The Broad Arrow Café, Port Arthur, Tasmania: using social values methodology to resolve the commemoration issues

Jane Lennon

This paper is dedicated to the memory of the 35 people who lost their lives in the Port Arthur tragedy and to the 54 persons who shared their feelings and opinions with me for this study.

The Broad Arrow Café was an undistinguished café-cum-gift shop in a converted sports pavilion, built in the 1950s to service sportspeople using the adjacent oval. It was the main visitor refreshment facility in the Port Arthur Historic Site and was due for replacement when it became the scene of a massacre of 20 people out of a total of 35 killed in the vicinity by a lone gunman on 28 April 1996. The tragedy so shocked the nation, as well as the range of communities with attachments to the victims or to the place, that it became the catalyst for uniform national gun laws prohibiting private ownership of automatic weapons.

The Café was partly demolished in December 1996. Opinions were sharply divided on whether it should be totally demolished or retained, and possibly incorporated in a memorial garden on or around the site. Legal and administrative problems delayed the decision-making.

In January 1998, the Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority (PAHSMA) commissioned me to identify the cultural significance of the Broad Arrow Café, and to formulate policies and strategies to guide its management in the immediate future, including design constraints and opportunities for its possible inclusion within a proposed memorial garden.

'Cultural significance' is the term used in heritage assessments and defined in the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance (the Burra Charter) to mean 'aesthetic, historic, scientific or social value for past, present or future generations'. 'Social value' is about collective attachment to places that hold meanings important to a community and is the primary heritage value associated with the Broad Arrow Café. The brief prepared in conjunction with the Port Arthur Heritage Advisory Panel called for the use of the Australian Heritage Commission's social values methodology prepared by Chris Johnston in 1992.

The question my study had to answer was: What is the value of this place to people now and will it have heritage value in the future? Arriving at the answer involved consulting a wide range of stakeholders who comprise the various communities of interest in the Café.

Assessing social value

Social value is about the special meanings attached to places by groups of people (rather than by individuals). These places are usually community-owned or publicly accessible or, in some other ways, 'appropriated' into people's daily lives. The meanings given to a place are additional to other values such as historic or aesthetic, and may not be obvious in the fabric of the place or be obvious to a disinterested observer. Social values are fundamentally about people's values regarding a place, not those that arise out of a detached professional view. Understanding these values requires care and deliberation, being sensitive to the range of views, hearing what is said and what remains unsaid, and being rigorous in recording and summarizing the views.

The process of understanding the social value of a place as currently defined by the heritage criteria involves the following four steps:

1. Defining the 'community of interest' and its values and charting the meanings it attaches to places;
2. Identifying and clarifying the nature and degree of significance of that place to the community, the strength of the associations which underpin the social value;
3. Preparing an agreed statement of the social value of the place; and
4. Understanding how the value of the place can be conserved.

Essentially any process or method used to explicitly define social value will need to:

- accept and validate subjectivity;
- recognise that responses will express aspirations for the future as well as about the past and present;
- result in a greater understanding of the contemporary cultural context; and
- recognise that within any community there will be incompatible or conflicting perceptions of social value.

1. Defining the community of interest

The social value of the Broad Arrow Café will vary between the different groups that make up the community of interest. These groups include:

The staff of Port Arthur Historic Site: the Board, office and works staff, ticket sellers and reception staff, and tour guides. The tragedy raised several new concepts from the point of view of staff. Firstly, that of 'negative social value' – the desire of a community to have a place obliterated. Secondly, the concept of a building representing an 'emotional intrusion' distinct from a visual or physical intrusion, whereby its presence affects the mental and emotional well-being of a large number of staff and community members associated with the tragedy. The Broad Arrow Café is a constant visual reminder of direct and indirect experiences associated with the tragedy. Seeing it can trigger intense depression and feelings of inadequacy and
insecurity, plus a range of other emotions that have detrimental effects upon both the working and social lives of affected people. Immediately after the tragedy the overwhelming majority of staff wanted the Café demolished; but two years on the majority wanted it retained or incorporated in some form in the proposed memorial garden. In the intervening time, attitudes and values had changed as staff and the broader community came to terms with the tragedy. There was also a high staff turnover; those remaining either loved the place and their job or were unable to move away but coped with the physical evidence of the tragedy in the form of buildings, trees and places where their friends died.

The Tasman Peninsula Community: As PAHSMA was the largest employer on the Peninsula, the majority of the community has either relatives or friends who are staff members. The local community is a complex group and incorporates a high proportion of friends and relatives of the deceased as well as staff.

Families of victims and visitors not resident on the Peninsula but present at the tragedy: These people from all over Australia and Malaysia had a range of views, which have been quoted in the study and summarized in Table 1. They were consulted by direct interview, phone conversations and letters. The Tasmanian Health Department had a special support network for this group which enabled the consultant to have contact.

Tourist operators: The tourist accommodation operators saw the Café, in its derelict form, as a blight on the Historic Site and wanted faster action in creating the memorial garden. Tourist coach drivers said that they mentioned the tragedy in passing but that most visitors wanted details of the convict era.

Other Australians: A considerable proportion of Tasmanians and other Australians, especially past visitors to Port Arthur, appear to have been indirectly affected. A random sample of people encountered in the course of this study were asked for their views. Unless they knew the site they all referred to the loss of life and the consequent gun law reforms. Others suggested a memorial in a place they already thought of as a memorial to Australia's convict past.

Heritage professionals: Those contacted, including the Port Arthur Heritage Advisory Panel, were concerned that some considered assessment be made before precipitate action occurred. There were queries as to whether the Australian Heritage Commission social values methodology was appropriate for a site of tragedy but all agreed that the Café had no significance except for its association with the tragedy.

In addition to talking with the people described above, the voluminous print media reporting and philosophizing about the tragedy and its impacts were read. The series of articles by renowned Tasmanian writers and historians in a special edition of Island magazine published not long after the tragedy and an article by Eleanor Corlín Casella specifically on the heritage of mourning at Port Arthur, published in 1997 in the U.S journal Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites, provided historical context.

2. Identifying the degree of significance/strength of association

In 1998, the tragedy represented an event of regional and national importance relating to the occurrence of a major violent crime and the large-scale loss of human life outside the context of a war, or civil uprising. As the primary setting of the tragedy, the Broad Arrow Café has, unavoidably, become a place of social value to many individuals and communities.

This association has been further reinforced by media reporting of the tragedy, which featured images of the Café and its surroundings, and had worldwide distribution. The shootings, the Broad Arrow Café and Port Arthur itself have become synonymous in and through media accounts. However, the sister of one of the deceased said: 'I see the Broad Arrow Café as a symbol or focal point of the events of the 28th, and not as the site'.

The degree of significance and strength of association is reflected in both negative and positive social value attached to the Café.

Negative social value

Negative Social Value has been expressed in the desire to have a place obliterated. This stems from perceptions of the building as being an 'emotional intrusion.' Emotions frequently result in very strong views about the building.

In Australia negative social value is associated with Aboriginal massacre sites, with dangerous occupation sites such as gasworks, pipeworks and foundries, mine and rail disaster sites, with bushfire and floods, with bridge collapses, nuclear test sites, landslides and earthquakes. Ironically, it has historical precedence in Port Arthur. During the late nineteenth century, the local community was far from proud of the previous convict settlement at Port Arthur, which was 'a stain' upon the fine history of Tasmania and the remains of the settlement were a reminder that a significant proportion had 'descended from criminals.' Much of the convict settlement was destroyed in bush fires possibly deliberately it, and the official place name was changed to Carnarvon.

Whilst the Broad Arrow Café as the scene of many of the deaths and of the bravery afterwards evokes strong emotional responses, the desire to obliterate the structure relates to the very real psychological trauma which the place engenders, as well as the fear of immortalising the incident, the murderer Bryant and the risk of providing a reference for 'copy cat' crimes. Negative social value was prevalent amongst those who had regular exposure to the Broad Arrow Café, including PAHSMA staff and related members of the local community.

Positive social value

Positive Social Value can be found where a place is highly valued by a community for its cultural and social associations or the place exhibits characteristics valued by a community.
The place does not necessarily have to be valued for positive events or association, it can include the sites of disasters, gaols or other negative experiences which the community wishes to remember.

Positive social values arising from the tragedy include aspects of the support given by one person to another on site during the 28th along with the subsequent support from the community to those who had suffered, plus the effect of the tragedy in initiating a nationwide public reappraisal of the place of guns in the community.

These social values are widely acknowledged by the national community. For those outside of Port Arthur, the Broad Arrow Cafe is one image that regularly appeared in the media reports about the tragedy – an unlikely symbol that highlights the senseless loss of life at a site used for visitor and recreational enjoyment. Perhaps for many, this link is strongest. The Broad Arrow may represent the fact that any ordinary Australian could have been a target of the gunman.

Healing is a positive value. It is associated with the need for those who have suffered from the tragedy to confront the place which is the source of their suffering. This is a recognised part of the grieving process as it generally assists the emotional recovery of the sufferer. In this case the sufferers primarily included those who were on the site during the 28th, whether they were visitors, staff or support service personnel, plus the relatives and friends of the deceased.

Values as expressed by Tasmanian writers

Both the negative and positive values expressed about the place are eloquently summarised in P.R. Hay’s article ‘Port Arthur -Where Meanings Collide’:

“The wretched events of 28-29 April must become part of Port Arthur’s evolving meaning. But they must not be allowed to obliterate the complexities that constitute its existing, multifold and ongoing meaning...Port Arthur’s essence, as a place, is a human essence.

So many meanings... but here is a community still intact and robust... with such reserves of fortitude and resilience that the resolution of the insecurities lodged in its unfaced past is well within its capacities...there still is a Tasmanian specialness...In the wake of 28 April 1996 there is an elusive truth which Tasmanians hold in trust for the world. It is to do with authentic living within thoughtfully constructed structures of community...Start at Port Arthur.”

Another Tasmanian writer and historian, Greg Young has accused the professional conservation industry of surrendering the difficult quest for meaning at Port Arthur to the quasys realm of cultural silence. Richard Flanagan has argued that every attempt has been made to quarantine Port Arthur in its convict past and to present it as an endpoint to the British Empire, rather than as a series of beginnings for modern Australia. With regard to its contemporary meaning, Peter McBe has written: “For those who care, Port Arthur, after the pain of the present, will regain its significance, and still be hauntingly beautiful asking of us answers to the same old questions, plus some newer ones”

Award-winning international travel writer Brian Johnston noted that:

The contrast between the beauty of its setting and the ugliness of its function made Port Arthur the Jekyll and Hyde of tourism...That was the problem: you had no right to make an evil place attractive to tourists....when Port Arthur reopened to tourism in the wake of its modern-day massacre, I wondered anew about this difficult interface between daytripping and reality, and how it was being addressed.

These writers have highlighted the difficulties for the range of communities in coming to terms with the violence and suffering in Tasmania’s convict past, and with this most recent chapter from the tragedy of 28 April 1996 at the Port Arthur Historic Site.

Community views towards the site and structure

In order to assess the heritage values of the Broad Arrow Café, a range of issues affecting the people involved — the communities of interest — were identified and considered. Staff, relatives and visitors were asked whether they had any attachment to the fabric and environs of the Café and how the structure should be managed in the future.

**TABLE 1: Opinions of Communities of Interest**

<table>
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<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
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*Table 1* reflects the views of communities of interest. The degree of attachment to the Café and surrounds varied according to the community of interest:

- The majority of all groups wished to retain and/or transform the structure.
- Staff had the widest range of opinions.
- Staff, local residents, families of the deceased and survivors of the tragedy had very strong feelings and opinions about the structure and associate it with individuals and remembrance of these as well as with both gruesome and heroic acts on the day. All families of the deceased, except one, agreed to accept the consensus view of that group regarding the future treatment of the café structure as part of a memorial garden.
- Others saw it as the place where the killings led to national gun controls and they viewed the event as one of destruction leading to a positive outcome in the national interest, rather than one connected with individuals known personally.
- Still others considered the tragedy as another chapter in the history of Port Arthur and one which should be acknowledged by leaving the physical remains standing or
alternatively, by constructing a monument which symbolizes long-term healing and reconciliation with over 200 years of European history at Port Arthur.

Concern has been expressed about the apparently narrow focus of consultation, especially the lack of a survey of visitors who make up the largest ‘community of interest’ in the site. However, a detailed visitor survey was not called for in the Brief and as social value by its very definition is about a strong collective attachment to a place, in this case the Broad Arrow Café, those most affected have been almost all contacted.

Summary of community views

The Café has nation-wide social value because of its connection with the tragedy.

• For some communities this value is related to deceased friends and relatives;
• for others it is related to nature of the tragedy, evoking both negative and positive responses;
• for others such as historians, writers and cultural tourists, it is part of the ongoing history of the site.

Other heritage values

The Café had negligible architectural value and was visually intrusive aesthetically, but the building site and its surrounds have historic value as they are situated above a convict-era stonemason’s yard and overseers’ quarters which have not been archaeologically investigated.

Prior to the tragedy the historical value of the Café itself was minimal. The tragedy represents an event of major regional and national significance. The importance of the event relates to the occurrence of a major violent crime and the large-scale loss of human life outside the context of a war, or civil uprising. The event brought into focus senseless violence and its ramifications in contemporary Australian society. The significance of the tragedy was further enhanced through the subsequent effects upon the nation, including the political ramifications of uniform national gun control legislation and through the widespread social re-appraisal of the need for firearms within the community.

The scale and importance of the after-effects of the tragedy will not be fully realised for some time. As the primary setting of the tragedy, the Broad Arrow Café has, unavoidably, become a place of historic value.

The historic value of the event may yet be wider than the tragedy itself. The tragedy shocked and angered the nation in a way that no domestic event in recent memory has and was the catalyst for the Prime Minister succeeding in achieving a major rewriting of gun legislation in each Australian State and Territory and in obtaining stricter controls on the depiction of violence in the media. Prior to the tragedy, the legislation controlling sale and ownership of automatic and semi-automatic guns was the responsibility of individual States and Territories and the provisions and controls varied widely. This led to loopholes through which guns could be purchased in one State and moved to another with relative ease. Attempts at reform had been slow and had been opposed in some States, especially Tasmania. Public emotions and response to the tragedy provided the catalyst for the gun law reforms.

Although suffering, hardship and death were a feature of Port Arthur historically, the Site’s major significance is as a site for the secondary punishment of transported convicts. Convict suffering and death were institutional and sanctioned to a large degree by the society at the time, based on belief in the reformative nature of the convict system, although it is recorded that many convicts did not reform. 1200 of them are buried on the Isle of the Dead in the adjoining Carnarvon Bay.

The 1996 tragedy is unrelated in that it is a random and illegal act, beyond sanctioned behaviour in society. However, it has added another violent chapter of death and suffering to the history of Port Arthur.

The desire to obliterate the Café from the Site probably does have precedent at Port Arthur in the historical attempts last century to remove the convict association, ‘the hated stain’, from the Site, and in the second half of this century to turn it into an attractive park of picturesque ruins. The convict past illustrated in the structures at Port Arthur evoked such strong feelings of repulsion last century that there were attempts at destruction and demolition – the social value of that time before it passed into historic value and became the rationale for heritage tourism.

Heritage significance and scale

The issue of scale underlies the assessment of the heritage significance of the Café. As it is a cultural landscape of national historical significance, to what degree do local, regional, national or international concerns shape its management? As these perspectives will differ, which scale of interest holds most significance? And who plays judge or mediator? These are common questions facing historic site managers:

In the past, institutionalised decisions on heritage and cultural value were made from a regional or national level authority. However, this ‘heritage-isation’ of space has been increasingly criticised for disenfranchising local communities from their history and rewriting it as heritage. Wendy McCarthy, then Chair of the Australian Heritage Commission, also recognised this issue of scale and ownership and the Commission endorsed the social value methodology which urged that incorporation of the interests of local communities was essential for a conservation program to evoke the associations and memories of a place. However, heritage managers must act as ‘advocates for the future of heritage places while respecting and recognising the desires and decisions of the present’. In this context Casella asked:

How can we best manage material and cultural landscapes that gain their primary significance from unimaginably hideous tragedies? Is retention of these sites a glorification of inhumanity, or a physical testimony and warning to future generations? How can we use material and cultural landscapes to heal from the experience? Do we conserve the architectural place for future pilgrimages?

3. Preparing an agreed statement of social value of the place

In accordance with the methodology outlined in the Burra Charter for compiling a statement of significance, the site, its history, the nature of the tragedy and its impact on a range of communities were examined and assessed as well as constraints arising from that assessment. The following statement of cultural significance is a summary of all the preceding investigation:

• As the main setting of a recent national tragedy, which became the catalyst for national legislation prohibiting private ownership of automatic and semi-automatic guns,
the Broad Arrow Café at Port Arthur Historic Site, Tasmania, demonstrates very high cultural significance because of its social values.

- The Broad Arrow Café had little historic or aesthetic value but the tragic events of 28 April 1996 have radically transformed the way people view it.
- The new social values associated with the place vary throughout the national community and include strong, polarised opinions generated by the highly emotional nature of the tragedy and its political ramifications.
- The Café has become a symbol of the tragedy and the place of remembrance and mourning for some visitors, survivors and relatives of those lost. For others, it is a hideous reminder of a terrible event or a monument to a criminal.
- The Broad Arrow Café holds symbolic value to the Tasmanian and Australian communities as well. The fact that unpredictable violence on such a massive scale could occur, not only within a quiet rural community but also at a national historic site, caused fear and the realisation that ‘it could happen to anyone, anywhere’.
- Aware of the deliberate site destruction already experienced at Port Arthur during its late-nineteenth-century period as Carnarvon township, many people have highlighted the parallels between obliteration of the ‘convict stain’ and current pledges to dismantle the Café rather than conserve it as part of Australia’s history. Port Arthur is a public place dedicated to conserving our convict history but now it is also a place of remembrance of private suffering and loss.

As the nineteenth-century penal buildings at Port Arthur speak to us of the suffering and treatment of the convicts, so the Broad Arrow Café speaks to us of the 1996 tragedy and the suffering and loss which it caused. Prior to the tragedy the Café was of local significance as the postwar sports pavilion that had been adapted for use as a café and it was of no significance to the convict history of Port Arthur.

The Broad Arrow Café has cultural significance primarily for its social value as a place of remembrance of those who died and were injured in the tragedy. For survivors, friends, relatives and others touched by the tragedy, the place has become a symbol, as well as a memorial, evocative of the events of 28 April 1996.

This meaning will change over time, but differences in opinion on the social value of the Café are unlikely to be reconciled:

You won't please all the people... You can never please everybody here.

Or

...ultimately it matters how we negotiate the emotional gulf between those who are polarised over the issue and how we grasp the opportunity to build from a demonstration of the worst aspect of our human capabilities, a memorial that honours our capacity to evolve and grow to greater wisdom...

4. Understanding how the social value of the place can be conserved

In order to maintain this social value focused on the Broad Arrow Café, constraints arising from the assessment of social values had to be considered. As social value is involved with the feelings of groups of people towards the place, it is important as part of the process of assessing cultural significance to consider non-heritage constraints such as psychological health and its requirements.

Constraints:

Social Value versus the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

For those who witnessed the shootings, the symbolism and social value of the Café structure could be eclipsed by recurring, powerful images, which they will be experiencing as part of post-traumatic stress. This was illustrated by the following submissions:

I don’t think we need the café...it’s a terrifying reminder of the terror that went on that day...we feel very strongly against having such a horrific visual reminder of that tragic day.

By removing anything to remind us of what went on that day and replacing the area entirely with beauty we effectively wipe the slate clean, leaving only a nice place to reflect and remember.

However, it was necessary to balance the effects of post-traumatic stress against the social values both negative and positive, as shown by the following submissions:

Under no circumstances should any more of this building be removed. The Broad Arrow Café is a sacred site and should be treated with absolute respect.

...the people who want all traces of the café removed, don’t they realise that no matter what is put there it will still be the place where 20 people died.

Culturally significant sites with strong traumatic links are rare. The most widely known are perhaps the concentration camps at Auschwitz and the structural remnants of Hiroshima Town Hall, which are currently preserved for their World Heritage values. Whilst the scale of death and suffering at Port Arthur is not comparable to Auschwitz, the two sites share aspects of their significance – both being the site of atrocities inflicted by humans upon their fellows, upon innocent persons trying to go about a peaceful existence. However, there is one notable difference in the issues affecting the two sites. At Port Arthur, many of those involved have to continue living and working in the setting of their tragedy whilst at Auschwitz the survivors were relocated away from the reminders of their suffering and can choose to visit the site as a memorial. However it should also be noted that there has been a major recruitment of new staff at Port Arthur since 28 April 1996, as many chose not to return to work there.

The hardest concept for persons not associated with the events of the tragedy to understand is the reality that for many of those who were closely involved their lives will never be the same again – they cannot live their lives in the same manner as before the tragedy because their values and priorities in life have changed, and they may exhibit recurring post-traumatic symptoms for the rest of their lives.

Recovery and healing process

Important early stages of the grieving process include the sufferer accepting what has happened and the release of emotions. For many, acceptance requires their return to face the Broad Arrow Café. This is where the presence of the building has positive psychological effects.

In July 1996 about 700 people attended religious ‘cleansing'
ceremonies at the Port Arthur Historic Site. The ceremonies involved members of the Tasmanian Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim communities and included prayers, blessings, chants, meditations and symbolic offerings to restore spiritual health to the site. The ceremonies allowed people of the three faiths to visit the site without fear of evil.

The local doctors at Nubeena asked for significant time to elapse to allow the grieving process to be worked through and for ‘people’s feelings about this place to attain a more settled perspective’. This is borne out in the following submissions.

…it is of some importance to my mother to retain the structure in some form… it seems that many of the survivors and their families and friends will always have a need to come back to something.

…nothing can override or supersede what has been experienced and observed by people like us who understand only too well, the horror, trauma and repulsion that was felt by all there. The presence of the partly demolished Broad Arrow as it stands today, provides a sense of reality to an event that people are still trying to come to grips with and without it, it may take longer, if at all.

Their inability to comprehend the size, perspective and layout of the Broad Arrow meant that they never understood how so many were killed so quickly and why no one tried to stop Bryant. This is a very common belief and in fact has meant that some family members have harboured anger at the victims for not trying to do anything. They began to privately see the victims as passive or cowardly. Only when they walk through the Broad Arrow do they understand the situation and this too is a cathartic experience as it removes a lot of pain, fear and anger, and is replaced with a sense of peace, understanding and more importantly, control over their lives once more.

For some it is necessary to confront their fears, to restore some sense of security to see that where there was recently death there is now life.

From personal experience, the strength that is achieved from confronting and conquering fear and pain is such a positive and healing reaction that it should not be dismissed or trivialized. The initial argument for demolition of the Café because it traumatizes should now be balanced with the strength and sense of personal achievement that is gained on entering the Café. In my opinion, the very presence of the Café provides this cathartic healing and it far outweighs any trauma felt.

People also appear to reach a stage of recovery where regular reminders become a nuisance, an obstruction to their ‘getting on with their lives’ and possibly obstructing further recovery. Some staff and locals believe that preserving the structure of the Café and providing a grand memorial will prevent recovery and have stated this as follows:

They should have demolished it completely so people can sign off from the tragedy and stop all this lingering fuss. …the sooner it is completely removed the better. The way it is now is a disgrace to the Historic Site – it looks too much like a ‘bomb site’. Life goes on and many local people feel as I do...

However psychiatric opinion is divided on the need for those affected to confront the actual site/spaces as part of the recovery process. It depends on individual response and in a public place such as Port Arthur the whole range of responses can be expected.

A need for remembrance

Remembrance of a tragedy has two components. The first involves remembrance and respect of those who died. Typically this is done in a positive manner, not by focusing on how and when they died, but in celebrating their lives, their wholesome qualities and their contributions to the lives of others. In this case, you might also draw on the love and support that persons provided to others on the day. This is a memorial to the people.

The second component is remembrance of an event – the horror. The need for us never-to-forget the terrible harm that persons within our society are capable of inflicting on others. The fear that we must remember and learn from the tragedy or history will repeat itself all too soon. The need for remembrance of the event is a highly contentious issue:

The demolition of this building is tantamount to denying the horror of what actually happened.

As has been proved since time began, and throughout the world, people must have a certain place to visit and reflectively remember the occasion that produced, and is the reason for the memorial in front of them.

My family would like to have the café as it now stands (no doors roof or windows), as this building now blends in with the historic site, and leaves one with the haunting knowledge that suffering has once again been enacted.

Other submissions offered contrary views:

We realise Port Arthur is the site of many old historical buildings, but the café and what happened in and around there should not be allowed to stand as the reminder of one mad man’s whim.

…to memorialise the incident by leaving anything remaining to do with that day is just not necessary. To me all that would do is give something for tourists to look at in a morbid and sensational way… what is in danger of happening is making it somewhat of a tourist attraction in itself, which only goes to remind people of the perpetrator over and over again which I am sure was his intention in the first place.

A symbol of tragedy

The Café is one image that recurred in media reports and became a primary symbol of the tragedy, which reminds us of our own vulnerability, the fragility of the human body. Even in such a beautiful and peaceful environment, one day without warning we could be the subject of intense violence and destruction – the often repeated notion ‘if this could happen at Port Arthur, then it could happen anywhere’.

Although my three girls did not die in the Broad Arrow Café, yet it remains a symbol of all that occurred on that day. It represents the total horror that was let loose, and yet it also reminds me of the many feats of personal bravery, extraordinary effort, and love that rose to the surface in many ordinary caring people.

For those that were on-site on 28 April, the symbol is even stronger due to their closer association with events:

…if the café were gone, visitors to the site would not be
able to put into perspective what happened inside that building on that Sunday afternoon.

Many submissions reflected on the symbolism of the Café as the setting of the tragedy:

Today the penitentiary stands as a symbol of respect and admiration for those who endured the violence and hardship of their time. The crucial question is, in 20 years from now, what will be standing in honour of the 35 innocent people who lost their lives on April 28th, 1996? The truth cannot be hidden. Further destruction of the Broad Arrow Café is not the answer.

Port Arthur is an historic site. But what are we going to do with Australian history? Keep rewriting it and making it nice and clean? This is another chapter so let it stand and be part of history even if people are not comfortable. Leave it as a ruin, it's not threatening anymore. It's a monument and lets you get your thoughts in order especially having been wounded there and survived.

Simply put, the Broad Arrow is part of the history of the Site. It is a continuum of what the Historic Site represents in its purest form. It is unquestionably a place of human suffering and horror, but it is also a place of immense human courage and selflessness, of the incomparable human spirit. Despite the horror that appears to have immortalized the Broad Arrow’s reputation, it is also the place where enormous emotional strength and courage overcame horror and fear. These two antonyms are what the Broad Arrow symbolizes today, and should into the future.

...it is important to understand that the people who lost their lives on that day ‘had gone from the most destructive, fearful and violent moment of their lives to one of complete peacefulness’. It is for this reason that the café serves as a symbol of ‘the end of violence, the beginning of peace’.

The Broad Arrow Café does possess direct links with social effects such as the nationwide push for tighter gun control following the tragedy. However, while the building fabric itself does not demonstrate these effects, it represents the setting of the event which was the catalyst for them to occur.

The desire to destroy the symbol of the tragedy

Because the Broad Arrow Café symbolises the tragedy for many, there was a belief that in some way the destruction of this symbol would make amends for the tragedy. The belief is irrational, although the destruction of the Café may be of some psychological benefit – an important ritual to assist the emotional recovery of many. However, there remains the possibility that the space left by the removal of the building may become as prominent a reminder of the tragedy as the fabric was. As one widow said, ‘Seeing the walls reminds me that he has really gone’.

The staff realised that a lot of ‘gore junkies’ were attracted to the Site and many of the requests they received for information were from people soliciting gruesome details. Popular culture addiction to ‘violence as entertainment’ imbued the Café structure with some very ugly meanings in comparison to those who knew the bravery and best virtues of those present during the tragedy.

Summary of constraints

• In considering social value for a site associated with such loss of life in one event the whole range of human emotions are encountered from horror through to total denial of the impact, personal and social, and implications of such an event on those involved, through to considering only the positive aspects such as the heroic bravery and courage of some on-site. The recovery process involves caring for post-traumatic stress, assisting healing, allowing remembrance and providing symbols for that remembrance.

• If such a massacre had happened in a privately owned place or one without a nationally acknowledged convict past, the individual responses would remain just that – personal and individual, without the community or theSocial value value.

It appears that those who expressed strong anger, denial, horror etc. at the tragedy and focused this on their desire to demolish the Café were now, two years on, considering the Café in terms of linking their suffering with that of the convict past – this symbol of suffering in the physical evidence of the Café structure offers possibilities for interpreting themes in our history. Individual responses as part of the healing process are recognising the collective suffering of others now and in the past.

5. Conserving the social value on site

Conserving the social value of the Broad Arrow Café required consideration of a range of management issues: whether retention and maintenance of the fabric and space of the Café were essential; the form of remembrance; whether a memorial garden was appropriate in a Site dedicated to preserving evidence of the convict past; existing structural integrity, existing Site conditions, visitor management requirements, management obligations, external influences and regional economics.

Is the fabric significant for retention of the social value of the site? From the 1970s Australian heritage conservation emphasised physical attributes of heritage places and was mostly concerned with fabric but understanding meanings and associations with places led to revision of the Burra Charter (finally in 1999). A central objective of heritage management is the preservation of places, usually through maintenance of their physical form. However the conservation of the physical elements or the architectural spaces is not always necessary in order to maintain the heritage values of the place.

This is the key issue in relation to managing the heritage values of the Broad Arrow Café with its social and historical meanings. Does the significance reside in the fabric or in the site/place where the tragedy occurred? Arguments for and against retention of the fabric as a means of maintaining social value.
were considered. As with deciding the cultural significance of the Cafés, proponents for both retention and demolition of the fabric recognise that an issue of scale underlies this debate.

Resolution

PAHSMA prepared a discussion paper immediately after the tragedy on the future of the Cafés in which demolition of the structure's fabric was justified through evidence of its social impact, the relocation of commercial facilities to the new visitor centre and the inappropriateness of using the building to interpret the tragedy.18

Two years after the tragedy, two alternative approaches were suggested:

• The memorial should have a tangible link with the Broad Arrow Cafés - such as by incorporating a piece of wall left standing or perhaps being constructed of stone left over from demolition of the walls.
• The memorial should be sited at the location of the Broad Arrow Café - generally viewed as being most appropriate, although other options included adjacent to the public cemetery of the township of Port Arthur at the entry to the Historic Site, and in the vicinity of the Toll Booth so that visitors coming to commemorate their loved ones would not have to pay entry to the Historic Site.

Through these approaches there would be a transformation of the original fabric, rather than obliteration of it. The value of its association with the event, rather than being lost, would somehow become emotionally approachable through this process of re-construction.

Casilla suggested that:

Through a metamorphosis of the fabric, negative histories embodied within such reconfigured buildings or spaces are neither ignored nor glorified. The focus of both a history and experience of such a heritage place could become the powerful ability to survive: to transcend the grief, to change the circumstances, to continue with life.14

Comments received as part of this study from those personally affected bear this out.

...the café ruins should be incorporated in a memorial garden... no matter what is put there it will still be the place where 20 people died.

As for the building, I would like to see more of the walls pulled down leaving only parts of them standing to look more like ruins and not like a building without a roof... I would love to see a garden growing in and around the building as I really fancy the idea of nature reclaiming it.

Transformation

Eighteen months after the partial demolition of the Broad Arrow Cafés, these views were expressed by one survivor:

To enter the Broad Arrow in its present state, with no roof, windows, or joinery evokes a sense of release, of freedom and of survival over immense tragedy. It is a true and simple symbol of strength and survival. It has been sufficiently altered to prevent a mirror image recall or flashback of events. It has an almost ethereal atmosphere now, and does not exude an evil or threatening aura. This sense of atmosphere has been commented upon numerous times, particularly at the Anniversary Service where ironically, emotions and memories were at their most focused. Many people left that day with a deeper sense of understanding and compassion for all those involved in the massacre, not just for those killed... It was a very moving transformation...

Given that the Café currently has nation-wide social value, the transformation of the fabric and space that make up the Café was best done as part of the process of making a memorial on site, a place of quiet remembrance.

I look for a resolution so that we may move on but the last eighteen months have taught me that the "process" itself is of vital importance.

Overview of the proposed memorial

In June 1996 the Port Arthur Memorial Working Group of 15 local community representatives was established to investigate options and develop a process to produce an appropriate design for a memorial to the tragedy. The Working Group held at least 10 meetings to consider a design brief, survey Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority and the 165 public submissions that it received on the nature and design of a proposed memorial. Its recommendations can be summarised as follows:

• The memorial shall be in the form of 'a landscape' in which organic and built elements are integrated, as opposed to a single feature such as a monolith... built elements must harmonise with their setting.
• The memorial is seen as a tribute by the Australian community to those affected by the events of 28 April 1996 at Port Arthur.
• All groups have had an opportunity for input into the process and no one group has a greater right than any other has in determining what an appropriate memorial should be.

The Memorial Committee was evenly divided as to whether the Broad Arrow Café should be retained or removed. Retention was supported if the appearance of the remains of the building were sympathetically reduced or screened. As professional advice indicated that the remains possessed healing value to some persons and were emotionally upsetting to others, they recommended to the designers that the Café structure be treated in a manner whereby it was not readily apparent to visitors, that is, that a conscious decision to enter the Café shell would be required from visitors.

The PAHSMA requirements for a memorial were tied to the timing of the new visitor centre which would then allow redevelopment of the previous service area – café, parking, toilets etc; they also wanted low maintenance and separate interpretation of the tragedy. The decision finally rested with PAHSMA.

Community expectations for the resolution of conflicting approaches to maintaining social value at the Broad Arrow Café were high, following the nationwide media publicity, and for those directly affected by their links through the support network established by the Tasmanian government after the 28th.

As the Statement of Cultural Significance for the Café, developed from following the social values methodology, stated that the structure has now become a symbol of the tragedy and a place of remembrance, the walls and structural remains should be retained in situ and the garden developed around it.

Accordingly, the following conservation policy was recommended:
The heritage values of the Café associated with the events of the 28th April 1996 should be conserved by retaining enough of the structure of the Broad Arrow Café to commemorate those who lost their lives. The structure should be approached as a memorial inviting quiet remembrance and reflection.

Of the seven options considered for treating the fabric and space of the Café to conserve its social value, the option of leaving the walls intact and incorporating them into the proposed memorial garden was recommended. It provided flexibility in maintaining the social and symbolic value currently associated with the space of the Broad Arrow Café while treating it as a place of memorial associated with a garden of reflection. It also provides maximum flexibility for further treatments of the structural fabric.

This option also honoured the commitment given by the government to establish a memorial garden. Most people consulted during the study supported the development of a memorial garden around the Café structure. In January 1999, PAHSMA accepted the recommendations of conservation study and Torquil Canning who had been a member of the Memorial Committee undertook the landscape design and drystone walling as the site was transformed from ruined café to memorial.

Conclusion

With the passage of time, the individual responses of those directly associated with the tragedy and the ability to assess the effectiveness of the national gun laws may lead to some reassessment of the appropriateness of the maintenance of the fabric and space in its current form. At some point social value will pass into historic value and this reassessment will be required, as has already happened at Port Arthur with the World War I soldier’s memorial avenue of cypress trees.

By following the social values methodology the communities of interest with deep attachment to the Broad Arrow Café site were identified. This allowed for extraneous parties and ‘noise’ in the process to be filtered out during the study so that the communities of interest then participated in the development of a statement of significance for the site which then logically led to the consideration of how to treat the fabric remaining and the meanings attached to the site. By using the social values methodology at a time when decision making was stalled due to conflicting emotions and opinions, I believe a successful compromise was reached so that the tragic associations are memorialised in such a way that both individuals with social values relating to the site and visitors to the wider convict Historic Site can find meaning.

I invite you to go to the Broad Arrow Café site with its reflective pool and garden and consider whether you think the social value is being conserved.

Note

This paper is derived from Jane Lennon, Broad Arrow Café Conservation Study, unpublished report to the Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority, 1998.

References

Historic Environment 17.1 2003. Selected papers from the Islands of Vanishment Conference.
Marquis-Kyle, Peter and Walker, Meredith The Illustrated Burra Charter: Making good decisions about the care of important places, Australia ICOMOS 1992.
Young, Gregory The Isle of Gothic Silence’, Island 80/81 1997, 31-35.

Endnotes

12. They are of course the focus of this Conference; see papers published in Historic Environment 17.1 2003, especially those by Read, Logan, Leinweber and Domicelj.