The management of paradox: the archaeology of the Port Arthur landscape

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This paper examines, through the eyes of an archaeologist, the often noted contradiction between the beauty of Port Arthur and the knowledge and evidence of its disturbing history, how this contradiction is manifest in the landscape, its importance, and its management. The ‘disturbing history’ refers to Port Arthur’s convict past, not more recent tragic events. How this extra layer of cruelty at Port Arthur is either still present in the landscape of the site or how this should or could be managed is not considered in the paper.

The views expressed in this paper are the personal views of the author and not the views of the organisation for which he works.

The tourist gaze, authenticity and the Port Arthur paradox

In writing about medicine, and in relation to doctors, Foucault developed the notion of the ‘medical gaze’ (1976:89). His ‘gaze’ is a socially organised, systematised, and interactional construct. John Urry, a British sociologist, adopted Foucault’s concept and explored its construction and development as it might apply to tourists and their activities (1992:1). He elaborated on the processes by which the tourist gaze is constructed and reinforced, and considers who or what authorises it, what its consequences are for the places which are its object, and how it interrelates with a variety of other social practices – ‘tourists are in a way semioticians, reading the landscape for signifiers of certain pre-established notions or signs derived from various discourses of travel and tourism’ (1992:12).

Urry also noted in a survey of theoretical literature on tourism, that the quest for authenticity may be an important basic element for the organisation of tourism (1992:11). It is further noted by various commentators that the authenticity of places visited and cultural activities experienced by tourists is both becoming increasingly rare and difficult for tourists to identify anyway (e.g. Urry 1992:11 and Lowenthal 1977:355). Although, in more recent times, Lowenthal has gone further, stating that

Another anxiety common to many heritages is doubt about authenticity. Attachment to heritage depends on feeling and faith, as opposed to history’s ascertained truths. Lack of hard evidence seldom distresses the public at large, who are most credulous, undemanding, accustomed to heritage mystique, and often laud the distortions, omissions, and fabrications central to heritage reconstructions (1998:249).

Lowenthal, however, does acknowledge that heritage managers, or, as he terms them ‘heritage producers and stewards’ or, less flatteringly, ‘heritage mongers’, are still concerned about authenticity, although inadvisably in his view.

Despite his view, in Australia, most Governments have accepted the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter (1999) as the best practice guide to heritage conservation of places of cultural significance. The Burra Charter values authenticity and it is this document that is commonly used as a philosophical heritage conservation standard by those who have to enforce heritage legislation in the various jurisdictions, or, perhaps more fundamentally, by many of those who actually have to undertake heritage work.

Further, conservation documentation such as conservation management plans, when properly prepared, guide heritage managers on how they should deal with significant places. Port Arthur’s authenticity is identified, in its professionally prepared Conservation Management Plan (CMP) as an aspect of this place’s significance (Godden Mackay & Context 2000:1/44 & 49). Thus, authenticity needs to be considered, in the context of Port Arthur’s management, as a valuable aspect of the place that requires respect and to be protected from potential threats. Even if this was not specifically addressed in the CMP it would be required, indirectly, by the CMP’s policy of using the Burra Charter as a guide to all heritage management at Port Arthur.

This paper will now explore this need to retain authenticity at Port Arthur in the face of a possible challenge to it from the management of the often-noted contradiction between the beauty of the place and the knowledge and evidence of its disturbing history. This important quality is quite simply captured in the CMP in the formal Statement of Significance for the site: ‘At Port Arthur, a sense of scenic beauty is heightened by the paradox of a grim past’ (1/49).

Perspectives on paradox

The Draft Port Arthur Historic Site Landscape Plan provides quotations from four writers – Peter Hay, Lindsay Simpson, Richard Flanagan, and Greg Young – that will be used in this exploration of paradox (Context & Urban Initiatives 2001:93-94). The authors of these quotations focus generally on Port Arthur’s famous contradiction of great beauty and historical terror, or on how the presentation of the site is misleading. They, either directly or indirectly, state that this ambiguity needs a changed management policy to ensure the Port Arthur visitor is not fooled or lulled by the place’s beauty into a perception of it being both now and in the past, a most pleasant place, – ‘it wasn’t such a bad or harsh place after all was it; those convicts didn’t have it too bad did they?’ Another commentator, Lowenthal, also quoted in the Draft Landscape Plan (at p. 36), puts it this way: ‘Restored Port Arthur, Tasmania’s notorious prison, almost persuades us that nineteenth-century convicts were lucky to live in so idyllic a setting’ (1997:341).

It is easy to appreciate this aspect of these observations;
however, it might be useful to further explore this particular Port Arthur dichotomy, and its management.

Examining the accuracy and justifiability of the words of these authors in turn:

1. Management of the Port Arthur site has always been about denial. The wide welcoming sweep of benign lawn, and the restorative love and care bestowed upon the cottages of the civil and military establishments, to the neglect of the core convict buildings, are powerful evidence of this' (Hay 1996:72).

At Port Arthur the quantity of surviving elite housing is high compared to surviving rooted structures actually related to the daily life of most of the people at Port Arthur between 1830 and 1877 – the convicts. This meant that the focus, in an admittedly very fabric-orientated budget, was on the standing ruins, the cottages and infrastructure when the budget was provided by Government for the Port Arthur Conservation and Development Project (PACDP was the major Port Arthur works program prior to the current $10m program and provided the first major capital available for works). These circumstances and the nature of best practice heritage conservation, which usually preserves ruins as ruins, with careful but hopefully unobtrusive (although very expensive) works, and rooted buildings as roofed buildings with detailed presentations of the daily life experience of the significant past occupants, have resulted in the Port Arthur conserved as we have it today.

Landscaes of ‘benign lawns’, created originally for convenience of park management (see below), were maintained for the same reason, as they did not figure in the joint Governments’ budget as the focus of any PACDP attention. The core convict buildings were conserved during the PACDP. The first stage of the Penitentiary and Bakery works alone cost over $0.6m, the largest amount spent on any single conservation works during the project. It is appropriate that Hay cannot ‘see’ these works. They were designed not to be intrusive. Other extensive works, together amounting to about $0.8m, were done on the Hospital and the Church. The Model Prison and Asylum buildings, although very important structures, were not part of the experience of most Port Arthur convicts but certainly major works for these structures was not budgeted for by Governments in the 1980s PACDP funding. Nevertheless, Hay’s judgement of bias and neglect is incorrect and Hay’s ‘powerful evidence’ of Port Arthur management always being about denial is not substantiated.

It is worth emphasising that PACDP, by and large, left the broader Port Arthur landscape between buildings and ruins alone, except for road changes, Garden Point and Isle of the Dead. As stated, the PACDP’s primary brief was for infrastructure and building-focused works. Later management choices (possibly seen as an easy and visible way of spending little available money) have unfortunately emphasised gardens, creating an impression through landscape that Port Arthur was a pleasant place for all its occupants, and also over-emphasising the landscape of the Port Arthur elite. In this sense, Hay’s analysis and the comments of the other commentators, is provided with some support.

Similarly, more support might be found for Hay, in terms of past Port Arthur management intent, but with little evidence of implementation in that there was an interest, at least for a time, flowing from the Scenery Preservation Board in the particular views of Michael Sharland, who became the Board’s Superintendent of Reserves in 1947. His aim was to beautify Port Arthur and transform it into ‘a “Garden Town”... in which natural and architectural beauty will obscure the rather sombre picture of its past’ (Young 1996:136; see also Davidson 1995:658-9). Despite this intent, it seems, he was unable to bring his vision to fruition because of years of repeated poor funding that reflected all periods of Port Arthur’s post-convict history (Young 1996: in passim; and pers. comm.. D Young 3/7/02). The funding situation did, however, improve for the years of the PACDP and under the present State budget arrangements.

2. ‘Historical facts have been neglected and it seems to me the site relies on its physical beauty, the parklands, honey-coloured ruins and tree-lined avenues to attract its customers’ (Simpson 1996:91).

Historical facts have in reality been presented at Port Arthur through a variety of media for several decades now (an essential part of the deliberate aspect of the constructed tourist gaze) and to suggest that this is not the case is grossly inaccurate. To also imply that historical facts are the only way people can legitimately be attracted to Port Arthur, and that it is not legitimate to use its obvious picturesque appeal to attract people, is unrealistic. Does Simpson mean that promotional material should offer, in particular, some antidote to Port Arthur’s aesthetic charms by mentioning historical facts? This happens at present, of course, but might be extended. Site brochures do offer historical facts already but, for instance, historical photographs might be provided in promotional material. However, it is difficult to avoid the site’s beauty – an indivisible site reality – even by, say, removing that more recent component of it, the lawns. The site’s beauty is also, in the site’s presentation to visitors, a very useful and ironic counterpoint to the horror of the past, a quality that does certainly attract and disarm people so they can be informed of what actually happened there. Would visitors come so readily to be available for such education if Port Arthur wasn’t so beautiful?

This is not to say that these aesthetic qualities should be improved or further enhanced – they should not be, but neither should they be denied as part of the authentic Port Arthur. Mature English trees and picturesque ruins are not a function of some tourist promotion. They are the Port Arthur reality and need careful management.

3. The effect of the authority, and of the various government instrumentalities which preceded it, becomes apparent when you walk around the Port Arthur site. It is difficult to get any sense of what it meant to be a convict ... There are two types of history, one that remembers, and one that forgets. It is the latter that dominates at Port Arthur’ (Flanagan 1990:36).

This quote does not explicitly refer to Port Arthur’s visual appeal and it is not clear that Flanagan is even referring to the landscape, as the other commentators do. However, Flanagan’s impression is that there is disjunction between the place’s appearance or presentation and its historical reality. He seems not to be recognising that the management of Port Arthur as an historic site has meant that convict-era ruins have been managed as ruins, and convict-era roofed structures (apart from the Asylum/Model prison complex), which are mostly residences of the elite, have been conserved as houses with appropriate period furnishings.

Such management decisions were only possible because of the state of the preservation of the respective buildings when they came to be formally conserved. The relatively good state
of these buildings is a function of the 1890s bushfires and the fact that the houses (the Commandants and Civil Officials) were easier to recycle in the post-convict years, as compared to the larger institutional buildings which were destroyed and only preserved as ruins. It is or was not a deliberate policy to forget aspects of the site's history.

There are no buildings surviving as roofed structures and few ruins which are directly associated with the bulk of the convict population of Port Arthur and their daily life: the Penitentiary, the Hospital, and the Church are the main ones. These buildings are interpreted for visitors but more imagination is required of the visitor to ruins, than for visitors to the houses of the elite, which are fully furnished and provide a clearer picture of their daily environment. A convict's daily experience is not so generously presented because the surviving physical fabric does not support it. One way it might be done is through major reconstruction, which would seriously challenge best-practice integrity and authenticity.

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Flanagan misunderstands the historical reality of the nature and ratio of surviving fabric related to the Port Arthur elite and convicts, but despite this he makes legitimate commentary on the lack of interpretative redress to this inequality.

4. 'As an historic site [Port Arthur] has always been presented in ways which have worked to deny and evade its devastating reality...Port Arthur has been presented with unconscious irony as a Romantic park. Thus its impact on contemporary Australians has been unfortunately diminished' (G. Young 1997:32).

Despite this statement being made only a few years ago, in the last 20 years the irony of which he writes is no longer 'unconscious' but very much conscious – the beauty of the site has been consistently contrasted in interpretative material with the site's distant and more recent horrors. Greg Young, like the other commentators quoted, has not appreciated the historical forces that have resulted in the present landscape of Port Arthur, nor, and in particular, the deliberate design choices taken in the convict era based on 'Romantic' ideas.

The emotional dichotomy of Port Arthur is part of its historical reality – see, for instance, the 1853 Butler Stoney reference cited by David Young (Stoney 1855:49 in D. Young 1996:25) and this dichotomy will continue to be ironically referred to. It is certainly a factor which those who interpret Port Arthur need to recognise, so that visitors are given a balanced view.

It is presumed that none of these four commentators are asking for the demolition of all the ruins and removal of the exotic and mature trees. There are interpretive strategies that could be put in place to ensure that visitors have a greater opportunity to appreciate the 'truth' of Port Arthur - but this should not include major assaults on the authenticity of the site.

None of the quotations are very deeply informed. The critics do not reveal that they have based their comments on any detailed and comprehensive, deconstruction of the Port Arthur landscape – exactly what are the landscape components, their qualities and origins, that give rise to its picturesque beauty? But perhaps this is an unfair comment as it would require detailed site knowledge to undertake such an analysis and these writers are probably attempting to provide nothing more than an impressionistic response to the site but with a political edge. They do, however, name some elements that trouble them – the honey-coloured ruins, the tree-lined avenues, the parklands or the presentation of Port Arthur as a Romantic park, the lawns, the restoration of officials' cottages and the contrasting neglect of core convict buildings.

Concerns with particular site elements

Responses have already been provided to some site elements that trouble the cited writers, however, it might be worthwhile to look briefly at these further to determine the source or authenticity of the elements specified, to see if there are issues for landscape management amongst them, and if there could be others not identified by these writers, that need to be considered.

The honey-coloured ruins

These are presumably both the original yellow sandstone buildings and brick buildings painted with a manilla-coloured limewash to replicate sandstone. Sometimes this limewash is painted over render, which has been fashioned to simulate ashlar coursing, and then the faux-stone joints are inscribed. Some buildings have been given a coat of limewash of this colour in more recent years after physical investigation has established this as the appropriate colour, but in the case of the Penitentiary, for instance, the original colour of the wash can be seen, although deteriorated, still on the bricks. Therefore, the colour of the honey-coloured ruins is an 'authentic' component of the site.

Of course, the ruins themselves were all authentic to the extent that they were all burnt out in the 1890s bushfires – with the exception of the Church which burnt earlier. So the honey-coloured ruins are not deliberately manufactured site components designed to delude the gullible visitor or persuade them from an appreciation of the real nature of terrible life of the convicts. But maybe Simpson was not actually really seeing it this way, just assembling another element that contributes to the site's pleasant aesthetic quality.

The tree-lined avenues

The site landscape history is complex with many layers of change and succession. Both exotics and native trees were used in avenues (and elsewhere) throughout the convict and non-convict period. Avenues of English trees were planted out in the convict era – an example is the Sir John Franklin avenue planted by 1838 leading to the east entrance to the Church (CMP: Location Reference No. 101). There is also the avenue of Blue Gums planted in the 1860s by the Reverend Woolnough on the way to his property in the Dockyard (CMP: Loc. Ref. No. 93). These are clearly 'authentic' and not recent site beautifications to seduce the visitor away from historical reality.

The parklands or the presentation of Port Arthur as a Romantic park

Setting aside for the moment the issue of the lawns that are clearly an aspect of the parklike or Picturesque nature of Port Arthur, collectively, a range of factors comprise a very Romantic or more accurately a Picturesque landscape. These include the ruins, the nature of the ruins, the local topography, the wider setting of the site and various views of these, the mature English trees, the plan or juxtaposition of these site elements and others, the foreshore and cove, the views of the site across water, and other factors, not the least being cultural baggage (also part of the tourist gaze) brought to the site by the visitor.

A number of Port Arthur convict-era structures were
Picturesque in their architectural style, including one particularly
Gothick, others very melancholy, macabre, and terrible in their
associations. The fires transformed many of these structures
into Gothic ruins. Thus these ruins, in combination with the
naturally beautiful setting, the removal of some buildings, the
maturation of exotic and native trees, and the park
management practices of introducing lawns for more efficient
maintenance, give the site, not surprisingly, a very English feel
and charm. Ironically, Gothic revival architecture, which had its
origins in Britain's picturesque ruins of abbeys and castles set
in park-like countryside (cf. Apperly 1989:36), returned to these
origins at the best Port Arthur example - the 1830s Church -
seen (at least for a while) as an ivy-covered ruin set in a
manicured park.

The nature and cultural origins of the attractive power of ruins
is explored by the eminent archaeologist Stuart Piggott (1976)
and more recently by the art historian Christopher Woodward
(2001). Associationism and the particular Picturesque qualities
of Port Arthur, have been noted previously (Morrison 1986) and
will not be dwelt on here in detail. Briefly, Associationism was
popularised from the late eighteenth century as the
associations or train of thought evoked in a "refined person" by
some natural or man-made object of beauty carrying the
imagination far from the original object. The broad architectural
style termed the 'Gothic Revival' arose via Associationism. The
first phase of the Gothic Revival has been termed 'Gothick'
and is pre-Victorian (1800-1650). This phase is seen as being a
generally primitive/naive rendition of a picturesque image of a
medieval style whereas the post-1850 phase is seen as more
'archaeologically' correct and sophisticated.

Consistent with this, it is worth observing that even in the
1830s and 1840s writers were commenting on the site's
Picturesque context and nature, and people were taking
deliberate actions, such as in the choice of the Military
Barracks and Church designs, the creation of a cottage ornée
for the Commandant (and later for Government Cottage), and
the planting of the trees already mentioned, to create a more
Picturesque feel for the place. This latter was sometimes in the
belief that this enhancement had a positive moral and
educative purpose to improve the redemptive success and
value of Port Arthur on the convicts, but the morality of
constructing the stone Church when convicts were housed so
poorly was also being debated. The morally improving power
of building design in a penal situation has been noted in other
cultures in Australia such as in relation to Macquarie's choice
of Greenway's design for Sydney's Hyde Park Barracks
(Gascoigne 2002:132).

The contradictions between the site's beauty and its function,
quoted above are, at least in part, a product of conscious
construction in the convict era (and subsequent historical
events such as the fires that created the ruins). It was part of
what could be termed the 'convict gaze'. It is certainly, in Ury's
terms, an important aspect of the 'tourist gaze' at Port Arthur,
no matter whether it is received by the tourist in the manner
expected by the quoted critics or not.

The lawns

These are "authentic" too in that they were produced in the
twentieth century by the poorly resourced SPB, seemingly from
1916 to 1972 (pers. comm. Nicola Goc 8/6/02), not to
deliberately manufacture an image of the past but as a function of
the then park management approach of removing fences,
smoothing out and filling in holes, and covering it all with grass
that could be maintained simply by one person with a gang-

Nevertheless, whether the lawns were extended later as a
function of Sharland's vision when he was involved with the
Scenery Preservation Board (SPB) or were of more pragmatic
origin, they certainly have an enhancing effect on the
picturesque nature of the site. In this regard the lawns, as a
more recent feature of the site, may be targeted for obliteration
by revisionists as they are seen to be a 'beautification', even
though this was not necessarily the intent of those who created
them. The lawns might be seen as distracting the visitor from
the appreciation of the site's role as a prison. But they are also
part of the complex layering of the site with a legitimate right to
be preserved, as the CMP demands that the contributions to
the place's significance from all eras be respected. However,
following due heritage conservation process, they do need to
be assessed as a site element in their own right to allow proper
consideration of any removal or replacement proposals.

At the same time consideration should also be given to the
increasingly distorting influence that is arising from the decade
and a half of convict era gardens 're-creation' across Mason
Cove; some consider it is philosophically worse than the lawns
- having a more detrimental impact on visitor appreciation of
convict life. It is unclear why the lawns are being condemned
by critics of the current general appearance of Port Arthur and
yet the more temporally anomalous and confusing gardens are
not also despised.

The Government Garden might be seen to stand, philosophi-
cally, a little separate from other gardens because of its history
and scale, however, this garden too would seem to be a
temporally anomalous re-creation next to its associated ruined
structure. This Garden had an existence prior to the
construction in it in 1853 of the Government Cottage - a ruin
since 1895 (Collins and Harrington 1992:16; Brand 1978:206-
207). The Garden might be seen as a separate entity in its own
right, although it would appear that its development after the
Cottage's construction was linked during the convict years to
the Cottage's presence. Perhaps the Cottage could be seen as
merely a feature of this Garden and having no significance in
its own right. It could be argued, by those wishing to justify the
'restoration' of this Garden, that a garden in this situation and
of this scale might be capable of different presentation to its
associated or possibly less significant ruin. It could be argued
that the garden be re-created even though the associated
structure was still in ruins. However, it is this author's view that
the 'restoration' of the Government Garden ignores both the
significance of the Cottage, the historical associations and
inter-relationship between Cottage and Garden, and an
important aspect of the Garden's cultural significance.

The gardens that have been or are intended to be re-created
across Port Arthur are those related to the residences of the
elite. Criticisms have been made that those gardens that have
been re-created or proposed to be so are not really site
elements that were part of the convict experience (apart from
the gardens in which they may have 'laboured') and convicts
were most of the people who were at Port Arthur. Thus, to
re-create them, especially without the re-creation of the other
large produce gardens, creates a manifestly false and
unbalanced impression in visitors' minds of what Port Arthur
must have been like, and it is ultimately a bourgeois capturing
and presentation of the convict landscape.
Whether this was and is a deliberate political attempt to change the visitors’ view of the past is debatable, but it was certainly, and may still be, a deliberate decision to create another visitor attraction, albeit, in the long term with very labour-intensive (and therefore expensive) consequences. Such re-creations might also have been seen to be expedient in undertaking work at Port Arthur at times when there was little money available for the essential and critical works of large capital building conservation, stabilisation, conservation documentation, and even cyclical maintenance, to proceed.

It is this author’s view that gardens re-created around a building now a ruin, are inappropriate on a site of such high authenticity, especially when the building has been a ruin for more than a hundred years and acquired other significances as such. Re-created gardens in this context are inconsistent with best heritage practice. They create an unnecessary and undesirable temporal anomaly, and can only be seen as site ‘beautifications’.

Issues

What are the issues for landscape management that fall out of this brief exploration of the quotations?

1. The ‘Picturesqueness’ of Port Arthur derives from a variety of sources including from ‘authentic’ historical choices and events, such as architectural styles chosen, and fires, as well as the removal of many structures over time. The site’s romantic ruins, a major contributor to Port Arthur’s Picturesque landscape, have not been deliberately manufactured. It is true that these ruins have been maintained as such, but the 1830s choice of the architectural style/s for Port Arthur buildings, now ruins, is also a significant contribution to the creation of the picturesqueness of the place. This is especially so in the case of the Church – the original Gothic style ironically became accentuated after it was reduced by wind and fire to a Gothic caricature.

2. The landscape, buildings and their disposition in it, had picturesque/Gothic qualities when they were all created or modified in the convict era – part of a seemingly, deliberately constructed ‘convict gaze’.

3. There is no doubt that ‘Port Arthur has been increasingly beautified in response to visitor perceptions’ (Context et al. 2001:97), an explicit reference to the construction of the Port Arthur ‘tourist gaze’. However, in this author’s view, the primary, deliberate ‘beautification’, which is the biggest challenge to the site’s authenticity, relates not to the maintenance of the lawns, but to the establishment of re-created gardens.

4. Another issue is that site interpretation, as a major contributor to the construction of the tourist gaze, needs to consciously address the beauty of the place versus the ‘historical reality’ issue to ensure that visitors are made more aware of how the ‘tourist gaze’ is constructed at Port Arthur and how they may be manipulated by it to a false appreciation of Port Arthur.

5. As the fundamental dichotomy between Port Arthur’s beauty and the convict experience is in part a function of the site’s actual and significant historical development – deliberately constructed during the convict era – it should be better appreciated, promoted and managed, not excoriated.

6. Authenticity, an extremely important quality of the Port Arthur site, and the significant contributions from all eras of the site’s history, do not appear to be being valued sufficiently highly in landscape management.

7. Historical ‘revisionism’ should not be the immediate source of change to the physical environment of the site. Best-practice heritage conservation processes, where action is being contemplated that could affect the significance of the place, involve the mature consideration of all of the available information and values before informed and cautious action is taken. The distinction between the ‘convict gaze’ and the ‘tourist gaze’ needs further exploration to ensure we do not lose something very special about Port Arthur in intervening in its cultural landscape.

Whose beauty?

What action might need to be taken on such matters as past beautifications to correct for possible distortions in visitor interpretation of Port Arthur? The identification of exactly what is an inappropriate beautification has already been seen to be problematic but it may be worthwhile to examine this more closely.

If the lawns of Port Arthur are seen as inappropriate they cannot be removed without some replacement being considered. Replacing lawns with a re-creation of some past landscape, such as the former context or setting of a building, which is now abutted by lawn, is one option. Of course, such an option would have to be properly investigated and tested against good conservation policy and the Conservation or Landscape Plan before it could be seen as a truly viable option on this significant site.

A policy in the Landscape Plan would not need to provide permission for the removal of previous site ‘beautification efforts’. It is essential that ‘previous efforts’ be very carefully identified and that actions (such as the encouragement of ivy growth on ruins) which are really deliberate beautification efforts, not incidental consequences of some past park management policy (such as lawns), possibly with other values, be targeted for further evaluation.

Careful discrimination of what might be targeted here from amongst past activities is also essential because there are other past activities that might fall into this ‘beautification’ category that it might not be desirable to remove. An example might be the clearance in 1967 by bulldozer of many of the decayed rows of separate cells from the Penitentiary with the inaccurate rebuilding of the north wall behind it (D. Young 1996:138; and pers. comm. Eddie Belleite 1981). This major project to remove ‘unsightly rubbish’ from the inside of the building is an important aspect of this building’s story, of past attitudes and of the conservation history of Port Arthur; evidence of it in the building’s fabric should be preserved and not obliterated by, say, a more accurate rebuilding of the north wall.

Similarly, should the stone wall around the foreshore which was a twentieth-century SPB beautification and employment project (pers. comm. Eddie Belleite 1981) now be removed? Such a proposed policy would need to be very carefully written to ensure that the policy does not provide licence to remove more than it should, simply because of a subjective ‘dislike’. This particular policy is quite critical in terms of Port Arthur’s future approach to landscape and so a clear enumeration of the proposed removals or landscape changes needs to be made in the Landscape Plan, if this is not already the case, rather than leaving it up to subsequent decision-making.

Substitute landscape options

In its simplest form there are three options for dealing with the
The replacement of the removed lawns near buildings by reconstructing the previous settings of buildings may be considered as an intervention option but reconstruction on little or no evidence should never occur. Lawn retention would be preferable in this case (with appropriate interpretation). Nor, indeed, should reconstruction be undertaken only because it is possible to do it.

Almost every such reconstruction of building setting is similarly fraught and sound conservation argument is required to justify any reconstruction. The overall consequences to the site of many such reconstructions coming to fruition also need examination when weighing up the physical intervention option. Possible consequences of building setting reconstruction are the creation of site and conservation philosophy anomalies, the possible obliteration of other period information inherent in the current landscape, the need to properly record and archaeologically investigate possible sites beforehand to ensure accurate reconstruction, and future options being denied by the proposed reconstructions.

Apart from other relevant Burra Charter issues, the authenticity of Port Arthur may be significantly challenged by major landscape intervention, and it would be unfortunate to see the place drown in a sea of restoration and reconstruction as an alternative to the continued maintenance of the lawns.

It is worth restating the Burra Charter definition of ‘reconstruction’. It ‘means returning a place to a known earlier state and is distinguished from restoration by the introduction of new material into the fabric’. Article 20.1 states ‘Reconstruction is appropriate only where a place is incomplete through damage or alteration, and only where there is sufficient evidence to reproduce an earlier state of the fabric. In rare cases, reconstruction may also be appropriate as part of a use or practice that retains the cultural significance of the place.’ Therefore, it can only happen at any particular location if accurate information is available to allow the reproduction to an earlier state of the fabric.

Any specific proposals for particular landscape works need to be considered in the context of planning for individual precincts and related or adjacent individual structures. Burra Charter prudence, ‘Do as much as necessary but as little as possible’, might indicate that a non-interventionist, interpretive approach would be a better strategy anyway.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Port Arthur landscape currently has a high degree of authenticity and still enshrines the convict era’s oppositional constructions: the, in part deliberate but also incidental, moral Picturesqueness and the convict experience. These are two inseparable and highly significant aspects of convictism at Port Arthur that require very careful management. The landscape and its significance may be adversely affected should actions be undertaken that are motivated by ill-informed historical revisionism. If major landscape modification occurs, visitor confusion, controversy and a loss of significance may result. This might be avoided at Port Arthur if proper heritage conservation processes, as set out in the CMP, are observed, as they are likely to be. More precisely, in any action taken, the identified values, including this difficult contradictory one of terror and beauty, and the significant contributions from all eras, should be conserved.
References


Young, G. 'Isle of Gothic silence', Island, 60/81 (1997), 31-35.