



PORT
ARTHUR
HISTORIC
SITES



*Grounds and Gardens
crew member Ted Plummer
splitting shingles*

FACT SHEET

Conservation at the Port Arthur and Coal Mines Historic Sites



Government Gardens, looking down the main path towards the fountain and rose arbour.

Our role in the heritage profession

At the Port Arthur Historic Site we strive to keep traditional skills alive by training new generations of craftsman in dying trades such as shingle splitting and roof shingling, lime washing and stone working. By supporting skilled tradespeople we can assist in the conservation of other heritage places. Each year we offer research opportunities for students from universities all over Australia in aspects of cultural heritage management including architecture, archaeology, history and interpretation.

Learn more . . .

Are you interested in learning more? Do you own an old building or have an archaeological site on your land? These resources might be useful:

- *The Illustrated Burra Charter: Good Practices for Heritage Places* by M. Walker & P. Marquis-Kyle (available through <http://www.icomos.org/australia/charter.html>). The principles of the Burra Charter can also be found on this website.
- Australia's Heritage at <http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/> or visit your state government website.

Contact Us

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Why conserve?

In looking after Port Arthur and the Coal Mines Historic Sites, we do our best to ensure that as much of the sites as possible survive for future generations to enjoy. Our sites are internationally important because so much of the convict-era settlement remains – as buildings, ruins or landscapes. The small details of these places, their bricks, stonework, and artefacts, help us build a picture of life at the penal settlements during the 19th century. When we replace 'old' pieces with new, we can lose that vital information, as well as a powerful connection to the men and women who laboured and lived here.

As much as necessary, as little as possible. . .

Good heritage practice in Australia is guided by The Burra Charter, the Australian ICOMOS *Charter for Places of Cultural Significance*. This outlines basic principles to help people decide how best to look after important heritage places. The guiding principle of the Burra Charter is to do 'as much as necessary, and as little as possible'. This generally means that wherever possible, we should preserve as much of an original building, landscape or archaeological site as we can. The guidelines of The Burra Charter are reinforced through the Port Arthur Historic Sites Statutory Management Plan.

Why don't we rebuild the Church?

According to the principles outlined in The Burra Charter, reconstruction is an option of last resort. We don't reconstruct unless the space or building cannot be understood in any other way. Even then, we should only reconstruct if we have enough evidence to know how the space or building was originally built and functioned. It is not good enough for us to guess or assume how things were. For instance, after Port Arthur closed in 1877, the beautiful formal Government Gardens slowly reverted to a grassy paddock, making it impossible for visitors to imagine the space as it had been. So, after extensive archaeological and historical research, we reconstructed the Gardens in the 1980s. But the Church, even in its current state, can still easily be understood as a church and so we do not need to rebuild it.

Telling the whole story. . .

Buildings and sites go through many phases of change. After the Port Arthur penal settlement closed in 1877 many of its buildings were demolished, as Tasmania tried to erase the hated 'convict stain'. Other buildings were burned in the bushfires of the 1890s. Port Arthur has been a township and then a tourist site for much longer than it was a prison and it is important that in our conservation practices we try to explain all of this history to visitors. Thus we can respect and present Port Arthur's varied history without taking away from a sense of the place as it was during the convict period.

The ravages of time. . .

The Port Arthur Historic Sites present many conservation challenges. The stone and bricks used in the buildings were often locally made and quarried and some are of very poor quality. Many of the ruins have been exposed to our severe local weather for over a century, and this is made worse because the sites are on the coast. At the Port Arthur Historic Site more than a quarter of a million visitors each year – although very welcome – put stress on the fragile structures and archaeological sites. We must manage the impacts of all of these factors so that we do not lose significant aspects of our heritage. To help resolve these problems requires a raft of special skills. Our team includes people with skills in building and object conservation, along with builders, gardeners, stonemasons, archaeologists, interpreters and collections specialists.

