

Submission to Legislative Council Inquiry into Built Heritage Tourism in Tasmania

Electronic submissions to Committee Secretary at [tht@parliament.tas.gov.au](mailto:tht@parliament.tas.gov.au)

Dr. Michael Wadsley

I believe that built-heritage tourism has an important role in Tasmania's future. I believe that the manner in which built-heritage tourism is currently managed and operated is not sustainable and places the future of our built-heritage at risk, consequently placing any related industry's future at risk. I intend to use Richmond, Tasmania, as an example.

## **Introduction**

I live at Richmond, Tasmania, and have been associated with the town for over 50 years. My wife's family have had an even longer association with Richmond and district. My wife's father farmed in the Coal River Valley just to the north of Richmond from the early 1920's and her eldest sister was born while the family ran the property. Recognising the tourism potential of Richmond her father invested in developing his property to provide accommodation and guest activities including horse riding, tennis, swimming, golf and shooting. Unfortunately the Great Depression was not a good period to invest in tourist ventures and he was forced to sell-up in the 1930's. He qualified as a veterinary surgeon in Sydney and eventually returned and practised in the district. My wife's paternal grandmother built a residence at Richmond in 1929. Members of the family have had a continued association with the town.

## **Richmond's History and Heritage**

The Richmond of today results from a sequence including the following events:

The Coal River area was investigated by surveyor James Meehan, in 1803, and recognised the agricultural potential.

Lieutenant Governors Davey, Sorell and Arthur had property just to the north of Richmond at Carrington from about 1813.

The Richmond Bridge over the Coal River was constructed in 1823 to service the destinations of Sorell, Port Arthur and Tasmania's east coast.

The township of Richmond was laid out in 1824.

The Richmond court house and gaol were erected in 1825.

In 1827, the interior of Van Diemen's land, outside of Hobart and Launceston, was divided into five-police districts, and police magistrates appointed to each at New Norfolk, Oatlands, Campbell town, Norfolk plains, and Richmond, making Richmond an administrative centre.

Govenor Arthur was instrumental in having the Grass Tree Hill Road built from Risdon to Richmond about 1834.

Anglican and Catholic sandstone churches were constructed at Richmond in the 1830's.

In the 1830's and 1840's Richmond was a major administrative, agricultural and transport hub. It was connected by road to Kangaroo Point (Bellerive), Risdon, Brighton, Jericho, Oatlands, Sorell, the East Coast and Port Arthur. Richmond had a sea port on the lower reaches of the Coal River about a mile from the town with a regular shipping service to Hobart.

In 1861, Richmond became the administrative centre of one of a greater number but smaller local government municipalities in Tasmania.

The construction of the Sorell Causeways during the 1860's and early 1870's meant that Richmond no longer had ship access to the sea and that from 1872 Richmond was no longer on the most direct road link from Bellerive to Sorell, Port Arthur and the East Coast.

The main line railway from Hobart to the north, completed in 1876, passed well to the north of Richmond and the Bellerive-Sorell railway, completed in 1892, passed well to the south, further reducing road traffic through Richmond. Representations for branch lines from both of these railway lines to Richmond were not heeded.

The legacy of Richmond's years in the early to mid 1800's as an important administrative centre, transport hub and agricultural region caused Richmond to have its Bridge, public buildings (including the courthouse and gaol) and churches, plus significant commercial buildings and residences that make it a heritage tourist destination today.

In 1993, local government at Richmond came under the jurisdiction of Clarence City Council which has predominantly urban electors, as the result of council amalgamations.

## **Issues Concerning Richmond's Built Heritage and Setting**

Visitors come to Richmond because of its historic features. Visitors are free to wander the town and its environs. The Richmond Gaol is the only enclosed historic attraction for which a fee can be requested. This situation may be compared with the Port Arthur precinct or with National Parks that can command an entrance fee to assist in upkeep and in development of visitor facilities.

A significant number of businesses in and around Richmond cater for the visitor trade. These include the model of old Hobart Town, which continues the historic theme.

Richmond is close to Hobart (about 30 minutes by road transport) so there is not a large demand for accommodation and for auxiliary services such as evening meals. In Richmond there are a number of drive-in, drive-out, business owners and employees. In turn there are a large number of Richmond residents who use the town as a dormitory while commuting to and working in greater Hobart.

Most heritage private properties in Richmond now only have historic facades with extensive modernisation internally. Visitors may only view the facade. There is a significant exception in Oak Lodge. The owners and occupiers of this 1830's sandstone residence are well documented. By historical accident, the current interior of Oak Lodge is largely original, dating back to the 1840's when Captain James Richard Booth, the brother of the then Port Arthur commandant Charles O'Hara Booth, was in residence and owned rural property near Richmond.

Richmond, on the Coal River, is upstream to the Pittwater - Orielton RAMSAR site and to sea-food farms. These provide alternate visitor attractions to built heritage. Any sewage problem or other water contamination of the Coal River at Richmond affects these areas. I understand that harvesting of oysters has had to be suspended because of such problems.

Irrigation has brought economic benefits to the Coal River Valley. This was mainly associated with the construction of the Craighourne Dam in 1986 as part of the South-East Irrigation Scheme and the construction of the Daisy Bank Dam in 2000-2001. Consequently the Coal River Valley is home to numerous vineyards and orchards and associated visitor facilities. Irrigation has not been without environmental problems. There has been a significant algal bloom in the Coal River. Salinity problems have been noted. There are new local seeps of water into Coal River that appear to be associated with irrigation. Plants nutrients can enter the Coal River. There has been occasional local flooding but the association of this with irrigated property is disputed. The presence of the Craighourne Dam means fewer high-flow events occur in the Coal River at Richmond which in turn means that water-plants are less frequently scoured from the river-bed, clogging the Coal River at Richmond. Other jurisdictions, such as Albert Park Lake at South Melbourne, Victoria, actually have regular cutting of excess water plants.

I have personally observed many other changes at Richmond since the mid 1960's. The most obvious is the subdivision of nearby farms for residential lots, particularly Woodburn to the north east. There has also been extensive subdivision of larger lots within the town of Richmond. I understand that historically Australian towns were very open probably because many dwellings had a vegetable garden and an orchard and had small animals such as pigs and some had a house cow. I understand that many British and European towns were much more closely settled than Australian towns. Very recently there have been attempts to create residential subdivisions in the vicinity of two of Richmond's freestone churches, one by the Anglican Church and one by a neighbour of the Catholic Church. I believe that the initial proposals for a number of developments in and around Richmond were highly inappropriate and were greatly modified for the better before their implementation. However the final developments were not ideal and I believe that together they have detracted from Richmond and its setting. It would be terrible for Richmond to be destroyed by incremental changes in which each increment is considered to be of negligible harm in itself.

I believe that it would be disastrous for Richmond if any of the churches were sold to private owners for private use with the interior no longer accessible and available for traditional uses. I believe that if any of the churches in Richmond were placed on the market, they should be purchased for continue public use. Owners of property in historic precincts do not necessarily have built heritage preservation and accessibility as a high priority. Churches have social obligations. For some individuals, built heritage and its marketability is their superannuation.

Recently National Trust (Tasmania) gave notice that it would be selling Oak Lodge as an expendable part of their heritage property portfolio. The immediate sale was prevented by community action but a future sale is still possible if Oak Lodge proves to be a financial cost to National Trust (Tasmania). I believe that Oak Lodge is the only residential structure in Richmond in which both the interior and exterior are largely original relative to an 1840's date. That this building should be self-supporting financially forever is unrealistic. Oak Lodge should be retained as a publicly accessible building by government purchase if necessary. I believe that National Trust (Tasmania) failed to investigate and promote the significance of Oak Lodge with respect to its place in Tasmanian and Australian history and heritage.

I believe that Richmond's buildings, structures and setting should not be considered individually because the whole has much greater value than the sum of the individual parts. If any more of Richmond's publicly-accessible buildings or their settings are privately sold it would lead to it's steady decline or slow death as a built heritage destination. There has been a temptation to say that any single project would not significantly affect the town. If a number of the proposed projects in Richmond had actually occurred then the town as a whole would have been significantly disadvantaged.

I believe that much can be done to improve the visitor experience at Richmond. Facilities at the western end of town near the entrances from Hobart should be developed. Currently visitors are enticed to drive into the town centre and park there or to cross the Bridge and park there. Many of these visitors rarely return to the western end to view it's attractions such as Oak Lodge, for example. Facilities at the western entrance would encourage visitors to start there and to traverse the complete town, as the Bridge and St John's Church are natural attractions at the north-eastern end. To this end the land between the link road junction and residences on the western side of Bridge Street should be purchased for use as public facilities and vehicle parking.

More interpretation should be provided such as presentation of the above history together with linked maps and the installation of copies of early paintings and photographs at the point of their capture to enable visitors to compare now and then views of Richmond. Interpretation of links to other places and people in Tasmanian and Australian history should also be provided to visitors. Other jurisdictions, such as Victoria's Port Phillip Bay, use reproductions of old paintings to create effect. Expensive consultants are not necessarily the ultimate source of information as there can be

very strong local knowledge, motivation and initiative which is too often ignored. Richmond residents are generally informed and proud of their heritage.

The river flats area between Lowlands Farm and Bathurst Street on the western bank of the Coal River to the south of Richmond should be purchased for public use and the area used to revive the Richmond Show and used for other public events such as music festivals. This area is a flood plain that is not suited to residential or commercial development but is ideal as level public open space that can accommodate temporary structures and vehicle parking and be readily maintained, as it requires mainly mowing. The old show grounds (Richmond War Memorial Oval) have effectively been taken over purely as a sports facility. The turf surface there is apparently placed at risk by many alternate activities. There is likely to be much synergy in such an open space development. Richmond is already an attractive built heritage destination so events there are likely to be even more attractive. The renaissance of agriculture in the Coal River Valley needs a show case.

The funding of improvements to a built heritage destination such as Richmond is problematic. It cannot be left to locals (business and volunteers) or local government (Clarence municipality) to fully fund such ventures as that would mean a very slow development rate and currently undeveloped land would be put to other uses. It is very difficult to fund developments that would assist the community as a whole but do not generate a guaranteed cash flow. Continually relying on state and federal grants or seeking private or corporate benefactors is highly uncertain. A vibrant Richmond would be good for the region, for the state and for the country. Heritage belongs not only to locals. I believe that Richmond's development requires state and federal support. To this end I believe that new entities should be created, that is, special built heritage tourism zones. I realise that this approach could be considered to be at odds with the "one size fits all" approach to planning but is required if Tasmania's built heritage is to survive.

A problem caused by multiple jurisdictions at Richmond was demonstrated by flood damage to a wall between the Gatty Dam and the pumping station in September, 2009. The initial damage was promptly reported by residents to authorities and would have only been a few hours work for one person to repair. However many years of haggling over jurisdiction went by and further deterioration meant the repair cost blew out to many thousands of dollars. In recent years DIPWE, DIER, State Growth, Tasmania Irrigation, Tasmania Water, Crown Land Services and Clarence City Council and probably others have had interests in the Coal River and its riparian zone. Willow tree were poisoned but left standing adjacent to the Richmond Bridge causing any photographs of the structure over many months to include the dead trees. This weed management technique might be best practice in other places but surely is not appropriate adjacent to one of Tasmania's premier tourist destinations. I have had success felling willows and poisoning the stump, a technique that has minimum visual impact. There was a small wash-away in September, 2009 on the north-western side of the Richmond Bridge that had orange netting draped around it for over five years to minimise the pedestrian hazard. Again this had to feature in visitors photographs for an extended period. Dispute over responsibility again seemed to be the root of lack of remedial action. Formation of

Built Heritage Precincts with different priorities and clarity regarding their governance and funding would assist in overcoming these issues.

Some roads leading to Richmond are under state government control while other roads are under local government control but a number of these pass from one local government area to another just outside Richmond. This has led to variable degrees of maintenance and variable speed limits. The creation of the Brighton transport hub has directed unwanted heavy vehicle traffic onto the access roads to Richmond. The new link road has spared the town from much of this traffic. Richmond has become popular with cyclists but the local rural roads are not wide enough and have too poor visibility to allow safe overtaking. This has been observed to lead to visitor frustration. Bicycle overtaking lanes are urgently required on uphill sections of the roads leading to Richmond as are changed road regulations to require bicycles to stay in these lanes where they are provided.

Richmond residents used to participate regularly in rubbish collection along the roads leading to the town. Unfortunately legal advice suggesting that the organisers might be personally liable in case of injury or damage led to the termination of this community activity. The activity could be restarted if the situation were clarified.

Private properties contribute significantly to the setting of Richmond's built heritage, particularly in the vicinity of the Richmond Bridge. Through the thoughtful management of their properties the landowners are largely responsible for the pleasant vistas viewed and photographed by visitors. These properties include "The Mill House" at 2 Wellington Street, "Laurel Cottage" at 9 Wellington Street, "Yew Tree Cottage" and "Sante Fe" at 52 and 56 St John's Circle respectively and "The Birches" at 12 Gunning Street. In some cases the properties have been tended by the same family over 85 years. A number of conservation management plans for Richmond have noted the ownership situation. However, the authors of these studies have been remarkably coy about meeting with and discussing the situation with the landowners. The authors of a recent study draft in fact went on to propose the purchase by government of large tracts of private land along the Coal River at Richmond without ever meeting with the owners of that land. The authors were so zealous that they invented information to support their case for purchase, information that would have been strongly refuted by the landowners. Government does not appear to have the funds to properly manage the land already under its control without taking on additional responsibilities. I believe that there should be a genuine Public - Private Partnership at Richmond where the parties work together rather than one party wanting absolute bureaucratic control with little prospect of making real improvements. Maintenance costs for these properties can be very high, particularly when arborists become involved, so potential mechanisms for assistance would be welcomed.

## Summary

Richmond is a significant built-heritage visitor destination in a very attractive setting with around a quarter of a million non-Tasmanian visitors annually. However Richmond lacks an obvious means of extracting a fee from visitors to maintain its heritage and to improve the visitors' experience. This is in common with some other Tasmanian built-heritage destinations. I believe that creation of Built-Heritage Precincts supported by a Built Heritage Fund might be of significant utility. Funding is always problematic. Options include a Visitor Vehicle Fee similar to the National Parks Vehicle Pass. There should be a hire-car levy in Tasmania. Tasmanian tour operators are currently able to bring visitors into places like Richmond for free so a levy on tour-operators licensing could be directed to the Fund. Clarence municipality residents visit and live at Richmond so some rates should be directed to the Fund. Tasmanians regularly visit Richmond so some state taxes should be directed to the Fund. Interstate Australians regularly visit Richmond so some federal taxes should be directed to the Fund. International visitors regularly visit Richmond so a visa levy should be directed to the Fund. A Heritage Lottery has been proposed as a means of fund raising. Given that socially disadvantaged people appear to contribute disproportionately to gambling and given that Tasmania appears to have a disproportionately high number of socially disadvantaged people, using a lottery for fund raising may be flawed.

## **Summary of recommendations.**

1. Create Built Heritage Precincts and a Built Heritage Fund to support them.
2. Support a Built Heritage Fund by a visa levy for overseas visitors plus levies on tourist operators, hire cars and contributions from targeted Council, State and Federal taxes. Funding cannot be left mainly to locals with ad hoc top-ups.
3. Government or Heritage Fund administrators need to be prepared to buy significant heritage properties that would otherwise be lost to public access and/or irreversibly altered internally.
4. Government or Heritage Precinct administrators need to communicate with and work with private landowners or be prepared to buy those parts of the settings that would otherwise be lost to public access and/or irreversibly visually altered. Cooperation is the cheaper option.
5. Planning regulations need to be aware of the small changes to built heritage areas that cumulatively irreversibly change and ultimately destroy them.
6. Make more use of interpretative displays to enhance built heritage areas.
7. Land should be purchased that would add to the possible events that could occur in the vicinity and strongly complement Built Heritage Precincts.

I believe that the following bibliography contains publications that are very relevant to this inquiry.

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Dr. Michael Wadsley

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