

PORT ARTHUR TALKS

'The Unfortunates' : Prostitutes transported to Van Diemen's Land

presented by Chris Leppard

Since historians first began to mine the records of the 160,000 men, women and children who were transported to the Australian colonies, the mention of prostitution has titillated researchers and the general public. Highly visible and public, unlike the pickpocket, smuggler, extortionist or forger, each of whom strove to be invisible, the prostitute relied on her visibility to earn a living. Unlike her secretive companions the prostitute's activity was not illegal, yet her visibility made her a convenient scapegoat for many of the fears and failings of contemporary society.

In the 1970s the female convict was reinvented as a hardworking family maker and the label of 'prostitute' was reserved for a few marginalized, debauched incorrigibles. That attempt to exonerate the reputation of the majority, firmly positioned the prostitute as an outcast.

The label of 'prostitute' on the convict records has been accepted as a sign of immorality or 'badness'. Women were questioned about prostitution, as their replies were recorded but historians have failed to ask, 'Why was the question posed, and why was their affirmation recorded?' From their arrest in Britain until their freedom in Van Diemen's Land the label remained fixed on some women's records. To what use was that information put, and how significant was it in determining outcomes for the women?

Chris Leppard recently completed her PhD at the University of Tasmania. She was involved in the 2007 archaeological dig at the Ross Female Factory and has worked as a guide at Port Arthur. She is currently employed as a history researcher at the University of Tasmania.

ALL WELCOME!

Thursday 29 August, 2013 at 5.30 p.m.

**Junior Medical Officer's Conference Room,
Port Arthur Historic Site**

For more information call 6251 2324

