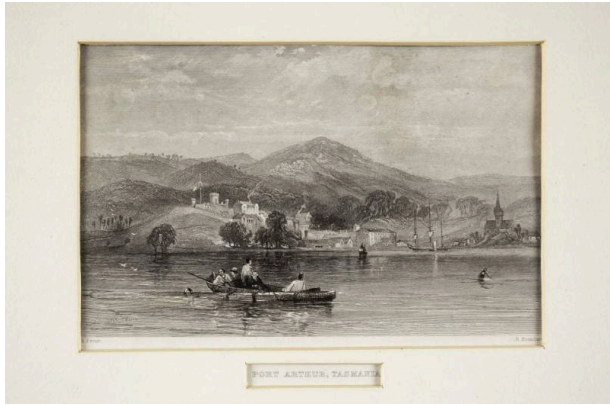


Basic Detail Report



00040673

Title

Port Arthur, Tasmania

Date

c 1876

Primary Maker

John Skinner Prout

Medium

Handcoloured print on paper.

Dimensions

Overall: 335 × 375 × 25 mm Image: 117 × 180 mm

Name

Engraving

History

Extreme poverty was a fact of life for many in 18th and 19th century English society. In desperation, many resorted to crimes such as theft, prostitution, robbery with violence and forging coins as the means to survive in a society without any social welfare system or safety net. This was countered by the development of a complicated criminal and punishment code aimed at protecting private property. Punishment was harsh with even minor crimes, such as stealing goods worth more than one shilling, cutting down a tree in an orchard, stealing livestock or forming a workers union, attracting the extreme penalty of 'death by hanging'. From the late 16th century, transportation was mostly used as punishment for crimes against the state. Together with imprisonment and capital punishment, it formed the cornerstone of the British criminal justice system. James I initiated a transportation act in 1619, however, the introduction of the Transportation Act of 1718 was used to combat a perceived increase in crime, and transportation became used as a large-scale criminal deterrent. The loss of the American colonies in the War of Independence put an end to the mass export of British convicts to America. Many of the convicts in England's overcrowded jails were sent instead to the hulks (de-commissioned naval ships) on the River Thames and at Portsmouth, Plymouth and Cork (Ireland) where they were employed on river cleaning, stone collecting, timber cutting and dockyard work. In 1784, under the Transportation and Penitentiaries Act, felons and other offenders were exiled to colonies overseas which included Gibraltar, Bermuda and in 1788, the colony of NSW. The Port Arthur penal settlement was first established as a small timber-cutting station in 1830. In 1832 Governor George Arthur stated that the settlement would become the primary secondary punishment settlement for male convicts in Van Diemen's Land. Secondary punishment settlements were specifically located in areas that were isolated and removed from districts inhabited by

free settlers. This isolation not only gave the settlers some protection from escaped convicts but also deterred the convicts from bolting, acting as a psychological wall or barrier. The Tasman Peninsula, on which Port Arthur and a number of other penal settlements were situated, was the perfect location. It was surrounded by water on three sides and the only land access was via Eaglehawk Neck - a narrow neck on land only 80 meters across - which was guarded night and day by armed guards and a line of chained dogs. A perfect example of the changing government attitude towards crime, punishment and prison reform, Port Arthur became the largest convict manufactory in Van Diemen's Land with its captive workforce producing iron-work, bronze-castings, leather work, ceramics, bricks, small boats and ships for the colonial government. In 1842, the four-story flourmill and granary (later the penitentiary) that still dominates the site today was begun, along with the settlement's hospital. The Penitentiary was the largest brick building in the colony and contained 136 separate cells on the two lower floors for prisoners under heavy sentences, the third floor contained a dining room, library, school room and Catholic prayer room whilst the forth floor was a general dormitory area which accommodated 348 separate sleeping places in two tiers. At its height in 1844 there were some 1200 adult and 800 boy convicts located on site. Taken into account the administration, military guard and related families the population of the site was close to 3000 making it the second largest settlement of Europeans in Van Diemen's Land. In 1848 construction began on the Separate or New Model Prison, the completion of which marked a philosophical shift away from physical punishment to mental control and domination. Prior to 1842 all convicts in Van Diemen's Land, except those serving secondary punishment sentences or working on government projects, were employed under the Assignment System. Under this system convicts were assigned to work for private individuals, who provide shelter, food and clothing in exchange for the convicts' labour. The Select Committee on Transportation, also known as the Molesworth Committee after its chair, William Molesworth, was specifically formed in April 1837 to investigate Transportation and Secondary Punishment in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land. When the Molesworth Committee reported that the Assignment system was too lenient on the one hand and open to abuse and corruption on the other, the British and Colonial Governments introduced the Probation System into Van Diemen's Land. This new system was based on the convicts first having served part of their sentence in England prior to being transported out to Van Diemen's Land. In the colony they were classified into classes depending upon their crime and previous behaviour and then sent out to Probation Stations, or secondary punishment settlements such as Port Arthur, for at least two years. During this time the convict would have points credited or debited from an account - a certain number of points would entitle the convict to a remission on the remaining part of their sentence. After two years probation the convicts could receive a probation pass allowing them to work for wages while reporting to police. If they were well behaved they gained a Ticket of Leave and later a Conditional Pardon. The Cessation of Transportation in 1853 saw the Port Arthur penal settlement decline in population and importance and Port Arthur was abandoned by the government in September 1877. The final occupants were Norfolk Island returnees, convict pensioners and transported felons whose sentences had not been completed. Although transportation to Tasmania stopped in 1853, the 1857 Tasmanian census showed that 50% of all adult Tasmanians and 60% of all adult Tasmanian males were convicts or ex-convicts. Despite the large percentage of ex-criminals in its society the Tasmanian (the name of Van Diemen's Land was changed to Tasmania) prison rate was far lower than any other similar sized colony. One the main reasons cited for this transformation from the most crime-ridden

colony to the least crime-ridden was the development very early on of government sponsored charitable institutions. With the Tasmanian colonial government spending on average three times as much on social services than the colonies of Victoria, New South Wales or Queensland. (Reynolds, 1969 in Braithwaite, 1999) When the last invalids and paupers left the complex of buildings at Port Arthur were sold off to private individuals and the site became known as Carnarvon. The former Separate Prison and Penitentiary became popular tourist destinations until they were severely damaged by bushfires in 1895 and 1897. J S Prout was born at Plymouth, England, in 1806. He painted chiefly in watercolour, and came to Australia towards the end of 1840. He lectured on art at Sydney with success. In 1844 he went to Hobart and organized the first exhibition of pictures held in Australia in January 1845. A second exhibition was held in 1846 and a third at Launceston in the beginning of 1848. Prout returned to England in that year and lived first at Bristol and then at London. He was elected a member of the New Water Colour Society (now the Royal Institute of Painters in Water-colour). He died at London on 29 August 1876. Prout was a capable artist in watercolour, though over-shadowed by his uncle Samuel Prout. Besides illustrative work in England he published during his residence in Australia, 'Sydney Illustrated' (1844), 'Tasmania Illustrated' (1844), and 'Views of Melbourne and Geelong' (1847).