

PART A – Project Submission

1. What is your project?

The Port Arthur Historic Site is one of the most visited tourist attractions in Tasmania and is considered an 'iconic' site for tourism and convict heritage across Australia. The Site is often a visitor's first introduction to Australia's convict heritage and as such has a significant role to play in introducing both domestic and international visitors to this important part of the Australian story and cultural landscape.

In 2016 the Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority (PAHSMA) committed to a large-scale project to re-develop the Port Arthur Visitor Centre, in response to demands on the building during peak visitation periods exceeding the capacity of the internal planning arrangements. The Visitor Centre is the primary facility for tourism services on the Historic Site. It is the gateway and entrance to the Site and the commencement point for personalised visitor engagement with interpretive themes and experiences.

The re-development project aimed to extend the current building in size and layout, thus calling for an upgrade of ALL interior facilities inclusive of the Interpretation Gallery space. The previous Visitor Centre Interpretation Gallery was designed in 1998 and installed the following year, and although the concept remained fit for its original purpose, it was recognised that the gallery was tired and attention to broader interpretive themes needed consideration in the broader Port Arthur Visitor Interpretation Experience. This project offered PAHSMA the opportunity to tap into new and developing interpretive techniques and technologies, refresh and renew the visitor interpretation "experience" and allow for new stories and methods to be worked into the new gallery and transitional spaces. It also provided an opportunity to extend opportunities for visitor orientation beyond the ticketing desk, and thereby improve the provision of visitor information. The gallery re-development was carried out as a sub project to the greater rebuild/refit and was restricted to the closure period of February 2017- December 2017 inclusive of current gallery demolition.

2. How does it demonstrate excellence and best practice in heritage interpretation?

Research, concept planning and methodology

A consultancy group consisting of Anna Housego, Tim Williams and Roland Gataric were engaged to work in conjunction with the PAHSMA Heritage Programs Team to develop a Presentation Plan which included thematic pathways, methodology and stylistic specifications. In developing this plan, the consultancy team undertook a review of visitor research and visitor comments relevant to the interpretive experience at Port Arthur. Focus group sessions with PAHSMA staff involved in the visitor experience were also conducted. Five key audiences were identified in this process, including:

- Short stay – up to three hours onsite, seek out the site highlights, focus on the centre of the site, greater need for efficient orientation and introduction.
- Explorers – more than three hours, explore more widely, more likely to do additional tours and talks and range further. Likely to include high proportion of repeat visitors. Desire to go deeper into interpretive content and an expectation that content has been refreshed since their earlier visit.
- Tourism Groups – pre-booked visitors on organised tours/cruise ships with time constraints. Gallery must have capacity for large groups.

- School Groups – Tasmanian and interstate, curriculum-centred activities through education program or self-exploration. Gallery must have capacity for large groups.
- Special Interest – have a narrower band of interest related to a specific subject and want to go deep. They need opportunities to pursue information.

Following a process of rigorous research and consultation, five thematic pathways were identified during the presentation planning process. These thematic pathways provide direction for the Gallery interpretive content and offer an opportunity to deliver the larger context that wraps around the Site by grounding it in the stories of Port Arthur. The pathways are:

- Building an Empire
- Loss of Home
- People of Port Arthur
- Myths and Misunderstandings
- Punishment and Welfare

These themes have been used to support a 'zone' approach to the Gallery and also provide opportunities for layering and integrating content across the gallery and the Visitor Centre as a whole, providing audiences with a sense of seamlessness. They are delivered through direct messages and also presented implicitly through objects, images, film, and hands-on activities.

A range of communication techniques were implemented in the Gallery to appeal to a wide range of communication styles and preferences. An issue identified with the old gallery was an excessive amount of text – approximately 50,000 words. While this text was accurate and clearly linked to the themes of the Gallery, our visitor research found that it was overwhelming for the average visitor and only a small proportion of it was being read. One of the key aims of the new Gallery was to reduce this text by approximately 75%. This was achieved through the utilisation of interpretation through a range of different media, which include:

- Text panels to introduce thematic zones
- Wall graphics, including a large-scale Infographic which illustrates the story of the Australian Convict Sites World Heritage Property
- Artefact displays
- User-operated video content
- User-operated interactive site map
- Interactive 'Discover their fate' character cards and profile drawers

The design palette of the Port Arthur Gallery was determined in cooperation with the consultancy group. At the highest level, the drivers for the design of the Gallery were:

- The Port Arthur Historic Site – its materials and scale
- The re-developed Visitor Centre materials, design and scale
- PAHSMA's signage style guide, which includes an earthy colour palette and materials such as metal, wood and glass
- Clean lines, reflected in the redesign of the Visitor Centre.

Further refinement of the design of individual elements in the Gallery was achieved in consultation with the consultants and artists who were engaged to work on the project. Graphic Designers Kelly Eijdenberg (Poco People) and Julie Hawkins (In Graphic Detail) were instrumental in developing a style that tied together the various interpretive elements and created a visual thread throughout the space that visitors could use to navigate through the Gallery based on their level of interest, theme and topic. The team at Red Arrow, led by Tim Williams, provided their expertise in the design of custom Gallery furniture including our character card drawers, designed to replicate the look and feel of history archives and evoke a sense of discovery, and an over-sized Nine Men's Morris game board, inset into the floor and made of timber and brass, in-line with the materials used throughout the rest of the Gallery.

The Project Team worked with exhibition case and lighting designers to create a customised exhibition space which meets industry standards. We also commissioned art work from three Tasmanian artists which is featured throughout the Gallery, including an eight-metre long Infographic which tells Port Arthur's world heritage story, 52 new character illustrations, and line drawings of all of Port Arthur's buildings and ruins.

The design elements and artwork used throughout the Gallery have since been integrated across PAHSMA's marketing ephemera and provided the basis for the design of three new website's for PAHSMA's three sites.

Where possible we requested the use of sustainably sourced materials, for example we used Blackwood timber throughout, sourced from sustainable providers. We also minimised our carbon footprint by engaging almost exclusively with Tasmanian contractors and suppliers.

Engagement

As outlined in the previous section, the Gallery audiences were identified in the initial presentation planning stage of the project. Examples of how targeted engagement with each of these audiences is achieved include:

- Short stay – Our orientation zone is designed to help short-stay visitors get the most out of their time on site. These visitors can use the route planner on the interactive map and digi screen displaying up-to-date tour information to plan their time efficiently.
- Explorers – Explorers can take the time to delve deeply into the themes presented in the Gallery, using the artefact guide to discover more information about the artefacts on display. Repeat visitors will appreciate the displays in the temporary exhibition space and the opportunity to find out about a new 'character card' each visit.
- Tourism Groups – Large groups visiting together will be able to comfortably visit the Gallery together with the design allowing for space for large groups to enter at once. With fewer text panels to read, these groups will also feel comfortable and able to explore the Gallery according to their time constraints.
- School Groups – The new Gallery provides plenty of space for school groups to explore the displays. Themes and topics are relevant to the Australian Curriculum and support inquiry-based learning. Interactive aspects such as the 'Character Cards' and the Nine Men's Morris floor game provide fun and educational activities that can be guided by teachers.
- Special Interest – The new Gallery allows special interest visitors to explore their areas of interest in detail. For those interested in family history, the 'People of Port Arthur' zone provides access to the Port Arthur convict database, and forms are available to request further research assistance. Visitors can also use this zone to listen to the stories of people with special connection to Port Arthur.

Stakeholders were identified in the planning stages of this project and extensive consultation was undertaken. Key internal staff were invited to participate in focus groups and their feedback was used to inform the development of Gallery content. A committee was also formed to determine the appropriate interpretation of the 1996 massacre in the new Gallery. This committee included local community members, internal and external heritage professionals and others connected to the event.

As Port Arthur is part of a World Heritage listing, another key stakeholder to consider in undertaking this project was the UNESCO World Heritage community, including the Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee, The Australian Convict Sites Steering Committee and our Tasmanian World Heritage Sites State Managers Group. Consultation with this community was undertaken primarily through the Executive Officer for The Australian Convict Sites Steering Committee, and input was sought from the respective site managers into the interpretation of our collective world heritage significance and the linkages between our sites.

Implementation

This was a stand-alone project, which formed part of a wider multi-staged redevelopment project.

Cross-departmental cooperation was integral to the successful delivery of this project, from consulting with internal staff during the planning process, to working with the marketing team to promote the opening of the Gallery. The Visitor Services team provided invaluable input into this project through sharing their knowledge and experience of visitor management, and identifying the gaps in our visitor experience within the Visitor Centre. The Guiding team shared their knowledge and experience of providing interpretation to visitors on site which was used to inform the development of thematic pathways, and the physical pathways provided in our interactive site map. The new Gallery also necessitated the creation of a new Guiding shift as Gallery Attendant. Our Guides now provide an extra point of information, assistance and interpretation to visitors in the Gallery which is a significant enhancement to the Visitor Experience, particularly for those visitors who prefer face-to-face communication.

The Project Team worked closely with the Marketing team to manage both the closure of the previous Gallery, and the opening of the new Gallery. We shared the design elements and artwork created for the Gallery with the Marketing Team so that they could be incorporated into new promotional products, creating a cohesive design palette across PAHSMA's public face.

Access

The reduction of text used in interpretation and inclusion of a more varied suite of interpretive media is a significant advancement in the visitor experience available to people with diverse English literacy levels and interests. In recognition of a growing number of visitors from mainland China, the text panel and character card profiles in the Gallery have all been translated to mandarin and are available by request, or offered by our Gallery Attendants. The Gallery Attendants are also on hand to assist visitors with various special needs, whether they are physical or intellectual, and to provide assistance to those with special interests who may be seeking additional information.

The Gallery was designed with the needs of people with mobility issues in mind. The entire floor space is accessible for wheelchairs and interpretive device are placed at an appropriate height. Seating is provided throughout the Gallery for visitors who may not be able to stand for long periods.

Training

Prior to the official opening of the Gallery, training was provided to all members of the Guiding staff to enable them to undertake Gallery Attendant shifts. During this training the concept, thematic storylines and topics were thoroughly explained, and interactive elements of the Gallery were demonstrated. A folder containing copies of all text and graphic panels and details of the planning and design concept was provided to the Guiding team so that they could familiarise themselves with the content prior to their shifts. Following the opening, Guides were also given the opportunity to provide feedback to the Project Team on any aspects of the Gallery that needed attention, and the general feedback provided by visitors.

3. Identify the resources needed for your projects (e.g. staff, materials, money). Demonstrate how you used these resources effectively.

This project was funded solely by PAHSMA to the value of \$819,650.

PAHSMA funded the project from its recurrent capital works budget. Resources supplied by PAHSMA covered project management, specialist conservation staff, specialist conservation tradesmen and contract administration. Consultants and contractors were engaged to supply services that could not be provided by the Historic Site.

These costs included:

- 5 exhibition cases with environmental control units at \$93,000
- Exhibition case furniture and fittings at \$21,800
- Film production services at \$26,380
- 3 bespoke archaeological artefact interpretive cases at \$21,229
- Interpretive panels and light box elements (including copper panels) at \$24,468
- Graphic Designer and Artists fees at \$58,600
- Information technology products and services at \$127,400
- Lighting engineering, design, installation, programming and software at \$188,650

More detailed project costs are subject to commercial-in-confidence agreements.

As previously outlined, the Gallery was designed to incorporate a wide variety of interpretive media, they include:

- Metal photo text panels x 12
- Projected site map, visitor operated by 2 iPad stations, displaying information on points of interest, amenities, and suggested walking routes
- Raspberry Pi operated 'digi screen' displaying up-to-date visitor information
- Individual playing cards distributed to visitors and corresponding Character card drawers fitted with interpretive panels
- 2 interpretive light boxes
- 7 Exhibition Cases displaying artefacts and interpretive graphics and corresponding A3 sized portable Artefact Guides
- Over-sized Nine Men's Morris board game and cushion tokens
- 2 sets of replica leg irons
- 3 visitor-operated 'People of Port Arthur' stations consisting of an iPad, LED screen and sound hood and displaying videos, images and access to a searchable convict database

- 8-metre long wall graphic on acrylic featuring a hand-drawn world heritage themed infographic
- 6-metre long wall graphic on acrylic and copper featuring hand-drawn images of Port Arthur's buildings and ruins

The project team worked with mostly local Tasmanian contractors and suppliers who could deliver high-quality products within the budget. Working with Tasmanian based designers and graphic artists gave us the opportunity to be closely involved in the artistic process and ultimately produce work which is unique and truly representative of the creativity and diversity of our small state.

Of great importance to this project was the dissemination of messages related to the conservation aims of PAHSMA. This was achieved implicitly through displays on World Heritage and archaeological work, and interviews with conservation professionals in the 'People of Port Arthur' zone. As part of the 'Myth and Misunderstandings' thematic pathway we also included a display on 'the Curse of the Convict'. This exhibition case and accompanying text panel discusses and displays items from our collection which had been taken from and then returned to the Site over the years by regretful visitors, many of whom believe that in taking the objects, which include bricks, ceramic fragments and even a chess piece, they were cursed. In telling this story and explaining why the removal of artefacts from historic sites is damaging to the significance of that site, we hope that our visitors will be discouraged from taking things in the future, and will encourage the spread this important conservation message.

4. How has your project met clear and measurable outcomes for your client/organisation and stakeholders?

As the project team primarily consisted of PAHSMA employees, and worked closely with the Port Arthur Visitor Centre Project Control Group, the organisation was able to work very closely with consultants and contractors during the concept development phase and the implementation phase to ensure that PAHSMA's expectations were met. In addition to closely managing consultants and contractors for specialised work, we also carried out much of the work ourselves. As a result, we got exactly what we wanted through all stages of the work. The Project Team agrees that the outcomes of this project not only met but also exceeded our expectations.

In addition to the formal opening event, which was attended by key stakeholders from a range of relevant communities, politicians and media, PAHSMA also hosted a community event for the local Tasman Peninsula community to view the new Visitor Centre and Interpretation Gallery. The attendees at these events provided overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding the outcome of the project, and appreciated the improvement it represented in terms of making the building a powerful visitor experience. Local community members particularly appreciated the progress we have made in interpreting all phases of Port Arthur's history, particularly the post-convict era to which many of the community members have strong ties. The People of Port Arthur zone, which includes interviews with community members, prompted the telling of many stories of family members and childhoods at Port Arthur during the community event.

The Port Arthur Community Advisory Committee and Conservation Advisory Committee members all expressed their satisfaction with the outcome of this project. The Port Arthur Board members are extremely proud of the quality of the project and the improvement that it has made to visitor experience.

The Visitor Centre project as a whole has been the subject of national media interest. Importantly the work undertaken on the Gallery has added to the appeal of the site to visitors and to their comprehension of the Site's overall significance in the global philosophical ground shifts relating to crime and punishment during the mid nineteenth century. While the Gallery has opened in the middle of Port Arthur's most successful year to date, it is but one element of a large and complex

site with much to see and do, and it is not possible to directly attribute the growth in visitation and sales to this one project.

Pre-project research is mentioned above in Question 2, and the audience evaluation gathered so far is largely based on anecdotal evidence derived from comments left on social media or from talking with visitors. Anecdotally, the character cards are an element of the Gallery that is consistently commented on as a positive and value-adding experience that allows visitors to personally connect with the site's history. Enquiries as to the availability to purchase items related to the Gallery have been common, with visitors requesting their own Nine Men's Morris boards, playing cards and art prints.

For the project team this was an immensely exciting, challenging and satisfying project to work on and we are extremely happy with the outcome. We are thrilled with all aspects of the interpretive experience. The design palette has been so well received that it has been integrated across Port Arthur's print and web-based platforms. Monitoring of social media posts strongly suggest that the Gallery is resonating with visitors, and it has also received praise from industry professionals. The World Heritage Infographic was particularly well received by the Australian Convict Sites Steering Committee, and plans are already afoot to adapt this resource for other sites.

To take the Gallery into a completely new direction was always going to come with risks, as the previous Gallery was much loved by many people, and was a memorable interpretive experience. The project team were careful to identify the elements of the previous Gallery that were the most successful and incorporate them into the new space using contemporary interpretive methods. One of the greatest achievements of this project has been the opportunity to provide appropriate, industry-standard exhibition cases that allow us to put some of our most significant artefacts on display for the first time in PAHSMA's history. These objects are powerful storytelling tools that have helped us to illustrate our themes in the most personal way possible. They generate conversation and debate, and inspire storytelling and the sharing of memories.