

## ‘a large and efficient Establishment’: Preliminary Report on Fieldwork at the Ross Female Factory

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*Since November 1995, survey and excavations have been conducted at the Ross Female Factory, a mid-nineteenth-century female convict site in Tasmania. Community volunteers, local schoolteachers, Aboriginal Heritage Officers, and university students from both Tasmania and the Australian mainland participated in fieldwork as part of the Ross Factory Archaeology Project. This article presents preliminary results of the 1995 and 1997 excavation seasons at the Ross Female Factory.*

One of the unique characteristics of the Australian convict system was its explicit role as a tool for British colonisation of the South Pacific.<sup>1</sup> Forming the ‘seeding population’ for this imperial venture, convict populations from the arrival of the First Fleet included both men and women. This immediate presence of female convicts also formed a distinguishing characteristic for Australian convictism.<sup>2</sup> However unique their position, the female convicts transported from 1788 to 1856 occupied penal landscapes shaped by dominant British philosophies of social control.

As numerous social historians have recognised, the century between 1750 and 1850 saw the emergence of the modern penal institution.<sup>3</sup> Based on concepts of classification, transformation and disciplinary control, this new architectural and social form reached consummate expression through penal design.<sup>4</sup> While some researchers have attributed the origins of the penitentiary to the rise and evolution of industrial capitalism,<sup>5</sup> others have argued for influences from Enlightenment philosophies<sup>6</sup> or Protestant religious beliefs.<sup>7</sup> Drawing on work by Michel Foucault, most scholars of penal history recognise that the late-eighteenth-century development of modern prisons accompanied a discontinuity in approaches to criminality.<sup>8</sup> The purpose of incarceration was transformed from retribution to reform, with corporeal punishment of the convict replaced by the disciplinary refabrication of his or her mind and soul. As a British penal colony, Tasmania became a testing ground for these new philosophies of social reform.<sup>9</sup>

Female convicts proved to be a continually disruptive problem for British penal reformers.<sup>10</sup> In an attempt to enforce a regular and uniform strategy, the probation system was developed for convicts transported to Tasmania (known as Van Diemen’s Land until 1853). Introduced in 1839, this new system included a period of incarceration for all arrivals:

... the great object of the first stage of the probation system is to make punishment formidable and certain, and equal in its effects; whilst, at the same time, every good influence is brought to bear in the mind of the convict, — and every endeavour made to prepare him, by progressive stages, for being returned to society an honest, industrious and useful man.<sup>11</sup>

A network of female factories were established along the Midland Road of Tasmania for the incarceration of women serving the probationary state of their sentence. Based on a system of moral classification, convicts within the female factories experienced rewards for outward displays of reform and punishment for displays of recalcitrance or insubordination.<sup>12</sup> Within the factories, convicts were classified into three groups: the Crime, Probation and Hiring Classes. The first two classes experienced 24 hour incarceration within the prisons, and were required to perform domestic labour such as making clothes, carding wool, spinning yarn, and washing and ironing laundry. Insubordination was punished by periods of

‘separate treatment’ or confinement within the solitary cells. After a period of demonstrated compliance with regulations, a convict would be promoted to the Hiring Class. Members of this group, sometimes called ‘Passholders’, were available for hire as domestic servants, and occupied the factories while awaiting assignment.<sup>13</sup>

Although in practice the probation system was problematic for all convicts, numerous reports circulated British Parliament specifically questioning the effectiveness of these disciplinary and reformatory procedures for the convict women. In May 1848, Captain Alexander Maconochie, private secretary to Lieutenant-Governor Franklin, reported on convict discipline to Earl Grey, the Secretary of State for the Colonies:

Mr LaTrobe expresses the ‘strongest general impression that the preliminary treatment of female prisoners now in Van Diemen’s Land is a total failure as far as regards their real improvement’, and these figures tend strongly to confirm this testimony. In Van Diemen’s Land, the multiplied errors of the then existing mode of dealing with these most unhappy beings; and although much sympathy has been since excited for them, and some expensive efforts have been made to improve their condition and prospects, these errors not having been adverted to their character has been in no degree raised.<sup>14</sup>

Similar charges were issued by those involved with female convict transport ships. While female convicts generally experienced better living conditions than either male convicts or free emigrants,<sup>15</sup> great concern was expressed over their perceived moral decay enroute to the Australian colonies.<sup>16</sup> Mrs Phillipa Bowden, Superintendent during the 1843 voyage of the *Woodbridge*, complained about the fate of her 202 charges:

Under the present regulations descent from rectitude is gradual and unobserved the passage from bad to worse is easy and uniform — association contaminates, idleness corrupts and the once penitent offender frequently becomes the hardened, reckless, miserable creature whom we sometimes behold raving under the impulse of ungovernable passion, and indulging without remorse, in conduct which had she witnessed it in another, she would, in the early part of her career, have shuddered to behold.<sup>17</sup>

Recent historical studies have suggested that far from being pathetic victims of ‘ungovernable passion’, the female convicts were actively manipulating the female factory system to minimise their institutionalised disadvantages. Through combinations of underground economic barter, sexual trade, and exhibitionist displays of vandalism and rebellion, female convicts shaped and resisted the social controls of the Tasmanian penal system.<sup>18</sup> A constant negotiation of power

existed within all Tasmanian female factories as the supervisory staff struggled with female inmates. Over the 17 year period of the probation system, these interactions created reciprocal patterns of domination and resistance within the female factories. This paper considers preliminary results of excavations at the Ross Female Factory Historic Site to begin archaeological explorations of these power negotiations.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE ROSS FACTORY SITE

Located approximately 120 kilometres north of Hobart, the township of Ross was founded in 1826 at a natural ford of the Macquarie River (Fig. 1).<sup>19</sup> Originally established for the accommodation of male convicts constructing the Midlands Road, the Ross Probation Station was extensively modified and transformed into a female factory in 1847. Two extensive historical reports on the Ross Female Factory site have been prepared for the Cultural Heritage Section, Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Environment and Land Management.<sup>20</sup> For the purposes of an archaeological study, site occupation can be broken into five significant periods.

### An Aboriginal Pre-Contact Landscape (pre-1830)

North of St Peter's Pass, the Midlands Graben Valley was occupied by Aboriginal people from the North Midlands Tribe.<sup>21</sup> This tribal group consisted of at least three (and probably five) bands, or basic social units who '... called themselves by a particular name, and were known by that or other names to other people'.<sup>22</sup> Lands along the upper Macquarie River would have belonged to either the Tyerrremotepanner (or the Stoney Creek or Campbell Town people) recorded north of Ross, or to an undocumented band from lands around the Isis River, west of Ross. As historian Lyndall Ryan noted,

Since the North Midlands people suffered European invasion from the end of 1804, insufficient ethnographic information exists about the boundaries of their bands. With five bands of between sixty and eighty in number, the North Midlands population probably reached between three hundred and four hundred.<sup>23</sup>

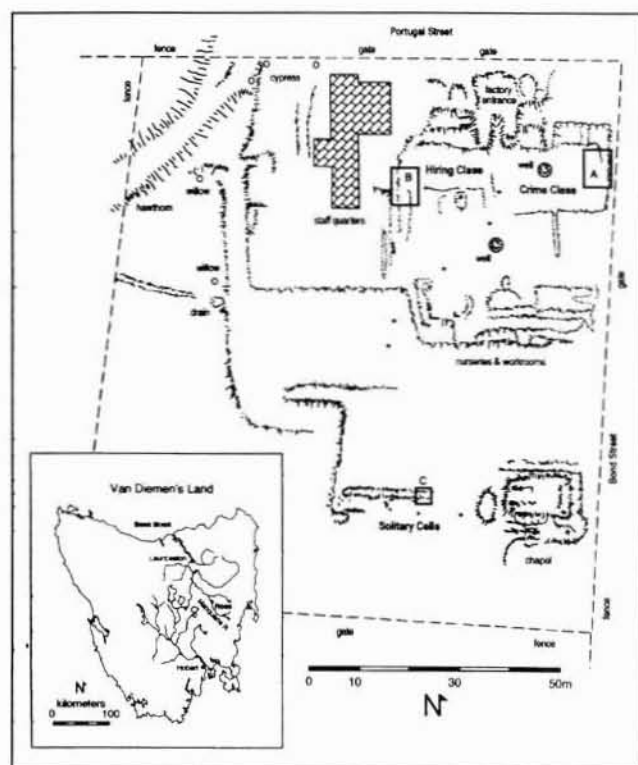


Fig. 1: Map of Tasmania and site plan.

The tribe subsisted on a variety of foods, including shellfish, riverine and estuarine birdlife, kangaroos, wallabies, possums, and vegetable foods.<sup>24</sup> The bands around Ross appeared to have maintained close relations with surrounding tribes, engaging in trade of foods, lithic resources, and ochre.<sup>25</sup>

During excavations at the Ross Female Factory site, the presence of Aboriginal peoples within the Ross landscape was represented through the recovery of Aboriginal lithics in disturbed post-contact stratigraphic contexts.<sup>26</sup> At the request of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Land Council, no analysis of these Aboriginal artefacts has been conducted. The complete assemblage is currently being repatriated to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Land Council. Ownership and use of this land by Aboriginal peoples created the first archaeological presence at this site.

### A Road Gang Station (1841–1847)

From 1804 to 1829, the Northern Midlands region was increasingly occupied and modified by European colonisers.<sup>27</sup> Although the earliest encroachments were exploratory, and unofficial 'squatting' on arable land was discouraged by the colonial government, by 1823 land grants covered the entire course of the Macquarie River.<sup>28</sup> Many of the named properties around Ross were among the 1 206 Midland grants issued by the Lieutenant-Governor from 1820 to 1823. By 1831, a bridge across the Macquarie River was under construction at Ross. According to Tony Rayner's historical report, convicts working on the Ross Bridge were housed in four brick and thatched huts, vaguely located on the southern side of the township.<sup>29</sup> No archaeological remains of these structures were found in examinations of the female factory site. By 1835, these huts no longer appear on town maps.

During the late 1830s, the Colonial government began construction of the Midland Road, connecting a direct route between Hobart and Launceston.<sup>30</sup> Male convict labour was employed for the majority of these roadworks. In early 1841, Captain Forth of the Roads Office decided to move a large road gang from their Campbell Town station to Ross. Sometime after 1842, the newly completed establishment received a road gang of over 200 men. Historical records were unclear on the density and duration of occupation of the Ross Probation Station. In January of 1844, the number of convict occupants was 'reduced' to 209 men.<sup>31</sup> By 1847, with only 64 male convicts housed at Ross, repairs and modifications were conducted to transform the station into a Female Factory.<sup>32</sup>

Both architectural plans and written descriptions of the Ross Probation Station documented five wards, capable of housing at least 220 men. The buildings were of stone construction, and seem to correspond with female factory structures in the northern half of the site. These structures had stone floors and no ceilings as historical records documented the modification of these features during the later Female Factory period.<sup>33</sup> In an 1847 Despatch to British Parliament, Charles La Trobe, Acting Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land, described two wells, although later documentary and archaeological evidence confirmed the existence of only one related to the convict era.<sup>34</sup> As will be demonstrated below, this early period of convict occupation seemed archaeologically obscured by later female convict occupation. Within convict structures, excavations did not reveal the remains of stone flooring, and significant disturbances to both soil deposits and structural foundations seemed to accompany the construction of wooden floors in 1847.<sup>35</sup> Artefactual materials recovered during excavation are currently under analysis. However, preliminary interpretations suggest these materials were primarily underfloor deposits related to the Female Factory occupation period, and structural deposits related to post-factory use of the site.

## The Ross Female Factory (1847–1855)

In 1847, J. S. Hampton, Comptroller-General of Convicts, decided to break-up the dwindling road gang station at Ross, and turn the site into a rural Midlands establishment for female convicts and their children. Unlike the factories in Launceston and Cascades (Hobart), the Ross Factory only accommodated two classes of convicts — the Crime Class, who experienced 24 hour incarceration within the prison, and the Hiring Class, who were housed within the factory while awaiting assignment to local pastoral properties. Extensive alterations were made to the site and its structures to properly accommodate the female factory. Six solitary cells were constructed within the prison, and cook and bake houses were built in front of the station entrance (Fig. 1). A porch or entry room was added to the entrance of the Crime Class dormitory. Archaeological evidence, discussed later in this article, indicated that a handcarved sandstone drain feature was added after the addition of this porch structure.

After the women arrived in 1848, significant modifications and additions continued at the site. The Crime and Hiring Class yards were separated by timber fences, and original stone floors were removed in the nurseries, hospital, and Crime Class. Floors were replaced with wooden boards and joists supported by sandstone tiers. Night soil privy toilets were added to all yards of the establishment. The nurseries and Crime Class were also provided with timber ceilings and the roofs re-shingled. Over 160 panes of glass, each 8 inches by 10 inches, were ordered for the 'Hut to be occupied by the women and children, the two day rooms, and for the Hospital: all of which are without any glass or sashes at present'.<sup>36</sup> All factory wards were whitewashed with lime, for 'General Purification'. Although in the other factories women usually slept in hammocks, at Ross 2 tons of straw were purchased for filling mattresses, providing padding for the wooden sleeping platforms built into the dormitories. In January 1848, 30 iron bedsteads were purchased for the hospital.

By 1849, continued outbreaks of disorderly conduct by factory inmates prompted J. S. Hampton to request further modifications and additions to the Ross establishment. Proposals funded by the Lieutenant-Governor included:

- completion of a boundary fence 'to prevent unauthorised communication';
- ventilation for the existing solitary cells;
- completion of the staff quarters (currently the only standing structure);
- ceilings for the wash house and laundry removed and ventilation installed;
- addition of a ceiling for the hospital;
- addition of a wooden floor for the clothing store;
- construction of a clergyman's house inside the Crime Class muster yard;
- addition of clotheslines between the factory and the boundary fence; and
- rails for airing bedding.

In 1850, a series of scandals involving misappropriated medical supplies led to a change in administration at the Ross Female Factory. With the hiring of a new Superintendent, Dr E. S. Hall, a number of significant additions were made to the southern half of the site. A Gothic-style stone chapel was opportunistically built atop an alluvial terrace in the south-eastern corner of the Factory. This impressive structure immediately overlooked a row of 12 cells for 'separate treatment' also added that year. A new workroom and wool store was constructed for Crime Class inmates; built against the southern side of the factory, its expanse of windows faced both the new chapel and solitary cells. A coroner's inquiry into

the deaths of infants housed in Factory nurseries resulted in the addition of a separate hospital kitchen and 'dead house'.

In 1851, the constable's room and office first appeared in factory plans. Located across Portugal Street and facing the factory entrance, this structure functioned as the guard house and visitor checkpoint. Scripps and Clark suggest that this hut was also occupied by male convict gardeners until they were moved to the 1820s era military barracks in the centre of Ross township.<sup>37</sup> By the end of 1852, no further additions or modifications of factory structures were documented.

With the cessation of the transportation system in 1853, the Convict Department confirmed closure of the Ross Factory in late 1854. The 11 remaining inmates were transferred to other institutions before 31 January 1855, and all portable furniture was sold.

## A Police Station (1855–1938)

Buildings vacated by the Convict Department were transferred to the colonial government. The Roman Catholic Church rented the factory chapel to provide services for the local community. Presumably, use of this structure by the Catholics ceased in 1868 with completion of a large stone Roman Catholic church within the township.

On 31 January 1855, management of the factory site (other than the chapel) was handed over to the police department. However, this government department had little interest in the property, leasing-out the undeveloped blocks for sheep grazing, and leaving factory buildings unoccupied but supervised by a caretaker.

In 1873, contractors for the Main Line Railway petitioned the Colonial Secretary for use of the site. They were granted use of the remaining factory buildings 'on the condition that they put them into tenable repair (which would involve fresh roofing nearly the whole)'.<sup>38</sup> Archaeological evidence of the railroad occupation period was found throughout trenches in the Crime Class (Fig. 2). Below the upper silt layers were two distinct stratum of brick and sandstone rubble. Preliminary analysis of the artefactual assemblage suggested that while the lower layer of yellow/brown silty matrix appeared to contain convict-era underfloor deposits intermixed with structural debris, the upper layer of rubble and dark gray/brown silt contained frequent deposits of large ferrous industrial related artefacts, including 44 railroad spike heads, 153 large bolt heads, and two brackets for heavy machinery. By 1879, the railway line was constructed on the eastern side of Bond Street, approximately 30 metres east of the female factory site.

According to an 1879 property survey, structures in the south-eastern corner of the original female factory had been demolished, including the wash house, the dead house, a set of solitary cells, and most significantly, part of the Crime Class currently under archaeological investigation. During this period, the site was unofficially reserved for Ross municipal purposes, and the 'Staff Quarters' occupied by Mr John Nickolson.<sup>39</sup> It is uncertain whether John Nickolson was a policeman, site caretaker, or rental tenant.

In December 1895, alterations and additions were made to the 'Staff Quarters', using sandstone recycled from remaining factory buildings, a construction project completed in mid-1897. Although this was the only documented recycling event, oral history suggested that structural remains of the female factory were recycled throughout the built environment of Ross Township. No further documentary or survey images existed for the factory convict structures. The 'Staff Quarters' remained occupied by the Police Department through 1938, with the house wired for electricity sometime during that period.



## The Knowles' Property (1938–1980)

According to historians Lindy Scripps and Julia Clark,

From 1938 to 1974 the [Commandant's Cottage] was occupied by a private tenant, Mr Leslie Knowles, who paid his monthly rent of one pound 12 shillings to the local police trooper. Mr Knowles also rented the rest of the factory site for grazing sheep.<sup>40</sup>

In 1974 Mr Leslie Knowles died, and his son (Mr M. J. 'Tut' Knowles) applied for permission to assume tenancy or to purchase the property. The Lands Department considered the cottage too poorly maintained to support occupation, and Mr Tut Knowles surrendered his tenancy. He continued to graze cows, pigs and sheep over the property through 1980, when it was claimed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (now under the Department of Environment and Land Management).

During the 1995 excavation season, Mr Tut Knowles conducted a site tour, sharing information on modifications made during his family's occupation. His oral history suggested that most subsurface impacts of factory-related deposits occurred within the immediate surrounds of the 'Staff Quarters', then functioning as the Knowles' farmhouse. These farm-related improvements primarily included the construction of a horse barn and various sheds west of the Staff Quarters, an area of the site that according to documentary evidence was not occupied by the female factory. Mr Tut Knowles also mentioned his family dumping domestic rubbish into stone wall remains of the Hiring Class dormitory, and grazing cows over the Crime and Hiring Class areas of the female factory (Fig. 1). The Crime Class dormitory region of the site appeared to hold special significance as a cricket pitch for the Knowles boys, although minimal subsurface impact resulted from this particular activity. In summary, twentieth century occupation of the site seems to have exerted limited impact on female factory related archaeological deposits. Oral history suggests depositions of farm related materials concentrated in the Hiring Class region of the site.

## THE ROSS FACTORY ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT

During November 1995, a series of non-invasive surveys were conducted at the Ross Female Factory site. Results from the first non-invasive surveys were inconclusive.<sup>41</sup> An electro-resistivity survey of the Hiring Class and Crime Class wards produced little information on either the location or morphology of subsurface features. Loaned by the Cultural Heritage Branch of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, the instrumentation consisted of a twin-probe array, linked to a Gossen Geohm 3 Direct-reading Resistivity Meter. Because of the design of the metal resistivity frame, probe separation was set at 0.5 metre intervals.<sup>42</sup> While such geophysical surveys have produced exciting results on other Tasmanian sites, the Ross Female Factory was probably an inappropriate site for such methods.<sup>43</sup> The shallowness of archaeological deposits prevented proper insertion of resistivity probes, and inaccurate readings resulted. A metal detector survey of the same region also produced disappointing results, with the amount of twentieth-century period ferrous deposits obscuring evidence of underlying factory-related structures or deposits.<sup>44</sup>

More promising results came from the topographic survey, directed by the Surveying and Spatial Information Department, University of Tasmania. Systematically recording local geophysical features, this survey demonstrated a high correspondence between topographic features on the current landscape, and structures documented in nineteenth-century plans of the factory. This spatial correlation suggested that subsurface factory architectural features remained intact. Analysis of resulting maps also suggested that factory

architects made opportunistic use of the undulating alluvial landscape for surveillance schemes, including the Gothic style chapel constructed atop a natural terrace, immediately overlooking the sandstone 'Separate Treatment' punishment cells.

## 1995: THE PRELIMINARY SEASON

From 8 December 1995 to 10 January 1996, 16 square metres were excavated in the Crime Class dormitory of the Ross Female Factory. Explicitly following methods developed for the Port Arthur Conservation and Development Project, all archaeological data recovered at the Ross Female Factory site was recorded using the Harris Matrix system.<sup>45</sup> According to this method, every part of the site is defined as a 'context' and is assigned a unique four-digit number. Contexts can be layers of soil, natural deposits, animal disturbances, soil stains, holes dug into previous layers, or architectural features.<sup>46</sup> These contexts can then be sequenced stratigraphically, ultimately creating interpretation of occupation periods within the given site.

The Ross Factory Archaeology Project followed standard excavation methods.<sup>47</sup> All artefacts, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, were catalogued by their context number. All dirt removed from the site was screened through both 5 millimetre and 2.5 millimetre sieves. Many of the smaller artefacts were found in the screens rather than within the excavation trenches.

During excavations, samples of each layer of dirt was tested for colour and pH. Colour was described based on a Munsell Soil Chart, with a specific hue, value and chroma recorded for each stratigraphic unit. Field measurements of soil pH were also taken, with the Inoculo Laboratories Soil pH Kit yielding adequate estimates of soil acidity/alkalinity.

Artefacts from one stratigraphic context were provenienced and bagged together, as they ultimately belonged to the same stratigraphic event. Due to depositional circumstances, lot provenience was determined to be the most appropriate locational detail for most finds.<sup>48</sup> Documentary and material evidence for site formation processes indicated a transposed primary context. The major depositional layers resulted from a mixture of Factory-related underfloor deposits and subsequent destruction and recycling of the Factory structures. Individual three-dimensional locations of artefacts were therefore not directly related to social use of the site; that microscale spatial information had been obscured by later demolition activities. Thus, a lot provenience seemed to yield the most appropriate information. However, following methods developed by English Heritage, three-dimensional point provenience data was taken for all 'special finds', or those objects determined to be highly significant, photogenic, valuable, fragile, or otherwise unusual.<sup>49</sup>

The 1995 season of the Ross Factory Archaeology Project produced three significant results. Firstly, a preliminary stratigraphic sequence was established for the Crime Class ward.<sup>50</sup> Consisting of six phases, this sequence included a recognisable series of female factory depositions overlain by later post-factory demolition events (see discussion of Fig. 2). The discrete appearance of these depositional phases might have been influenced by the local environment. The Macquarie River is a dominant geomorphological feature of the Ross township landscape. Part of the Tamar drainage system, the Macquarie runs from Lake Toombs (near St Peter's Pass) northwards into the South Esk River. The Macquarie is a 'meandering river', flowing through unconsolidated alluvium, and confined within the Midlands Graben.<sup>51</sup> The township of Ross lies within the flood plain of the Macquarie River, the famous sandstone Ross Bridge built to provide a crossing for the nineteenth-century Midland Road.<sup>52</sup> Although the majority of the township lies on a particularly high alluvial ridge, above the annual flood levels, the Ross Female Factory site is located on the lower, southern side of this terrace. Consequently, the

## Ross Factory Archaeology Project:

### Area A: west facing profile

#### Interior of Crime Class Dormitory

180.920 m  
(above sea level)  
16s/5w



180.802m  
20s/5w



0 20 60 cm

Fig. 2: Line drawing of stratigraphy, interior of Crime Class dormitory, Area A.



Fig. 3: Overhead photo of Area A, facing east.

site has experienced relatively frequent flooding and sediment deposit. The frequency of such alluvial depositions may have contributed to the depth and clarity of the local stratigraphy at this rural site.

Substantial architectural and artefactual remains of the Ross Female Factory were also discovered. Foundations of the original Crime Class dormitory suggested multiple building sequences, possibly the architectural signature of continued power struggles between prison officials and recalcitrant convicts. The preliminary test trench also uncovered the presence of a carefully engineered course of carved sandstone drain, a feature never documented in factory construction or sanitation records. Underfloor deposits suggested the presence of illicit materials such as non-uniform buttons, alcohol bottle fragments, and kaolin tobacco pipes.

Finally, only one of the two wells currently present at the factory site appeared to be related to convict-era occupation. Through a combination of surface erosion and vandalism, the upper layers of dirt had been removed from both well features. While the northern well (located within the Crime Class) did not appear to have any lining, the southern well was lined with handcut blocks of sandstone. In 1850 a windlass was installed at the head of the southern well to raise the water, and an 1862 historic plan of the structures remaining at the factory site documented the location of this well.<sup>53</sup> Beyond the mention of two wells in La Trobe's 1847 report, no other historical evidence suggested the northern well was contemporary with convict era use of the site.

## 1997: THE SECOND SEASON

Opening on the 6th of January, the 1997 season consisted of eight weeks of excavation at the Ross Female Factory site. Over 100 square metres were opened, divided between three different areas of the site: the Crime Class, the Hiring Class, and the Solitary Cells. These trenches investigated archaeological remains from the three different probationary states experienced by female convicts at Ross. Excavation and recording methods developed for the 1995 season were again used during the second season. Project participants included local community volunteers, avocational archaeologists, Aboriginal Heritage Officers, and students from numerous Australian universities.

### Area A: The Crime Class

Extending from the preliminary trench, 48 square metres were excavated within the Crime Class ward (Fig. 3). Sandstone foundations of the original dormitory structure were rapidly uncovered. These two walls were approximately 90 centimetres wide and 50 centimetres high, running along a north-south axis through the excavation trench. Constructed of roughly cut sandstone bonded with lime mortar, these features also contained stone packing to even out the irregular stone blocks. This packing consisted of smaller rubble from a variety of stone sources, predominantly including sandstone and chert. Aboriginal lithic artefacts recovered during excavations appeared to have been recycled into the rubble pack.<sup>54</sup> The



high frequency of lime-washed mortar recovered from both interior and exterior sides of foundation walls supported documentary accounts of dormitory whitewashing.

Archaeological evidence for floorboards was also recovered, in the form of three sandstone support tiers, two running parallel to both dormitory foundation walls, and one midway through the structure. The archaeological presence of these joist supports correlates with documentary evidence for construction of wooden floors within the Crime and Hiring Class dormitories during 1848.<sup>55</sup> No archaeological evidence remained of the sandstone flagged floors documented for the early 1840s male probation station period of site occupation.

The stratigraphic sequence for the Crime Class dormitory interior demonstrated that sterile clay and sand sediments were overlain by two separate rubble deposits (Fig. 2). Although analysis of the artefactual assemblage is currently in preliminary stages, field observations suggested that the lower layer of rubble (held within a yellow/brown silt matrix) contained a significant frequency of occupation related artefacts, including kaolin clay tobacco pipe bowls and stems, copper alloy sewing pins, red-on-white glass beads, ferrous, bone and mother of pearl buttons, mid-nineteenth-century olive glass bottle fragments, British coins, and numerous transfer printed ceramic sherds. The upper rubble layer (held within a dark gray/brown silt matrix) held a much higher frequency of heavy ferrous artefacts and slag deposits. This layer was interpreted as related to post-factory use of the site by contractors from the Main Line Railway. Installation of wooden floor boards for accommodation of the female convicts appeared to have accompanied a removal of the original stone floors, and disturbance of the artefactual debris associated with the male probation station period. This specific replacement activity seemed to relate artefactual underfloor deposits to the female factory occupation period.

On the exterior of the Crime Class dormitory, the original muster yard flooring consisted of highly compacted dirt, pebbles and cobbles. This courtyard also contained an extensive drain system, constructed in two parts. The upper course was an intricately carved sandstone spoon drain. While the northern sections of this feature appeared to be recycled and refitted, the southern section was specifically fitted for the dormitory during the female factory period. According to 1848 plans for factory alterations, an entrance porch was added to the Crime Class dormitory in preparation for incarceration of female convicts.<sup>56</sup> Archaeologically, the right angle turn in this spoon drain suggested that segment of the drain feature was modified during 1848 to accommodate the addition of a porch. Brick and sandstone foundations were uncovered, archaeologically locating both the porch structure and the entrance to the dormitory. A rectangular gap in the foundation wall marked the original location of the sandstone door sill, a structural element probably robbed from the dormitory and recycled into some other local building after the abandonment of the prison.

The addition of an entrance porch on the Crime Class dormitory could be interpreted in a variety of ways. From a purely functionalist perspective, the porch served as a shelter for inmates and staff entering or leaving the dormitory. During the factory period, between 44 and 93 women were incarcerated within the Crime Class ward.<sup>57</sup> Given such a high occupation density, perhaps the structure was added to combat excessive wearing of the pebble-pack courtyard directly west of the dormitory entrance. However, architectural theory could offer another possible interpretation of this structural space.

French philosopher Henri Lefebvre considered four types of social spaces:

Every social space once duly demarcated and oriented, implies a superimposition of certain relations upon

networks of named places, of *lieuxdits*. This results in various kinds of space.

- 1) Accessible space for normal use
- 2) Boundaries and forbidden territories
- 3) Places of abode, whether permanent or temporary
- 4) Junction points: these are often places of passage and encounter; often, too, access to them is forbidden except on certain occasions

Boundaries and junction points (which are also, in the nature of things, points of friction) will naturally have different aspects according to the type of society (original format).<sup>58</sup>

Bounded spaces form the architectural framework of institutions, and most especially of prisons.<sup>59</sup> The boundaries between such spaces can communicate hierarchical relationships between those spaces, as the tension of junction points becomes addressed through the material world. In 1984, architects Hillier and Hanson developed an interpretation of power relations through examination of boundaries and junction points within built structures.<sup>60</sup> Borrowing their philosophy, architect Thomas Markus argued:

In public buildings there is a shallow visitor zone. Visitors interface with the inhabitants at some spatial barrier which prevents deeper penetration: the counter in shops and banks, the bar in pubs, the proscenium arch in theatres, the gallery space of museums. The inhabitants occupy a zone beyond this which, to visitors, looks deep and usually has its own access. Depth indicates power.<sup>61</sup>

However, Markus, Hillier and Hanson all recognise the problem of modern penal institutions:

In one kind of building, the normal relationship is inverted. The visitors are deep within, increasing depth signifying decreasing power, and the inhabitants in a shallow, often ringy, zone at the surface controlling access to the deeper parts. These are institutions: the prisons, hospitals, asylums and workhouses.<sup>62</sup>

Following this line of interpretation, an increase in architectural spaces between inhabitants (institutional staff) and visitors (institutional inmates) would correlate with a decrease in the power status of the latter. The addition of new boundary markers, whether fence lines, guard houses, or entrance porches, to the Ross Female Factory could possibly be interpreted as an increase in the hierarchical nature of spaces within the institution. Moreover, if the new entrance porch functionally served as a shelter for factory staff during routine observation of inmates inside the dormitory, the addition of the structure could be interpreted as the material signature of increased surveillance schemes within the institution.

The underbarrel of the Crime Class drain was also excavated in the northern half of Area A. Revealed to be a 'box drain', the underbarrel was formed from brick walls and hard clay flooring, and was capped by large rough cut sandstone blocks. Few artefacts were recovered from this feature. Given the substantial nature of this drain feature, it is remarkable that no mention of it exists in any historical documentation. The presence of convicts provided a surplus of manual labour within Tasmania, and male convicts were frequently assigned to labour-intensive public works, including construction of sandstone buildings, roads, bridges and drains throughout the colony.<sup>63</sup> However, because the modification of convict establishments required layers of bureaucratic approvals, including the Royal Engineer's Office, the Committee of Officers Reviewing Convict Expenditure, and the Comptroller-General of Convicts' Office, some documentation existed for

many of the architectural features of the female factories. Plans and elevations were prepared for everything from fences and privies, to ceilings and floors within female convict dormitories. Meticulous details of the drain system were recorded for the Launceston Female Factory.<sup>64</sup> Although the absence of documentation on the Ross Crime Class drain feature could have resulted from differential preservation of archival materials, the silence of the historical record on this particular and substantial feature is noteworthy.

### Area B: The Hiring Class

Originally begun as a one metre square test trench, Area B was eventually extended to 40 square metres, sampling from both the Hiring Class Dormitory and the adjoining Assistant Superintendent's Quarters. Area B demonstrated good preservation for factory-related architectural features.

The Hiring Class dormitory proved to be very similar to the Crime Class structure. Foundation walls were constructed from courses of cut sandstone and rubble pack, and sandstone floorboard supports were uncovered within the structure. A highly compact dirt and pebble pack muster yard lay directly east of the Hiring Class, and remains of two upper sandstone spoon drains were located on the immediate exterior of the Dormitory structure (Fig. 4).

The presence of a second structure immediately south of the Hiring Class complicated architectural interpretations of Area B. According to historic plans, this brick structure was originally built as a cook house during the early 1840s male probation station occupation period.<sup>65</sup> During the female factory period, it was modified into the Assistant Superintendent's quarters.<sup>66</sup> Delineating the entrance to this structure was a pathway of cut sandstone flags. As with the box drain features in Areas A and B, this path feature could be functionally interpreted as a labour-intensive construction scheme designed to occupy the male convict workers. The feature could also have been laid for safety or sanitary purposes, as the Assistant Superintendent's quarters originally housed the cookhouse. Regardless of its original intended purpose, and again drawing from architectural theory, this sandstone pathway might also represent a status marker within the cultural landscape of the factory.<sup>67</sup> Given the consistently inadequate supply of shoes for female inmates, winter musters within the pebble-pack courtyard would be cold, wet and muddy experiences of institutionalised subordination.<sup>68</sup> The presence of a sandstone pathway for access to and from the Assistant Superintendent's quarters might have communicated a hierarchical order of places within this penal environment.<sup>69</sup>

In Figure 4, only remnants of the sandstone flagging can be seen. This feature overlaid the underbarrel box drain of Area B, and segments were lifted during excavation. The box drain feature was of very similar construction to that of Area A, except in its cut sandstone flooring. Excavation of this feature recovered numerous artefacts, most significantly including two ferrous musket powder flasks. Capped with a copper-alloy self-measuring release valve spout, these pear-shaped artefacts were typical from 1750 through the late nineteenth century.<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, heavy oxidisation of the ferrous body of these artefacts has obscured any distinguishing or decorative marks that might have once identified the flasks.

In contrast to the convict dormitories, the Assistant Superintendent's quarters were of brick construction. This difference is probably related to the original function of the structure as a cook house. An ambiguous brick feature, possibly the remains of a brick oven, was recorded in the southeastern corner of Area B. For logistical reasons, the excavation trench was not extended to fully uncover this feature.



Fig. 4: Overhead photo of Area B, facing south.

The only intact structure remaining from the Ross Female Factory, the 'Staff Quarters', stood less than 10 metres from the excavation trench within Area B. As previously noted, this structure housed the Knowles family from 1938 to 1974. Overlying factory-related stratigraphic contexts were substantial deposits of twentieth-century artefacts, primarily related to agricultural and domestic uses of this cultural landscape. This assemblage of recent artefacts seemed to obscure all earlier deposits of convict-related artefacts; nonetheless these materials were systematically recovered as part of the Ross Factory Archaeology Project. Only one feature was recorded within Area B that could architecturally relate to the twentieth century occupation period. A paved area of flat sandstone flags was uncovered in the western section of Area B. Immediately adjoining the Hiring Class exterior wall foundation, this feature overlay sandstone rubble from the demolition of the convict dormitory. While this recent archaeological assemblage and feature are unrelated to convict occupation of the Ross site, they derive some cultural significance from their reflection of local community development, and changes in Tasmanian rural domestic life over the twentieth century.

### Area C: The Solitary Cells

During the 1997 season, 16 square metres were opened within Area C. Three cells were explored, with the eastern and western cells sampled, and the central cell fully excavated (Fig. 5). Architecturally, the solitary cells were designed to maximise the isolation of female convicts. Rough cut sandstone walls contained women undergoing confinement, minimising all sound transfer and communication between cells. Approximately 50 centimetres thick, the foundations were up to 1 metre high when fully excavated.



*Fig. 5: Overhead photo of Area C, facing south.*



*Fig. 6: Stratigraphic profile within eastern cell, Area C.*

These walls differed slightly from those of the main penal compound. While the upper courses of sandstone and rubble matched those of the Crime and Hiring Class dormitories, the lower foundations consisted of 50 centimetres of unfinished sandstone in a loose rubble pack. The 'frame construction' method was suggested for this foundation base, as is frequently found in contemporary Tasmanian convict structures.<sup>71</sup> Following a 'frame construction' method, deep narrow trenches were dug into sterile layers of the ground, and long wooden boxes set into them. Sandstone rubble was then loosely packed into these construction frames, and covered with an 'icing' of sandy lime mortar. When the mortar had set, the construction frames were removed, and the construction trenches refilled to stabilise the new sandstone rubble bases. The absence of wall trenches for the solitary cells suggests that rather than using wooden frames, the sandstone rubble was packed directly into narrow construction trenches, and the foundation walls built completely into the original trenches. Since the solitary cells were constructed within the Macquarie River flood plain, this modification of the 'frame construction' method would have

offered additional stability for the structure, as the highly compacted natural floodsilts would directly support foundation walls.

Archaeological excavations determined individual cells were approximately 1.3 metre wide by 2 metres long (approximately 4 by 6 feet), a space just large enough to accommodate a single inmate. Recovery of significant window glass deposits suggested fenestrations were located on the southern exterior of the solitary cells. Documentary accounts mention the purchase of window panes for numerous Factory structures.<sup>72</sup> Extrapolating from common nineteenth-century penal designs, these apertures were most likely small rectangular windows placed just below ceiling level, installed to provide necessary air circulation, while limiting visual stimulation and preventing escape.<sup>73</sup>

Unlike structures in Areas A and B, the solitary cells were floored with packed earth. These floors also appeared to be significantly lower than the cell doors. All architectural evidence for the location of entrances had been obscured by post-factory recycling of door sills, entry porches, or stairways. Therefore, archaeological preservation of this



structure began below entry level. However, floor features underlay 35 centimetres to 50 centimetres of demolition debris and structural collapse (Fig. 6). Stratigraphically, this evidence suggested that entry into one of these punishment cells required a descent of up to half a metre. Some internal stairs or short ladder may well have existed for each cell. Regardless of the original height of entrance doors, a recalcitrant convict descended into a cold, small, darkened, silent cell for up to three weeks of 'separate treatment'.<sup>74</sup> Within Tasmania, these 'sunken floors' appear to be an architecturally unique design for solitary cells.<sup>75</sup> Since the Ross Factory cells were originally constructed for the incarceration of female convicts, this peculiar design might be related to gender differences in the perception, nature or experience of solitary confinement, although much more comparative research must be done before such engendered interpretations could be constructed.

## CONCLUSION

Much further work remains for completion of the Ross Factory Archaeology Project. While rough interpretations of the local stratigraphy has been completed, specific sequencing of Harris matrices for each excavation area must still be refined. Cataloguing, identification and laboratory analysis of the Ross Factory artefactual assemblage is currently underway through the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service and the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery of Launceston. With the active involvement of the local community, results from the Ross Factory Archaeology Project are being incorporated into a museum exhibit on the archaeology of Ross. Displayed through the Tasmanian Wool Centre, a local heritage promotion organisation, this exhibit will integrate artefactual and architectural information from all occupation periods of the Factory site. Archaeological field work at the Ross Female Factory has contributed a preliminary insight into the everyday lives of convict women incarcerated within this penal landscape.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funding for the Ross Factory Archaeology Project was provided by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the University of California Pacific Rim Institute, and the Archaeological Research Facility of the University of California at Berkeley. I would like to thank Angie McGowan and Don Ranson from The Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service for their valuable assistance. Elspeth Wishart and Chris Tassell at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery have continued to offer great logistical support throughout this project. The Tasmanian Wool Centre of Ross and the Riggall Family of Somercoates were extremely generous during both fieldwork seasons. I would also like to thank the Hydro-Electric Commission Regional Office in Campbell Town for donating the machinery and equipment operator necessary for obtaining area photographs. Numerous enthusiastic diggers volunteered time and labour during excavations. Mary Reiten was an essential participant as Project Manager, Head Chef, and Camp Therapist. Finally, I would like to remember Martin Davies, whose inspiration and energetic support helped create this project.

## NOTES

- 1 Pearson and Marshall 1995:59.
- 2 Oxley 1996:3.
- 3 Foucault 1990; Evans 1982; Markus 1993; Upton 1992; Friedman 1993.
- 4 Semple 1993.
- 5 Melossi and Pavarini 1981; McLynn 1989.

- 6 Ignatieff 1978.
- 7 Semple 1993:87-88.
- 8 Foucault 1977.
- 9 Hughes 1987; Oxley 1996; Byrne 1993.
- 10 For a general discussion of female imprisonment, refer to Howe 1994; Zedner 1991; and Dobash, Dobash and Gutteridge 1986. For consideration of works specifically focused on Australian female convictism, see Damousi 1997, Oxley 1996, Robinson 1988, Smith 1988, Salt 1981, and Heath 1978.
- 11 British Parliamentary Papers (BPP), Transportation, Vol.VII, Comptroller-General to Lt. Gov., 28 October 1843.
- 12 Brand 1990.
- 13 Rayner 1980; Ryan 1995.
- 14 BPP Vol. XLIII, 1849, No. 1022.
- 15 Brand and Staniforth 1994.
- 16 Damousi 1995.
- 17 Heath 1981.
- 18 Daniels 1993; Damousi 1997.
- 19 Stieglitz 1949:9.
- 20 Rayner 1980; Scripps and Clark 1991.
- 21 Robson 1983:21-22.
- 22 Jones 1971:18.
- 23 Ryan 1996:31-32.
- 24 Jones 1971:96.
- 25 Ryan 1996:32; Robson 1983:22.
- 26 Casella 1996a.
- 27 Robson 1983:102.
- 28 Morgan 1992:19.
- 29 Rayner 1980:5-7.
- 30 Stancombe 1974; Department of Main Roads, Tasmania (DMRT) 1988.
- 31 Rayner 1980:10.
- 32 Rayner 1980:11.
- 33 Scripps and Clark 1991:13.
- 34 Brand 1990:188.
- 35 Casella 1996b.
- 36 Scripps and Clark 1991:13.
- 37 Scripps and Clark 1991:12.
- 38 BPP 1873, No 25, p.18-19.
- 39 Scripps and Clark 1991:61.
- 40 Scripps and Clark 1991:62.
- 41 Casella 1996b:6-8.
- 42 Ranson and Egloff 1988: figure 2.
- 43 Ranson and Egloff 1988.
- 44 Casella 1996b:8.
- 45 Davies and Buckley 1987.
- 46 Davies 1987.
- 47 Davies and Buckley 1987; Hester 1997; Dillon 1989; Connah 1983.
- 48 Casella 1996b.
- 49 Austin 1993.
- 50 Casella 1996b: appendix 2.
- 51 Walsh 1990.
- 52 DMRT 1988.

- 53 Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT), Colonial Office (CO) 280/700/269; AOT plan Public Works Department (PWD) 266/1699.
- 54 Casella 1996a.
- 55 CO 280/690/284 December 1848.
- 56 AOT plan PWD 266/1695.
- 57 Rayner 1980:31.
- 58 Lefebvre 1991:193.
- 59 Foucault 1977.
- 60 Hillier and Hanson 1984.
- 61 Markus 1993:16.
- 62 Markus 1993:17.
- 63 DMRT 1988; Robson 1983.
- 64 AOT plan PWD 290/823.
- 65 AOT plan PWD 266/1693.
- 66 Scripps and Clark 1991:13.
- 67 Markus 1993:95.
- 68 AOT MM 62/28 12161; Scripps and Clark 1991:51.
- 69 Refer to Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1992:84–88 for a discussion of architectural management of waste water and social status.
- 70 Held and Jenkins 1959:134.
- 71 Angie McGowan 1997, personal communication.
- 72 Scripps and Clark 1991:13; Casella 1996b:4.
- 73 Kerr 1984.
- 74 Scripps and Clark 1991:26–27.
- 75 Kerr 1984.

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