouse is controversial and risky, as it involves a measure of rebuilding, to recover and enhance obscured past forms and symbolic meanings and re-cast them within a modern social context. This raises the issue of the impact on the integrity of the ruin, an issue of particular relevance given the history of conservation practice at Port Arthur. Whereas Point Puer is, as yet, largely unaffected by the transforming hand of conservation and commercial exploitation, the Port Arthur site has little of its primary artefactual significance left intact, having become in effect the archetypal sacrificial heritage site—the tourism icon.

Some 85 years of reserve management have seen Port Arthur progressively transformed and reinvented, the extent and emphasis of its reconstruction, both physical and conceptual, being in step with prevailing social ideologies. The driving forces appear relatively easy to identify,

manifesting in the punctuated sequence of major fabric interventions at the Site. A brief survey of public acquisitions and works suggests at least three major conservation paradigm shifts following the fire destruction of the 1890s. Among the earliest structures resumed or reserved and stabilised between 1913 and 1940 were the Convict Church, Guard Tower and Government Cottage. The next major stage of works, taking place in the mid-1970s, focussed on the Penitentiary, Separate Prison and Asylum. The third phase, running from the mid-1980s to the present, has been principally concerned with civil-officer accommodation, precinctualisation and commercialisation. The emphasis on site conservation and interpretation eloquently parallels the creeds of moral-force-cum-civic-duty during the pre-1940 period; government collectivisation and institutional power of the early 1970s; and its reactionary offspring: personal and domestic empowerment and ‘user-pays’ economic rationalism of the 1980s and 1990s. At each of its stages of transformation into a ‘heritage place’ Port Arthur has sported the ideological livery of the age.

The cumulative effect is its present incarnation as a pay-to-enter convict theme park, featuring romantic ruins in a garden landscape that supports a gothic-horror cultural tourism industry. Commercialisation and marketing of products such as ghost tours, sea planes, electric people-movers, costumed role plays, à-la-carte dining, pyrotechnic festivals and other entertaining diversions obstruct a more critically meaningful engagement with the place, and totally disconnect it from any contemporary social debate on crime, punishment and rehabilitation, and the maintenance of hierarchies of privilege in society.

To date, the conservation movement has been complicit to this transmutation, ultimately seeing best value in enshrining the legacy of its own self-referential design, technical and interpretive prowess, and embellishing the resultant complacent parkland aesthetic. The alternative territory—of dispassionately reappraising and presenting the Site within the context of its own historical systemic complexity, and the wider issues of British convict-colonialism and the evolving criminal justice landscape in Australia—has been left largely unexplored. With Port Arthur receiving some 40 percent of visitors to Tasmania, a history-cum-conservation versus heritage tourism-cum-entertainment dichotomy is to be expected. However effective conservation of the site is also hamstrung by the inability of the conservation industry to resolve the conflict between viewing Port Arthur as an archaeological site with contemporary resonances, or an open-air museum to heritage-management styles.

To date, the crafted rustication of the latter has prevailed in the face of concerns about the long-term integrity of the resource, the realisation of its historical and archaeological meanings, and the challenging corollary of acknowledging the seamless merge of nineteenth century penal practice with current systems of confinement and coerced labour. If it is the role of history and archaeology to explain through critical inquiry, and that of heritage to celebrate and congratulate (Lowenthal 1998: 168), then the transformation of Port Arthur from Historic Site into Heritage Park is practically complete. A sobering thought, but one which provides a glimmer of opportunity for Point Puer. In the same way that Lowenthal (1998: 170) suggests Disney’s ‘Historyland’ might generate interest in actual historic places and themes, perhaps Port Arthur’s post-convict century of tawdry commercialism may spawn an appreciation for other less developed places and attendant opportunities for personal engagement and reflection.

As yet, Point Puer has not been overtly sanitised and clichéd; its lack of monumental standing remains within a single neat photogenic precinct perhaps saving it from the

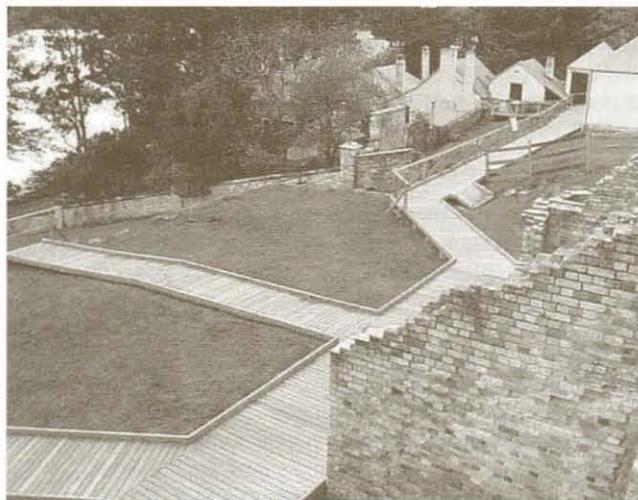


Figure 7 Interpretation infrastructure at Port Arthur transgresses historical thresholds and demarcations.

ignominious malaise. It is precisely because it has not yet succumbed to the ravages of beautification that the form and detail of the conservation and interpretation approach chosen for the Point Puer Chapel/Schoolhouse, and the other remaining features, is so critical. In many ways it may need to facilitate the uncomfortable history lesson that contrasts with Port Arthur's reassuring 'heritage experience'.

Compared with Port Arthur's neatly rusticated institutional facades and lavish period homes set in a serene parkland, the Point Puer settlement may seem on the surface to be just a few indistinct and architecturally unremarkable ruins in the bush. The principal difference is that Point Puer arguably comprises 'the real thing'. At the present moment it speaks more about the people who constructed and lived in it, the ways in which they interacted with their environment and each other, and the regenerative capacity of nature, than it does of the intervention of heritage managers and tourism entrepreneurs. Whereas the cultural patterning, spatial complexity and poignant symbolic meanings of the Port Arthur Site have been levelled and buried beneath comforting touristic clichés and pleasant broadacre lawns, the landscape of Point Puer still quietly articulates the story of the settlement's fraught existence. The place has a context, both environmental and temporal, that is lacking at Port Arthur. (Davies 1993: 193) Here then is a compelling opportunity to forego the nostalgic gratification of a fearsome but finished past for the potential disquiet of an imagination assaulted by contemporary social issues.

It is currently proposed to open the site of the former boys' establishment to commercial tourism within the next two years. In order to integrate the evident stewardship obligations to conserve the physical fabric of the Site and its setting with the needs and expectations of visitors, a planning approach has been initiated which attempts to establish a baseline understanding of the conservation requirements of the Site first, and then model for a minimal physical-impact, maximum-revelation mode of tourism delivery.

This is being done by identifying the current range of natural and cultural values within the area, examining the feasibility of a spectrum of cultural and natural tourism possibilities, attempting to predict the impacts of visitation pressure, and developing optimal themes and strategies for interpretation and tourism management—prior to a sensitive and staged implementation.

While the detailed stages of interpretive content and infrastructure design are only beginning, the result will hopefully entail a departure from the current range of well

heeled tourism products and 'safe' visitor experiences. Whereas unchecked numbers of visitors today meander blithely through Port Arthur Heritage Park—their attention and observance only occasionally being marshalled to read a sign or traverse a viewing platform that enables the Site to be appreciated from pleasing angles (Figure 7)—at Point Puer such volumes, self-determination or picture-postcard encapsulation may not be possible. Instead its visitors may find that something of the subtle spatial demarcations, underlying landscape symbolism and power relationships still apply strongly and not only amidst the ruins of the historic boys' settlement but also in the world that they re-enter after their visit.

This represents a considerable counterpoint to the prevailing message offered by Port Arthur, wherein an attempt to maximise economic returns a high-volume, lowest-common-denominator approach to site management and interpretation has been the order of the day. Contrastingly, the aim for forthcoming tourism management at Point Puer ought to be low-volume and high-quality, focussing on sustainability of the physical resource and connection with both its past and contemporary meanings. Whether the proposed lean-and-mean visitor management strategy is sustainable from a commercial perspective, or rather whether (as in the case of the Lascaux caves) measures of what constitutes sustainability can be deduced afresh for this important area, free of the baggage of Port Arthur's 'heritage past', remains to be seen.

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