Placemaking through postcards of Port Arthur

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Abstract

Port Arthur, a heritage tourism site on the southeast coast of Tasmania, was first established in 1830 as a secondary punishment station for British convicts and closed in 1877. Six months following its closure, the first steamship full of pleasure-seekers visited the former penal settlement. As many Tasmanians worked to shed the stain of the colony’s convict past, tourist interest in Port Arthur increased. The substantial income tourism introduced to a limited local economy resulted in ongoing tensions between subverting the convict past and profiting from it (Young 1996).

This paper presents a critical examination of the construction of place for tourists at Port Arthur through the analysis of a collection of 198 postcards held by the Port Arthur Historic Sites Management Authority (PAHSMA) dating from 1905 to 1968. Mass tourism, tourists’ quest for authenticity, dark tourism and Romanticism are phenomena identified as having developed in response to ‘modernity’ and industrialisation in the western world (Urry 1995; MacCannell 1999). The ways in which these contexts manifest and change through time is explored through historical postcards to demonstrate the temporality and process of placemaking in response to economic, social and cultural factors.

Introduction

Port Arthur, a heritage tourism site on the southeast coast of Tasmania, was first established in 1830 as a secondary punishment station for British convicts and closed as a penal settlement in 1877. Six months following its closure, the first steamship full of pleasure-seekers visited the former penal settlement. As many Tasmanians worked to shed the stain of the colony’s convict past, tourist interest in Port Arthur increased. The substantial income tourism introduced to a limited local economy resulted in ongoing tensions between subverting the convict past and profiting from it (Young 1996). Port Arthur is one of 11 sites included in the 2010 UNESCO ‘Australian Convict Sites’ inscription and is managed by the Port Arthur Historic Sites Management Authority (PAHSMA).

While mass tourism and its study have flourished considerably in the last few decades, the temporal depth of the process of placemaking or ‘heritigisation’ at heritage tourism sites is often neglected and presented as a recent phenomenon (Harvey 2001). Port Arthur was at the forefront of the development of heritage management as the first historic place in Tasmania’s reserve system (1916), and the first historic cultural heritage reserve in Australia (Davidson 1995). Port Arthur’s current form is an artefact of its ongoing evolution as a tourist site from 1878, with selective demolition, conservation and interpretation over the last 140 years informed by changing discourses around heritage and convict history in Australia (Jones 2016).
This paper presents a critical examination of the construction of place for tourists at Port Arthur through the analysis of a collection of 198 postcards dating from 1905 to 1968 held by the Port Arthur Historic Sites Management Authority (PAHSMA). It comprises part of a larger study incorporating additional forms of material culture, archaeological assemblages, historical museum collections and advertisements, to study the construction of place for tourists and the archaeological correlates of mass tourism (Jones 2016). Mass tourism, tourists’ quest for authenticity, dark tourism and Romanticism are phenomena identified as having developed in response to ‘modernity’ and industrialisation in the western world (Urry 1995; MacCannell 1999). The ways in which these concepts manifest and interact in distinct temporal and spatial contexts is explored through historical postcards to demonstrate the process of placemaking in response to broader economic, social and cultural factors. Historical postcards construct an idealised version of a place for consumption by tourists, and the changing depictions of Port Arthur illustrate the fluid nature of these ideals.

**Placemaking through tourism**

Tourism is a manifestation of the re-organization of work and leisure into separate spheres with the dominance of paid work in ‘modern’ societies. With its links to wage labour and industrial capitalism, tourism is considered a defining characteristic of ‘modernity’ (Urry 1995; MacCannell 1999). Currently the largest global industry, it differs from other industries as its product is experience while the ownership of the resources it utilizes and controls is often contestable (Chambers 2010).

Mass consumerism is a powerful driver in the process of placemaking at tourist sites (Daniel 1992). At heritage sites, history is not merely represented but is produced as a commodity for consumption by tourists, generally produced by a small group including heritage managers, academics, government agencies and tourism operators (Baram & Rowan 2004; Chambers 2010). Constructions of place are imbued with power, and visual portrayals of tourist landscapes both represent and help create their significance for both locals and visitors and it is through these images that places are produced, imagined and contested (Selby 2010).

Certain aspects of Port Arthur were promoted to tourists over others, and the ways in which Port Arthur was created and recreated for tourists changed through time and was often dependent on context. Constructions of the site and its history were driven by fiscal, social and cultural factors which were navigated by several groups. A number of actors, including hotel proprietors, tour operators, postcard producers, museum curators and guidebook authors, had varied roles and interests in the site, and these were enacted in a variety of media. Material culture is one means through which historical places are both produced and then consumed by tourists in the form of souvenirs, trinkets, books, etc. which provide material evidence of meaning attributed to the site by both tourists and tourism operators (Gazin-Schwartz 2010).

Place is most powerfully perpetuated and consumed visually (Daniels 1992; Jones 2010; Relph 1976; Selby 2010; Urry 1995; Waterton 2010). Much like texts, visual presentations are indicative of the underlying motives and interests of their creators and are used to create, promote, preserve and naturalize very specific constructions of the past. Seemingly neutral documents such as postcards, brochures and guidebooks recreate power and status as much as more overtly ideological items (Waterton 2010). Postcards comprise a powerfully visual form of tourist material culture. As manufactured portrayals created specifically for tourists, postcards offer idealistic representations of place and valuable insight into the cultural constructs and geographical imagination behind their production (DeBres & Sowers 2009). Postcards are a useful means of studying one facet of placemaking as personal items that reflect the tourists’ experiences and serve them as both touchstones of memory and signifiers of cultural status (Corkery, Bailey & Hall 1994). Postcards both present and act to construct idealised versions of a place. They present an ideal (or series of possible ideals) as imagined by photographers, tourism operators and postcard printers for consumption by tourists. Mass distribution of these images also (re)construct understandings and expectations of place with the receiving party.
Postcards were first invented in Austria in 1869, but did not enjoy widespread popularity in Australia until 1895 when it was legal to mail correspondence without envelopes (Angleviel & Shekelton 1997). The early twentieth century was the peak of postcard production and transmission, and in the first decades of the twentieth century over a billion postcards were produced worldwide every year as postcard collecting swept the western world (Davidson & Spearritt 2000; DeBres & Sowers 2009).

Tourism and Tasmania’s convict history

The popularity of Tasmania as a tourist destination began even before the cessation of convict transportation in 1852, and Tasmania remained the most popular long-range tourist destination in Australia until the First World War (Davidson & Spearritt 2000). Most tourists arrived by steamship from Melbourne or Sydney, and Tasmania promoted itself as the ‘Sanitorium of the South’, appealing to wealthy mainland Australian visitors with its temperate climate, ‘Englishness’, and scenery (Davidson & Spearritt 2000, p. 39; Young 1996, p. 12).

The citizenry was self-conscious about Tasmania’s penal past and concerned with how they were perceived as a people, hoping not to be associated with either the criminal class or ‘sadistic overseers’ (Young 1996, p. 12). In the popular imagination of mainland Australians, however, the convict past was full of horror and dark deeds. This darkness generated interest in Tasmania as a tourist destination, and by the 1870s some Tasmanians began to see the tourist fascination with the convict past as something potentially lucrative (Young 1996). Two popular novels, both featuring Port Arthur, stimulated interest in convictism: an autobiography titled Martin Cash: the Bushranger of Van Diemen’s Land, in 1843-4: a Personal Narrative of His Exploits in the Bush and His Experiences at Port Arthur and Norfolk Island, and Marcus Clarke’s (1872) For the Term of His Natural Life. The former describes the bushranger as a hero and highlights his courage, chivalry towards women, and crimes against the wealthy while contrasting his actions to the innate cruelty and prejudice of the convict system and its overseers at all levels. The latter remained one of the most popular Australian novels for decades, re-created as both a play and early film. The book’s depiction of Port Arthur was based on Clarke’s visit to the settlement in 1870 where he was given full access to the site and freedom to peruse the convict records. As Port Arthur was still a penal settlement and the Tasman Peninsula closed to the public he had the opportunity to interview nearly 300 convicts, mostly elderly and infirm, finishing their sentences following the cessation of transportation (Rieusset 2001). Clarke’s tale depicted a world of horrors and suffering well beyond the actual experiences of most persons within the convict system. Regardless of the fictional nature of the convict world Clarke created, the darkness and sadism he conveyed generated a very real interest in the convict past within thousands of Australians (Young 1996).

Through the 1880s and 1890s Tasmania’s Chief Justice actively advocated for the demolition of convict buildings as a means of wiping out the ‘convict stain’ and through to the early-twentieth century, sites associated with the convict past in Tasmania were actively demolished, neglected or forgotten (Casella & Fredericksen 2004, p. 108; Lennon 2009, p. 177). Tourist agencies worked to instead promote sites that featured Tasmania’s natural beauty, such as Mount Wellington near Hobart, the Cataract Gorge in Launceston, and the Mole Creek cave networks. Convict sites were considered tangible reminders of the convict era, a ‘birthstain’ the colony tried actively to erase as convict sites became targets for destruction, and renaming of convict places became commonplace (Young 1996, p. 43). Port Arthur was renamed ‘Carnarvon’ in 1877 to expunge any convict associations, the land was parcelled off for sale and a small township began to develop among the old convict settlement (Davidson & Spearritt 2000). Preservation of the existing convict buildings is the result of local residents recognising tourist interest in the site and the associated economic potential. The Tasmanian Government established demolition of convict structures as a condition of sale until over 100 local residents and notable figures in Hobart petitioned against it in (Davidson & Spearritt 2000). Due to the site’s continued popularity with tourists, and after the filming of the cinema adaptation of Clarke’s For the Term of His Natural Life on site 1926, its name reverted back to Port Arthur in 1927 (Rieusset 2001; Roe 2001).
Authenticity

Mass tourism is thought to derive from the quest for authentic experiences. While the ‘authentic experiences’ of tourism are meant to represent an escape from increasingly superficial and inauthentic lives, the tourist industry itself is increasingly critiqued as inauthentic and commercial (Chambers 2010; Harkin 1995; MacCannell 1999; Potter 1999). While tourist places can be described as authentic, inauthentic or even placeless, the broader notion of ‘authenticity’ is tied to value judgements about experiences, cultures and the past. What constitutes ‘authenticity’ is regularly contested by anthropologists studying cultural tourism (Jones 2010), heritage agencies (Cooney 2007; Baram & Rowan 2004), and theorists interested in heritage and the construction of the past (Hodges 2009; Rowan 2004).

The notion of authenticity in tourist experience has been discusses by observers since the beginnings of mass tourism in the mid-nineteenth century and resulted at the time in a dialectic (which arguably continues) separating high culture/traveller/authentic experiences from low culture/tourist/inauthentic experiences (Sharpely & Stone 2009, p. 115). Chambers (2010) suggests that in place of concern for a single conceptualization of authenticity (or inauthenticity) the focus instead be shifted to a standard of significance. This differs from the concept of significance within the framework of heritage management, which is often inherently tied to concepts of truth and authenticity, and instead considers that what is deemed significant enough to locals or visitors to be presented as authentic is worthwhile of study in itself. This overwrites common applications of significance by heritage practitioners, as for tourists and locals key aspects of the site may encompass folklore, fictional events (such as scenes in books and film) and fantastical elements (such as paranormal hauntings) that could be considered ‘inauthentic’ and generally unlikely to be supported by historical research or heritage fabric assessments.

As a place’s identity can be fluid and context-dependent, the type of authenticity a place might offer visitors can be similarly multifaceted and complex. In this study, authenticity is considered a multifaceted aspect of the experience of a place and the tensions between authentic and inauthentic (or fictional) representations of Port Arthur in tourist postcards are explored.

Methodology

The original parameters for selecting postcards to analyse were that they pre-date 1960 and they depict Port Arthur or the Tasman Peninsula. This resulted in a collection of 198 postcards with marks dateable from 1905 to 1968. Collector’s literature for historical postcard enthusiasts was consulted to date the marks and stamps on the postcards, as were publications focused on Tasmanian photographers (Long 1995). Most of the postcards were predominantly printed by photography studios and publishers based in Tasmania, though some were produced by companies based on the Australian mainland, generally Sydney or Melbourne. Dating the postcards roughly grouped them into three distinct phases in of production generally dictated by Australia’s involvement in each World War, as the government tourist bureaus or agencies helping drive tourism generally slowed or folded during war eras (Davidson 1995. The following phases of postcard production were identified:

- **Pre-First World War**—before or during the First World War (1905-1918, n=35);
- **Interwar**—between First and Second World Wars (1919-1939, n=106);
- **Post-Second World War**—after the Second World War (1946-1960, n=47), as no postcards were identified as having been produced during the Second World War, and
- **Un-phased**—not clearly assigned to one phase (n=10), these have been excluded from discussions of temporal change.

To draw out ideas about dark tourism and romanticism, the findings of the PAHSMA postcard collection were subject to content analysis. Content analysis provides a methodological bridge between qualitative and quantitative analysis and involves quantifying the presence or absence of objects or themes in materials, often texts or images (Hannam & Knox 2005). With roots in
literary theory, critical scholarship and cognitive approaches in the social sciences, it involves the deconstruction and reinterpretation of media (Krippendorff 2004). Each postcard was analysed across several standardized fields designed to address identified themes, including vegetation, view orientation, weather, buildings (and/or ruins) present, the presence of people (including gender, numbers and dress), and activities portrayed. These fields were influenced by those used by Pocock (2003) in her analysis of tourist activities and placemaking at the Great Barrier Reef.

Real and imagined suffering—dark tourism

Dark tourism (or thanatourism) in Australia has strong precedence in western European fascination with death through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Tours of Paris often featured stops at morgues to gaze upon corpses and in Britain the viewing of public punishment, including flogging, hanging and branding, was popular and socially acceptable entertainment (Seaton 1996; Stone & Sharpley 2008). Murderers, highwaymen and pickpockets attained celebrity status, with fictional and non-fictional characters such as the Artful Dodger, Sweeney Todd, and Spring-Heeled Jack heralded as public figures (Bogle 2008). The ‘true crime’ literary genre developed after the success of The Newgate Calendar (1773), which outlined the biographies and crimes of all prisoners hanged in Newgate Prison, London.

As a British colony, Australia shared in the same social milieu and cultural ideas about crime and violence. Australia developed its own range of popularized outlaws and bushrangers, and their memoirs and other sensationalized ‘histories’ about the convict era proved highly popular through Australia from 1870 Australia developed its own melodramatic, dark literary genre, the pinnacle of which was Marcus Clarke’s bestseller For the Term of His Natural Life (1872) (Roe 2001; Smith 2008).

With amendments to social reform regimes into the nineteenth century in Britain and Australia incarceration and punishment increasingly occurred in isolation and public hangings had decreased significantly. As death and punishment comprised less of a public spectacle, fascination with material culture associated with suffering and death continued as destinations like Madame Tussauds’ Wax Museum, with its celebrity death masks and ‘Chamber of Horrors’, appeared in the early nineteenth century (Bogle 2008). As death became increasingly removed from daily life (as a spectacle) through the nineteenth century, some forms of dark tourism developed as a mechanism for confronting death in modern societies (Hartmann 2014; Sharpley & Stone 2008). Dark tourism, as a phenomenon, represents a reaction to modernity (Ashworth & Isaac 2015; Lennon & Foley 2000; Seaton 1996).

Of the 35 postcards produced pre-First World War, only five (14.3%) directly represent darker aspects of Port Arthur’s past. All five depict the Isle of the Dead, a small island visible from Mason’s Cove at Port Arthur thought to contain at least 1,500 burials, mostly convict (Figure 1). Only one, however, has text detailing the number of burials at the front and shows the Gravedigger’s Hut. Five (14.3%) further First World War postcards produced present sites of incarceration, with four images of the Penitentiary and one image of the Separate Prison.

Interwar postcards have a significantly higher proportion of images associated with convict punishment or death, real or imagined, and they represent 25.5% (n=27) of postcards from this period. The images include an artistic interpretation of the ferocious dogs comprising the ‘Dog Line’ at Eaglehawk Neck (Figure 2), the Isle of the Dead with Gravedigger’s Hut, the Separate Prison, the Penitentiary, and both the ‘Suicide Cliffs’ and ‘Underground Cells’ at Point Puer. The ‘Suicide Cliffs’ refer to a fictional event in For the Term of His Natural Life where two young inmates at Point Puer throw themselves off the cliffs in desperation to escape the convict system. There is also no evidence that the ‘Underground Cells’ at Point Puer illustrated in postcards served that function, but their use for punishment was popularized in local fiction. Of the 65 postcards that had titles in this phase, nearly half (n=29, 44.6%) contained at least one word that referenced thanatotic elements, including ‘cell’, ‘convict’, ‘dead’, ‘prison’, ‘punishment’ and ‘suicide’. This is significant, as the number of postcards with titles that reference thanatotic elements of the convict past outnumber actual depictions of the prison or convict items. Relatively benevolent looking pictures lacking images of prison buildings or
convicts were still assigned titles that referenced the site’s convict past. Similarly, a significant portion of the postcards that depicted images associated with convict punishment or death had no titles—these assumed a degree of familiarity with the content of the images for both tourists and possibly the recipient of the postcard.

Every post-Second World War postcard had a title but none referenced real or imagined punishment or death. Of the 47 postcards produced, only four (8.5%) contained convict objects or people, and these were all images from inside Radcliffe’s Old Curiosity Shop, a museum established c. 1930 in the Port Arthur general store. Eight images (17.0%) depicted places of incarceration, though no reference to the convicts or the penal nature of the site is included in their titles.

Figure 1: Postcard titled ‘Isle of the Dead Port Arthur, TAS’, depicting the Isle of the Dead with Gravedigger’s Hut and fog-covered hills in the distance, printed by DIC between 1926 and 1931. (Source: PAHSMA Resource Library, Image 2003.10, provided courtesy of PAHSMA.)

Figure 2: Postcard of a painting depicting the ‘Dog Line’ at Eaglehawk Neck, printed by Beattie Studios between 1920 and 1930. (PAHSMA Resource Library, Image 1996.38, provided courtesy of PAHSMA.)
Embracing convict origins

Images that depicted Port Arthur as a recent or active convict site (prior to the ‘cleansing’ bushfires that created the ruins) or focused on convict objects accounted for 28.5% (n=10) of pre-First World War postcards, 49.1% (n=52) of all interwar postcards, and 8.5% (n=4) of all postcards published post-Second World War. These postcards draw on historical images of Port Arthur and pull the site’s convict history to the forefront. The concentration of convict-era depictions in the interwar period reflects changing social and cultural constructions of convicts. At the start of the twentieth century, popular constructions of Australia’s convict origins shifted away from the shame of the ‘convict stain’, and a new description of convicts as ‘innocent and manly’ began to permeate expressions of convict history. This investigation of the nature of Australian convicts was most marked following the First World War as Australia began to assert its own nationhood and national narrative independent of Britain (Jackman 2009). Convicts were increasingly depicted as a benevolent ancestral population of either poor rural workers forced into the evils of crime by desperation, or political prisoners standing for their beliefs in freedom and social justice, only to be unfairly exiled (Jackman 2009; Nicholas and Shergold 1988). Filming For the Term on site in 1926 would have further stimulated interest in the site’s convict history and supported the popularity of images depicted the site as an active penal settlement.

Over half (54.7%, n=58) of all interwar postcards contain reproductions of historical images, including artistic imaginings (paintings, drawings) of historic scenes, photographs of the site when it was an active penal settlement and soon after abandonment (c. 1880s) (Figures 2 and 3), and convict portraits from c. 1874. This interest in historical reproduction of the site is not replicated in the other phases. Of the pre-First World War postcards, 28.6% (n=10) are historical reproductions. This includes six images of Port Arthur after it was first abandoned (c.1880s), two images of the operational penal settlement, and two pictures of the site in a state of partial ruin. No artistic recreations of the convict era were found in the pre-First World War postcard assemblage. That said, all postcards with titles from this phase referred to the site as ‘Port Arthur’ although the town had been renamed ‘Carnarvon’ by the Tasmanian government as a means of overwriting the site’s convict history. There is significant power in naming places, and omission of the contemporary, officially preferred name in favour of its infamous convict-era name speaks to postcard printers actively engaging with tourist interest in convict history of the site.

Figure 3: Postcard titled ‘Entrance Hall, Penitentiary, PA’ depicting the entrance to the Penitentiary prior to its ruin, printed by Beattie Studios between 1920 and 1930. (Source: PAHSMA Resource Library, Image 1996.35, provided courtesy of PAHSMA.)
Postcards produced after the Second World War similarly exhibit a reduced interest in replicating the past at Port Arthur. Only one postcard from this phase was a reprinted historical image. Although all of the postcards printed between 1945 and 1960 have titles, only one makes reference to the site’s convict history but it does not depict convicts or prison structures.

**Romantic ideals**

Romanticism is part of a larger academic tradition that arose near the end of the eighteenth century, marked by great outpourings of emotional energy, purposeful fascination with subjective, personal reactions to the aesthetics of nature and art, and through this the rejection of classical formalism. In nineteenth-century travel accounts this was manifest in the increased preoccupation with the effects of the landscape and encounters with nature on European sensibilities (Buzard 1991; Horne 2005). The Romantic tradition focused on the ‘sublime’ in interactions with the natural world, a general sense of awe at the might of nature spiced with a hint of terror (Davidson & Spearritt 2000). The experience of sublime scenery was meant to inspire tourists and free their minds to contemplate greater things and lent a virtue to observing (and eventually recording) scenic vistas (Horne 2005).

Romanticism was in many ways a European reaction to the Industrial Revolution and the new difficulties of the modern era. Increased urbanization and pollution in city centres garnered distrust for the increasingly industrialized world in favour of the glories of nature: remote destinations provided a necessary escape from the stressors of the modern world (Davidson & Spearritt 2000).

The depiction of Romantic elements in postcards, such as rich, overgrown greenery, ominous skies and fog-covered hills was generally consistent across all time phases of postcard production in this study. Abundant greenery and overgrowth, as significant natural elements, featured in most postcards of Port Arthur produced between 1905 and 1960 (Figures 1 and 4). Of 198 postcards, 153 featured outdoor spaces and landscapes and 74.5% of those (n=114) include greenery identified as being overgrown, ranging from ‘enveloped in greenery’ to ‘slightly overgrown’. Only 24.2% (n=37) depict the site as having manicured landscapes and gardens.

Of the 153 outdoor images, only 39 (25.5%) featured a seascape, incorporating views across or towards the sea or shoreline, in any meaningful way. Port Arthur is located on a peninsula.
and the former penal settlement is wrapped around Mason’s Cove. No point on Port Arthur is more than a few hundred metres from water, but the majority of images through all periods are focused on abundant greenery and the expansive forests behind the settlement instead of the shoreline or views across the cove towards the penal settlement or other features. Dark, ominous skies feature in more than half of the landscape postcards, particularly in the earlier (pre-1945) images. Of the 127 photographic postcards with the sky visible in the background, the backdrop for 53 (41.7%) is a clear (or slightly cloudy) sky. Overcast, cloudy skies are represented in 39 images (30.7%), and another 35 images (27.6%) feature fog-obscured hills (Figure 1).

Postcards are not an objective documentation of a trip, but rather an idealized version of reality often featuring blue skies, sunshine and balmy weather (DeBres & Sowers 2009). The representation of Port Arthur on postcards through all periods does not reflect a leisure tradition common to postcards from other destinations. The overgrown vegetation, lush forested hills, foreboding dark clouds, fogs and mists in images of Port Arthur likely reflect a romantic ideal and visitor expectation about the nature of the site. Postcards of Port Arthur reflect tourist attempts to engage with the ‘sublime’ through the dramatic natural scenery at the site.

An ancient place

Within twenty years of Port Arthur’s closure as a penal settlement three bushfires tore through the site (in 1884, 1895 and 1897) and reduced many of the sandstone convict-built structures to ruins (Goc 2002). The convict-built structures represented human dominance and mastery of the landscape, and Romantic-era thought delighted at the overthrow of modern order by nature. The (historically) overgrown ruins at Port Arthur provided a means of experiencing awe (Wilson 2008). The ruins at Port Arthur had a similar aesthetic effect to the medieval remnants of churches and castles in England, while lending a Romantic appeal by being slowly reclaimed by nature (Wilson 2008). The iconic ruin of Port Arthur’s church was promoted by photographer J. W. Beattie as ‘Australia’s Glastonbury’ (Davidson & Spearritt 2000, p. 39), while others likened it to Tintern Abbey (Goc 2002). Other convict-built sandstone structures were considered reminiscent of classical ruins in Greece or Rome.

The aesthetic appeal of European antiquity on the Australian landscape also made the ruins a draw for tourists, as it visually rationalized their colonization of the land. The convict ruins provided (and still provide) historically significant markers for those of European ancestry in Australia, declared by a journalist who visited the site in 1918 as ‘Australia’s only bona fide ruin’ (Davidson & Spearritt 2000, p. 44; Wilson 2008, p. 47). The ruins themselves served to validify and embody European historical claims to Australia (Tumarkin 2005).

Postcards that focused on Port Arthur’s ruins formed a significant proportion of the postcard assemblage for all three phases, as images of the ruins are present in 51.4% (n=18) of all pre-First World War postcards, 31.3% (n=33) of all interwar postcards and 46.8% (n=22) of all post-Second World War postcards. The way in which the ruins were framed is meaningful in communicating the Romantic-Gothic appeal of nature reducing the previous penal settlement to rubble or their seemingly benign antiquity as objects from the distant past.

The portion of overgrown ruins is greatest postcards printed pre-First World War, with 77% (n=14) of all postcards featuring ruins in this period showing them overgrown with ivy and other forms of greenery, with the church being the most commonly depicted (Figure 5). The Isle of the Dead (also referred to as “Dead Island”) was the next most commonly depicted place at Port Arthur, which indicates that the Romantic-Gothic appeal of Port Arthur was of particular interest to tourists in this phase (Figure 2). Over time, through the interwar period and after World War II, depictions of the ruins became gradually more manicured and sterile, with images of cleaned ruins representing a larger proportion of postcards produced.

Much of this change through time could be accounted for by works to clean the ruins and establish the township of Carnarvon, particularly after the site was established as a heritage asset by the Scenery Preservation Board in 1916. Reproduction of historical images on postcards was popular in the interwar period, so while historical landscapes of romantic, overgrown ruins would have been available to print other images were selected instead.
In the post-Second World War postcard assemblage, images of the ruins are nearly as popular as in the pre-First World War assemblage (46.8% of all postcards). Of the ruin-focused postcard, 72.7% (n=22) show the ruins entirely cleaned of greenery (Figure 6). Images from postcards printed post-Second World War also increasingly featured the township and amenities developing alongside the ruins of Port Arthur and provide a juxtaposition of contemporary daily life and infrastructure alongside seemingly ancient ruins set in manicured lawns.

![Figure 5: Postcard titled ‘The Old Church, Port Arthur’, depicting the Church at Port Arthur covered in ivy, printed between 1905 and 1921 by J. Walch and Son. (Source: PAHSMA Resource Library, Image 1997.222, provided courtesy of PAHSMA.)](image)

![Figure 6: Postcard titled ‘Ruins Church, Port Arthur, TAS’ depicting the Church at Port Arthur cleaned of ivy, printed by Ash, Bester & Co. between 1940 and 1960. (Source: PAHSMA Resource Library, Image 1997.299, provided courtesy of PAHSMA.)](image)
A place of solitude—erasing people

People feature in a small portion of all postcards from Port Arthur, and only 58 postcards of 198 had people within them. Of those, nearly half (n=25) consisted of historical or artistic representations of convicts as opposed to then-contemporaneous pleasure seekers or residents of the town. There is a significant temporal element to the presence/absence of visitors and residents in postcards, and people slowly disappeared from images of Port Arthur through time. The gender of individuals depicted also changes considerably through time.

Tourists or residents appear in 25.8% (n=10) of all pre-First World War postcards, and men are present in all populated images while women appear in only three of the postcards, one of which also features a child. Most of the images are purposeful portraits of tourists and colourful local characters, as well as tourists gazing wistfully into the distance. Pre-First World War postcards also have the greatest proportion of images (of all periods) with tourists engaging solely with the site’s leisure amenities and the relaxation it might offer (n=5, 14.3%), though this represents a small proportion of the pre-First World War postcard assemblage overall.

Tourists or residents appear in only 14.1% (n=15) of interwar postcards, and in two of these the people in the images are in the distance and barely visible. Men are present in all but one image (which features actress Eva Novak on site during filming of *For the Term of His Natural Life*), though women are present in nearly half the images with people (n=7).

Of the post-Second World War postcards, only four have images with people present in them (8.5%). The first image depicts a tour guide in the Separate Prison, the second shows two women socializing in front of the ruins of the Separate prison, the third depicts the music box collection in Radcliffe’s Port Arthur Museum with a female visitor looking in glass display cases, and the final image shows the Port Arthur sports grounds with cars, campers, and people dotting the landscape. Although people in postcards becomes less common through time, female travellers become increasingly visible and are present in most images of tourists in the post-First World War postcards.

Regardless of the hundreds of people visiting Port Arthur in a day or week, by 1945 they were nearly entirely absent from postcard reproductions sent to friends and family back home. This is particularly notable as access to the site, particularly by motor vehicle, would have greatly improved from earlier periods of travel. The introduction of paid holidays for all Australian workers in 1940 also meant greater freedom and mobility for middle and working-class tourists, which would have helped boost tourist numbers (Davidson & Spearritt 2000). The influx of visitors as both access to the site and paid leave conditions improved contributed to changing constructions of the ‘ideal’ tourist experience at Port Arthur. As other tourists flocked to the site, solitude and the opportunity to engage meaningfully and ‘authentically’ with the site would have been increasingly valued. Postcards were a means of presenting these authentic experiences—in a vacant site unsullied by other tourists—to friends and family.

Conclusion

Several trends were identified during the analysis of postcards from PAHSMA’s collection dating from 1905 and 1968. The fluidity of depictions of Port Arthur through time illustrates the continued process of placemaking and changing ‘ideals’ in constructions of the site. Elements of dark tourism, Romanticism and the Romantic-Gothic manifest differently across temporal contexts, as does broader acknowledgement of the site’s convict history.

The significance of the site’s Romantic elements and the ability to experience the ‘sublime’ through the site’s dramatic natural scenery is evident in postcards produced through all phases. Dark skies, overgrown vegetation, fog and mists appear on imagery of the site for all periods of production in consistent levels. Most images focus in towards the forests and hills of Port Arthur, although the site is situated on a peninsula and surrounds a cove, providing ample scenic seascapes. The ominous nature of preferred images of Port Arthur, combined with the popularity of images of the ruins, suggests a leaning towards the Romantic-Gothic in depictions of the site. This presents a significant departure from traditional leisure conventions which see sunny skies and shorelines feature in postcards produced for other holiday destinations.
Postcards produced between 1905 and 1918 continued to name the site ‘Port Arthur’ though it had been officially renamed ‘Carnarvon’ by the Tasmanian government as a means of obscuring the site’s convict history. Romantic-Gothic interest, likely driven by the popularity of Marcus Clarke’s *For the Term of His Natural Life*, is evident in depictions of the site, with the ivy-laden Church and the Isle of the Dead being the most common places depicted. Images of ruins were the most common type of postcard for this period, and the majority of the ruins were heavily overgrown with greenery, symbolising the overthrow of human attempts to master the natural world in the Romantic mindset. As a contrast, this period also contained the largest proportion of images which depicted Port Arthur solely as a leisure-focused holiday destination. Beyond acknowledging the original name of the site, images on the postcards did not focus on sites of convict punishment or incarceration (real or imagined) or other dark tourism elements beyond the Isle of the Dead.

Postcards produced between 1919 and 1939 sought to recreate history, and a large proportion featured the site as a penal settlement, including artistic recreations of the convict era or reproduced images of the site in operation or recently abandoned. Postcards from the interwar period had the largest representation of convict punishment or death, real or imagined, both through visual reference to sites of incarceration and punishment and through the use of evocative titles. Titles that reference historical convict incarceration or punishment appear on seemingly unassociated images of buildings and landscapes. Many of the postcards produced between 1919 and 1939 did not have titles but depicted infamous convict elements at the site, suggesting that the sender could assume the receiver’s familiarity with the site. The construct of the ‘innocent and manly’ convict ancestor gained in popularity in academic thought after the First World War. Although Australia was federated in 1901, its involvement in this war established it as a nation independent of Britain, and with increased independence came a new ability to more freely criticise British Imperial history. Increased comfort in engaging with Port Arthur’s convict past, as well as its popularity after filming *For the Term* on site in 1926, drove a fascination with dark tourism and convict history.

All postcards produced between 1945 and 1960 had titles, though only one made direct reference to the site’s convict past. The Port Arthur ruins appear prominently on postcards from this period but they are generally cleaned of any overgrowth and set within a landscape of manicured lawns which began to dominate depictions of Port Arthur. The cleaned ruins appeared to be of great antiquity and without reference to their origins in any of the text they were depicted as being vaguely ‘historical’ or ‘ancient’. The ruins were also increasingly framed in the context of the developing Port Arthur township, further contrasting the seemingly ancient with modern amenity and civic pride. By the end of the Second World War the site’s role as a penal settlement was beyond living history. The composite of the most common postcard traits from this period suggest that it served as a piece of seemingly benign history reflecting European antiquity on the Australian landscape. Tourists were gradually eliminated from the landscape in images, even as visitor numbers and impacts to the site would have increased, indicating a desire to engage meaningfully with a vacant site as a form of ‘authentic’ experience.

Urry (1995, p. xx) goes so far as to state that ‘…identity almost everywhere has to be produced partly out of the images constructed or reproduced for tourists’. Tourist postcards from Port Arthur, alongside other forms of tourist material culture, served to (re)create Port Arthur as a tourist destination (Jones 2016). Depictions of Port Arthur in historical postcards reflected the ideals of tourists and tourism operators, as well as the means by which they meaningfully (or otherwise) engaged with the site’s convict history.
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