

**Legislative Council Built Heritage/ Tourism Enquiry –
A Response by Gary Hooper and James Parker on behalf of:
the *Port Arthur and Tasman Tourism Association*,
the *Tasman Peninsula Historical Society* and
the *Impression Bay Community Development Association*.**

General Statement

Without tourism there would be nothing left of Port Arthur except a pile of rubble which the general public would not be particularly interested in seeing, and which would certainly not be a major Australian historic site today. The economic benefits of tourism are the only reason that any Tasmanian government has done any work at all at Port Arthur. Tourism should not be seen as an obstacle to conservation of the built environment, but as its facilitator.

The obverse side of this proposition is that the built environment - especially the built environment of the 19th century - is central to the interest of tourists to this state. The Georgian-style buildings, sitting, as they do, so comfortably in the Tasmanian landscape are exotic to visitors from overseas and from other parts of Australia. This is especially so for visitors from New South Wales and, to a certain extent, Victoria where there is a sort of “cultural memory” of such a landscape, but few extant examples. Older Australian and European tourists especially, very much appreciate this cultural landscape and the opportunities which it affords of visiting and/or staying in lovely old homes.

Such people tend to be ‘long-stay’ and ‘high-yield’ in the terms of the tourism trade. If one accepts that this is the case, it would seem sensible for the state government to support conservation of the built environment and to invest in tourism projects which focus on that cultural landscape.

The rise of MONA as a huge presence in the Tasmanian tourism landscape does not subtract from this proposition. For some time, despite Port Arthur being by far the most visited tourist site in Tasmania, all eyes have been on the more trendy environmental tours and sites. One look at the figures shows that this is probably a misguided focus. Whilst high-end experiences such as the Bay of Fires Walk garner huge praise (deservedly) and I’m sure that Bay of Fires customers go to MONA, this is a tiny piece of the larger Tasmanian tourism market. Most MONA visitors are more likely to undertake a further cultural experience than go for a bush walk, especially one as time-consuming and expensive as the Bay of Fires.

We need, also, to face up to the fact that, for contemporary Australians, whether single, bringing up a family, or “empty nesters”, holidays tend to be more frequent but shorter. Without contradicting what has been said before, a lot of tourists want “a bit of it all” – something of an environmental experience (which amounts to a walk in the bush) a look at some old houses and some insight into Australia’s past. I strongly believe that many Australian tourists come to Tasmania expecting the third - a “roots” experience - are we providing that? What can we do to, and with, the built environment to provide that?

On the Tasman Peninsula that “roots” experience is very powerful - especially for Australians of Anglo-Irish descent. The following paper explores why this is so, and how it connects to the built environment.

The Significance of Convict Sites

The many sites of convict occupation still visible on the Tasman Peninsula reflect the extent and sophistication of the convict system here, and its importance to the “Gaol of Empire” that was Van Diemen’s Land. The significance of this to modern Australia comes in two ways.

Firstly, the convict system was how, for good or ill, modern European society was translated to this continent and this island. The extensive historical residue of that system still visible on the Tasman Peninsula allows insights into that system, and has *prima facie*, national significance.

Secondly, during the 1840s, and into the 1850s, Tasmania and, in particular, the Tasman Peninsula, was a laboratory of penology. Many techniques and, indeed, the basic philosophy of how we treat transgressors to this day were first tried here during the period of the “Probation System”. This makes any historical residue from that period significant.

The multitude of convict transport and industrial sites, spread across the Peninsula, have many associated features, and are also closely associated with the main settlement at Port Arthur. This means that the whole inter-locking convict system on the Tasman Peninsula is of great national historical significance, whatever the state of repair of individual sites.

The other factor which makes the convict sites of the Peninsula so important, is that the network of water-connected sites allows one to see the industrial nature of the convict system. Even here, where many sites were associated with secondary punishment, the inherent tension in the convict system is revealed – the need to get production and build a society versus the desire of (Westminster) government to punish criminals and deter crime. So, at the Coal Mines for instance, steam-powered winding gear was used, and at Port Arthur, a steam-powered saw-mill was in use by 1835. This, despite the fact that both jobs could be done by manual labour – an acknowledged form of punishment. (Sawing by hand continued in parallel with steam-milling at Port Arthur.) In the desire to cater to the tourist public’s wish for a frisson of guilty excitement, punishment is usually stressed in the interpretation of convict sites in Tasmania (the Gothic horror story) over the productive aspect of the system (nation-building).

To reiterate, for good or ill, the Convict Transportation System was how modern European society was translated to this continent and this island – and, from a European point of view, it worked. The big losers in Van Diemen’s Land were not necessarily the convicts, a well-behaved man with needed skills could get another chance at life in this colony and many female convicts became respectable wives and mothers – the founding mothers of Australia. The big losers in colonial times were the Aboriginal inhabitants of the island who were thoroughly and ruthlessly dispossessed. The Tasman Peninsula holds a huge concentration of historic residue from the time of the convict system which it is necessary to conserve as an enormously significant part of the national estate.

The Role of Government

- Legislate and enforce the protection of key built heritage assets
- Contribute to the provision of resources to maintain and preserve those built heritage assets that are critical to Australia's heritage and tourism for Tasmania
- Capitalise on Tasmania's distinctive advantage in built heritage by developing targeted marketing strategies to attract tourists to the state
- Promote and increase awareness of built heritage in Tasmania
- Provide support for adequate signage to ensure that visitors can fully appreciate the experience surrounding built heritage
- Provide resources to regional tourism associations to deliver support to local tourism associations

Role of Tourism Associations

As demonstrated by this document, built heritage in the Tasman Region is one of the most significant tourist attractions for Tasmania. Shortly after the closure of Port Arthur in 1877, under the influence of a hit novel, *For the Term of His Natural Life*, tourists began to flock to the site despite a lack of infrastructure services. However, the Government at that time had sought to sell or demolish the buildings in order to remove the scar of the convict era. Tourism operators consequently banded together to pressure Government to preserve the buildings that were the drawcard of excursionists to the region. This in effect probably was the beginning of the first Tourist Association in Australia.

However, it took until 1916 for any signs of strategic management of the site to occur, when the site became managed by the SCENERY PRESERVATION BOARD which undertook basic restoration and tourism management, therefore making Port Arthur the first "historic Site" in Australia. This historical example demonstrates the need for all organisations to work in close association to ensure that our built heritage is not lost and that through investment and appropriate management they can also be a valuable financial asset for Tasmania. Roles of Tourism Associations include;

- Promote and market built heritage and ensure that key assets are identified on local tourist information association brochures, maps and websites
- Lobby Government via regional tourism associations to ensure that built heritage remains part of our cultural landscape and continues to attract tourist to the region.
- Work closely and support the local Heritage Association (Council and other organisations) to ensure that built heritage assets are maintained, accessible to the public and that appropriate signage/documentation is available to support the tourist experience
- Identify training needs and provide appropriate training programs so the industry can deliver consistent knowledge and visitor services in the built heritage sector.
- Recent work to revive the Convict Trail concept in an electronic form is a good example of how identification of Heritage advantages can be worked on to:
 - a. Support the preservation of that heritage,
 - b. Provide economic benefits to support the local economy,
 - c. Breathe cultural relevance into a landscape, providing an enriched experience for locals and visitors alike.

The Tasman Peninsula Historical Society (TPHS)

The TPHS is a research and publishing organisation with several decades of experience investigating the (mainly) post-convict history of the Tasman and Forestier Peninsulas. The society has particular expertise in how the residue of the convict system became (literally, in some cases) the building-blocks of free settlement in this region. It also has a particular interest in the built heritage of the two peninsulas: this knowledge is a resource which can be made available to heritage tourism projects.

The Impression Bay Community Development Association (IBCDA)

IBCDA is a recently established body aiming to set up a community and tourism resource at Premaydena, on a site comprising part of the old Impression Bay Probation Station. Although the project aims to create an historically themed heritage garden, it does use as its focus the convict era building known locally as the “Commandant’s House” and its out-buildings from the early free settlement period. At this time, the property was the site of the local police station and court-house and is thus a very good example of how the historical residue of the convict system became the foundations of free settlement.

Relevant Considerations in Jurisdictions

There is a particular anomaly in the region and it relates to the Officer’s Quarters and other assets at Eaglehawk Neck. Currently the asset is managed by Parks and Wildlife Services but the reality is that it is intrinsically linked to Port Arthur Historical Site (PAHS) and all other convict era built heritage. It would appear that those assets would be better placed under the jurisdiction of PAHS for consistency of alignment of assets, management, maintenance and preservation. This is not to say that PWS have not managed the asset well, but also allows PWS to focus on its core responsibilities. There is a risk that these valuable built heritage assets may have to compete unfavourably for annual funding against other PWS core accountabilities.

Conclusion

Tourism based on built heritage, particularly that of the 19th century, is central to the economy of Tasmania and especially to that of the Tasman Municipality. Whilst environmental tourism has become more glamorous in recent years, and MONA is a phenomenon whose impact on the shape of Tasmanian tourism is still to be reckoned, heritage remains hugely important. Port Arthur, for instance has long been recognised as an attractor which can “pull” tourists through the island, thus benefitting not only the local economy, but that of the whole state. The government needs to support heritage tourism, and the three organisations involved in this submission stand ready to help in any feasible way.