Most conferences I have attended have brought together members of a single profession: actuaries, potato-growers, undertakers. The Islands of Vanishment conference was designed to cast a wider net, drawing in a mixed haul of architects and tourist operators, members of the community living close to the Port Arthur Historic Site and scholars from other parts of the world, experts in stonework, heritage administrators and many more - people of all kinds who are concerned in one way or another with the what, the why or the how of heritage sites but who are not always able to meet each other and exchange views. So I hope that there were useful encounters of kinds that aren’t too wariously familiar, and I hope, too, that the question raised by Peter Romey in relation to conservation and tourism - ‘Can’t we still be friends?’ - will get an affirmative reply.

The diversity of topics addressed and sites considered as Islands of Vanishment has been, perhaps, even more striking than the opalescent dazzle of the delegates. And the questions which have come flying up in clouds out of the clash of concepts have been more diverse still, especially when one kind of Island of Vanishment has been set against another. For example, as a result of a conversation about escapes, I found myself comparing this prison here at Port Arthur with the kind of prisoner-of-war camp featured in movies like ‘The Wooden Horse’. And this led me to wonder for the first time how many of the Irish, say, who were held prisoner here saw themselves as engaged in war against England. Or how many transported for ostensibly neutral offences, like stealing live-stock were actually political or politicised prisoners. Or, at the very time when, back in London, Karl Marx was hard at work in the British Museum, how many convicts, from all parts of Britain, could be regarded as prisoners taken in a long-running class war.

One might go on, pointing out for instance, as Philip Adams has done, that detention centres like Woomera may be termed quite properly concentration camps which gives rise to interesting questions about the political capital gained by certain leaders of small stature and large ambition when they whip up popular fear and hatred of some unhappy minority.

After only a little of this kind of thing it dawned on me that many Islands of Vanishment have been created out of fear, which can range from the quite proper - if belated - caution of those who finally pinned Napoleon down on St Helena to the murderous paranoia of Stalin or Pol Pot. I think one could also say that even when the occupants of certain Islands of Vanishment stayed alive, rather than disappearing for ever into killing fields or mass graves, many such islands have been intended to change the personalities of the inmates or destroy their identity.

This kind of vanishment is commonly achieved through uniforms and shaved heads, the substitution of numbers for names, the removal of personal possessions, the restriction of social contacts and, above all, the stifling of the individual voice by depriving the criminal, the alien, the pauper, the ethnically tainted, the ideologically unsound of any means of expression. In fact, many Islands of Vanishment have been first and foremost Islands of Silence.

Some prison reformers, who advocated the use of solitary confinement and the imposition of silence and anonymity through the apparatus of masks, chapel stalls and so on were men of goodwill. John Howard - like the present-day actor of that name - was certainly well-intentioned. Yet it is no coincidence that Howard's methods found favour in the 1790s at the point where the British Government, alarmed by events in France and the spread of dangerously radical doctrines amongst the newly industrialised working-class, brought in its gagging bills, banning gatherings of more than 50 people and tightening up the law on seditious utterance. More than 50 years before the Model Prison next door was completed, radical opinion which had supported Howard's programme of prison reform turned against the new penitentiaries, denouncing them as 'receptacles for persons who write or speak disagreeable truths'.

And yet large numbers of those who have been confined in silent prisons or similar Islands of Vanishment, who were supposed to go unheard or to vanish without trace and be forgotten, are still known to us, either because of the conservation of sites in which they lived or died, or the independent survival of their own testimony, or the existence of someone else's reports, records, stories in which we can still catch glimpses of a living person.

Shakespeare was much concerned with being remembered and in his sonnets made great play with the ancient literary convention of asserting that the written word will outlast memorials of stone or brass. So in a number of the sonnets addressed to the Friend, the beautiful young man who may or may not have been Mr W H, Shakespeare promises that the Friend's beauty will be remembered until the end of time. In sonnet 107, for instance, from which I've borrowed the title of this paper, he scorns 'tombs of brass', telling the young man 'And thou in this shall find thy monument', referring, of course, to the sonnet itself, the 'poore rime' that he has written down in his black ink.

I don't want to engage in a debate over the relative longevity of Shakespeare's sonnets and Stonehenge or even Frank the Poet's 'Ballad of the Cyprus Brig' - which was forbidden to be sung - and the stones of this prison in which he was confined. Quite the contrary. I'm not really concerned today with the separate lives of words or walls but more with the way in which the heritage site and the words which have come out of it or which shed light on it are joined as means to one end.

And Islands of Vanishment, particularly when they have been designed as also Islands of Silence, are perhaps special in this regard. When the inmates of such places have somehow managed to express themselves in words or have been given a form of extended life in the testimony of others, the page is not just an important clue to the significance of the abandoned camp or ghetto or gaol but, still more importantly, a powerful reason for conserving that historic site. Of course, we value sites like Port Arthur because to gloss away the cruelty and deprivation of the past is to build an impoverished present on deceit, but I'd suggest we should also value such places as memorials to those who refused to be reduced or silenced. These people should, I believe, find their monuments not just in

‘And thou in this shall find thy monument’

Margaret Scott
the page as site but also in the fabrics we conserve.

When one first starts thinking about prison literature it seems that if prisons really have been intended to prevent self-expression and shut people up they haven't worked particularly well. The list of sizeable books, often hugely important, influential books written in prisons is long. It includes The Consolations of Philosophy, written by the sixth-century philosopher Boethius — a work much venerated in the Middle Ages and translated in turn by King Alfred, Chaucer and Queen Elizabeth I — and many of the poems of Sir Walter Raleigh, as well as all he managed to write of his History of the World. Raleigh spent years in the Tower of London and was twice condemned to death, a fate he confronts with wit and courage, in a poem called the "Passionate Man's Pilgrimage". In fact he didn't die the day after writing this poem but was beheaded, quite unjustly, about 15 years later. In the poem he imagines his soul travelling to Heaven at his death just as a pilgrim or palmer might travel to the Holy City of Jerusalem. He ends it like this:

And this is my eternal plea
To him that made heaven earth and sea,
Seeing my flesh must die so soon
And want a head to dine next noon,
Just at the stroke when my veins start and spread
Set on my soul an everlasting head.
Then am I ready like a palmier fit,
To tread those blest paths which before I writ.

John Bunyan, although he was imprisoned for preaching without a licence, produced nine books of religious instruction during his first gaol term and wrote the first part of The Pilgrim's Progress during a later stint. Then there's the Marquis de Sade, who wrote in a rather different vein; the transportees Henry Savery, Australia's first novelist, and the Irish patriot, John Mitchel, who kept a Jail Journal but was allowed a measure of freedom in Van Diemen's Land. He wrote:

In vain I try to torment myself into a state of chronic savage indignation: it will not do here. In vain I reflect that I am after all, in a real cell, hulk, or dungeon yet — that these woodlands, are but CARTHAGINIAN prison walls — that the bright birds, waving their rainbow wings here before me, are but 'ticket-of-leave' birds, and enjoy only 'comparative liberty' — in vain — there is in every soul of man a buoyancy that will not let it sink to utter despair.

Then there's Frank McNamara or Frank the Poet whose feisty ballads provide a sharp contrast to penitent descriptions of the horrors of Van Diemen's Land, including the ballad of that name, probably commissioned by authority to discourage crime. Later comes Oscar Wilde's De Profundis, written in Reading Gaol, and much else, including a small book on the trade union law of Sierra Leone written by my late husband, Michael Scott. In the late 1950s when Michael was practising as a barrister in Sierra Leone he rather rashly helped bail one of his clients, a diamond smuggler called Lazarovich. Unfortunately, Lazarovich attempted to leave Sierra Leone and was caught with more diamonds secreted in a private part of his anatomy. Not surprisingly, the police concluded that Michael was in cahoots with Lazarovich and promptly put him in gaol, where, being of a philosophical temperament, he settled down to write his book:-- In the preface he thanks various people who have assisted him in his work including the Extra-Mural Department of Fourah Bay College. He also thanks the Government of Sierra Leone for financing a period of leisure and retirement during which it was possible to complete my work.

There are also, of course, hundreds of books written by prisoners after their escape or release in which they describe their time in Siberian gulags or Japanese prisoner-of-war camps or other sites of incarceration. And there are a few, like the Diary of Anne Frank, left to us by those who afterwards vanished, which deal with a victim's earlier experience.

Many of these writings are valuable historical documents providing details about sites we may wish to conserve; virtually all are themselves strong reasons for that conservation. If, for instance, it should ever be decided that the Tower of London ought to be bulldozed to make way for a shopping mall, I hope some protester will arise waving in his or her hand a copy of Raleigh's 'Passionate Man's Pilgrimage'.

Raleigh and other prison-writers before and after him rejected 'utter stark despair' and wrote with the odds against them. There are, of course, millions of others who were more effectively silenced but who have managed to leave some hint of their personalities, their individual voices behind. And I want to end today by saluting three of these. The first is a man with the rather odd name of Kyd Wake, an English printer, who, like Denis Collins, had a grudge against his king. Wake, however, threw no stone. He merely hissed and booed the royal carriage for which, in 1796, he was sentenced to five years' hard labour. He was sent to Gloucester Gaol, one of the new penitentiaries where prisoners were kept in solitary confinement and subjected to a discipline similar to that of our Model Prison — though not quite so rigid since Wake's wife was allowed to send him extra food. In order to raise money for purchasing the food, Mrs Wake had an engraving made of her husband, dressed in prison uniform and standing in his cell, which she sold to the citizens of Gloucester. Underneath the engraving was printed Kyd Wake's own description of the horrors of solitary imprisonment under penitentiary discipline. The passage ends with the reflection that if Judges and Jurors would but consider what an irreparable misfortune it is to have a considerable portion of life so wearisomely wasted, they would surely be more tender of dooming any man, for a long time, to such wretchedness. It is a calamity beyond description, more easily to be conceived than explained.

The next voice out of the silence belongs to Thomas Walker, who was transported to Van Diemen's Land at the age of 16 for housebreaking. From the moment of his arrival in Van Diemen's Land in September 1824, Walker was a thorn in authority's side largely because he was absolutely determined to escape. His record shows that he made one attempt after another, twice managing to hide away on ships. He was savagely punished, receiving over 1000 lashes before he made his last and most spectacular escape attempt in 1839. It was actually an escape rather than an escape attempt because Walker with seven companions got clean away from Port Arthur in Commandant Booth's Whale Boat and was at large for over three months. I'd like to dwell on the events of that time since they demonstrate that Walker, as well as being a remarkable leader and strategist, had somehow remained a humane and humorous human being despite the treatment he'd received. But I'll have to confine myself to bits of a deposition provided by a Mr Davis of George's River on the east coast of Tasmania. Walker and his men lived, of course, by raiding settlements and taking what they needed, but they always let settlers with enough to eat and only once discharged a firearm in the course of a raid. The
part of the escapees’ story I like best concerns Walker’s arrival at the Davis property, smartly dressed in stolen clothes, clearly in charge of the Whale Boat crew and, telling Mr Davis that he was out hunting for the Walker gang. Davis cordially invited him to dinner – which was duly eaten – and even after the ruse had been discovered, went on to defend the remarkable Walker as far as he possibly could. In his deposition Davis insists that Walker and his men treated him with the greatest respect, civility and attention.

Lastly comes Renée Friesova, who as a Jewish teenager living in Czechoslovakia was sent with her parents to Terezin, a concentration camp which was not itself a death camp – though many died there from hunger, overcrowding or disease – but was a feeder-camp for Auschwitz, so that regularly many of those Renée knew – her friends, her teachers – disappeared never to be seen again. Renée not only managed to preserve her own identity and her own voice during her imprisonment but in her book Fortress of My Youth also pays tribute to others who did the same. She writes: ‘The German authorities strictly forbade teaching. Even though the plan for the final solution of the Jewish question was being implemented, what would happen if some of the Jews survived? The Germans did not want the Jews to be educated’. The SS searched the camp for pencils, books and paper but failed to prevent dedicated teachers from working with the young late in the evenings, preserving their ability to use language as Renée, one of the few to survive, has done to remarkable effect. She also pays tribute to her fellow prisoners’ love of music, telling how they smuggled instruments into the camp and even secretly performed operas, though productions were constantly disrupted when members of the cast vanished on the transports to Auschwitz. I don’t know if Terezin has become a heritage site – I hope so and I also hope that it is not simply a place of mourning but also one which ‘celebrates the voices which refused, so courageously, to be silenced.

I also hope that we who are privileged – who have liberty, books, writing materials and all kinds of technological wizardry – will go on working to preserve both sites and words which are not just sad memorials to the vanished but also celebrations of those who refused to be crushed or who are struggling now for their right to be heard. I hope that in what we write and what we conserve they will find their monument.