

Wish you were here: Historic inscriptions from the North Head Quarantine Station, Manly, NSW

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From the early nineteenth century many of the ships arriving in Port Jackson, NSW were required to undergo quarantine at North Head, Manly. Thousands of people passed through this site during its 150 year history. Historic inscriptions remain as one of the most intriguing archaeological legacies of this period. In this paper we revisit recordings of these inscriptions and consider what they may tell us about the people who inhabited the site. Using contemporary theories on the material culture of travel and memorialisation we explore the inscriptions as commemorative gestures, or mementoes of passage. In the process we reflect on our own professional ties to the past.

THE PULL OF THE PAST

Archaeologists, historians and cultural heritage professionals have a diverse and sometimes divergent suite of methods, theories and interpretive lenses at their disposal. The common ground of our practice is a shared motivation to engage with the past and an obligation of sorts to reanimate the places, people and objects under investigation. We all, in effect, invoke the past in the present through our professional practice. The sites where we work, the materials we handle and the stories they carry, all contribute to bringing together the 'now' and the 'then'. Often it is the very power of this combined presence, with its attendant sense of wonder that draws so many of us into doing what we do. Our professional efforts to understand the past, and our connections to it, are a not-so-distant cousin to the allure that fuels current interests in historical re-enactment, archaeology documentaries, family history and cultural tourism. To borrow from Susan Stewart (1993) we might describe this emotive currency as a kind of inquisitive longing and as a suspended state of wishing the past into the present whilst knowing it will always remain at a distance. Our actions as archaeologists are well captured in the sentiment of our title. We know that the past is remote, still, we wish it into being, here in the present.

We begin by addressing the pull of the past because it frames the metaphorical approach we bring to the historic inscriptions at the North Head Quarantine Station, Manly, New South Wales (Figure 1). It also enables us to consider the themes of liminality, passage and commemoration as ways of interpreting the assemblage of inscriptions. This paper is an introduction to the journeys that were taken to and from the Quarantine Station, a place which, by its very nature, also reflects that ultimate journey through life, towards death. We consider the people who spent time at the Quarantine Station by thinking about the inscriptions they left behind as postcards sent from a point of rupture in their travels. While we do not suggest that people were inscribing these rocks with the aim of making permanent postcards, in this paper we would like to consider what we might learn by receiving them as such.

The ideas that form the crux of this paper are based on our observations of the North Head inscriptions in conjunction with data collected by Wendy Thorp (1983a, 1983b). During a consultancy project for the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service Thorp (1983a:14) recorded 854 inscriptions distributed across 11 designated precincts in and around the main quarantine facilities at Spring Cove (Figure 2). A second major area of inscriptions is located some 500m south of the Quarantine Station on the cliffs and ledges of an area called Old Man's Hat. This vicinity contains a large but as yet undetermined number of inscriptions (Figure 2) which are the focus of our new research project, begun in early 2010. Aside from informing our understanding of the Quarantine Station inscriptions, the Old Man's Hat assemblage is not included in this re-working of Thorp's original 1983 survey data.

Rock engravings are, of course, a major form of cultural representation created by Indigenous Australians across the Sydney Basin (McDonald 2008, Attenbrow 2002). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, non-Indigenous Australians also engraved inscriptions onto rock surfaces, trees, metal water tanks and the plaster walls of abandoned buildings to commemorate acts of exploration, transit and presence. Often dismissed as mere graffiti these sorts of historical inscriptions are nonetheless expressions of place-marking and engagement, and in the case of the Quarantine Station engravings we would argue, these activities were carried out



Figure 1: Historic inscriptions from the Quarantine Station, North Head, Manly, NSW. Photograph courtesy of Ursula Frederick.

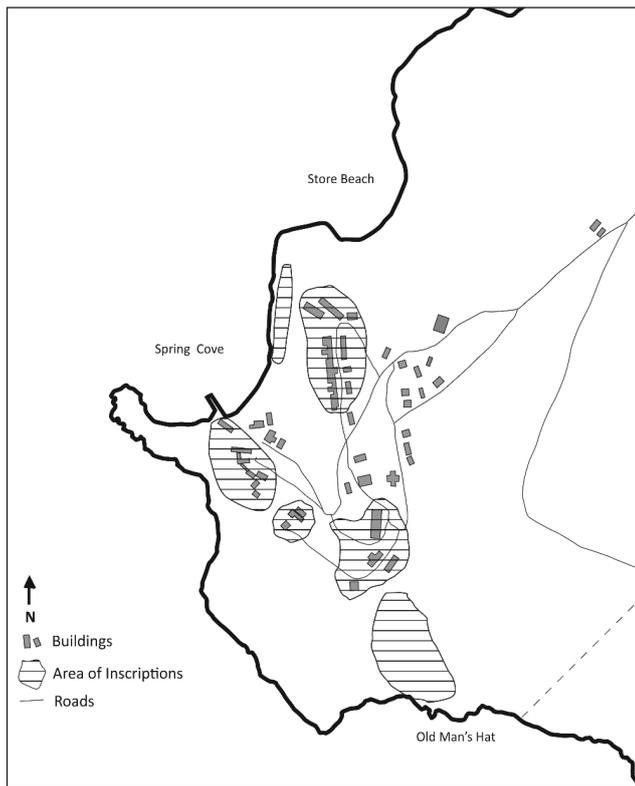


Figure 2: Map of Quarantine Station showing density of inscriptions at Spring Cove and Old Man's Hat. Map courtesy of Ursula Frederick.

using specific and culturally contextualised graphic vocabularies. In Sydney historical inscriptions have been recorded at other Government institutions such as the Callan Park Asylum in the suburb of Rozelle (Clegg 1998, 2000) and on Garden Island in Sydney Harbour (Wilson 2008). Historical graffiti produced by passing travellers has been recorded in Australia (e.g. Chambers Pillar) and many other parts of the world, from El Morro, New Mexico (Slater 1961) to Africa (Breen and Lane 2003: 477) and the Middle East (Crone and Moreh, 2000). Mark-making activities are also a familiar phenomena in contexts of institutionalisation and incarceration (Casella 2005; Gojak 2001; Scholten 2003; Wilson 2008). The Angel Island immigration and quarantine station in the USA is the only other quarantine site we know of to have a large assemblage of historical inscriptions (Lai, Lim and Young 1980). The inscriptions at the North Head Quarantine Station are by far the largest, most concentrated and event specific assemblage known in Australia.

Material repertoires of passage: memorials, souvenirs and postcards

In contemporary society travel for reasons of migration, work, or pleasure, is a major political, social and economic force. Travel from one place to another, and sometimes back again, usually always incorporates something of the transformational and transitional. The notion of passage not only expresses the physical and emotional transformations from one state of being to another but also the experiences of liminality that accompany even the most seasoned traveller as they move between the everyday and the extraordinary, between arriving and departing, between here and there and home and away. As members of modern consumer society we have all learnt and are thus able to participate in the public and private conventions and rituals associated with travel, journey and passage. We signify and commemorate our journeys through

material repertoires of travel that include particular forms of clothing, personal accessories, diaries, guide books, cameras and different sorts of souvenirs. We also engage in place-marking behaviours that commemorate both collective and individual experiences of journey and passage. Public spaces in our cities and towns are decorated with memorials to the events of collective sacrifice and tragedy. Headstones in cemeteries, the plastic flowers and handmade crosses of roadside memorials and the spray-painted scrawl of a tag on a fence, wall or rock all commemorate and sometimes celebrate the passing presence of the individual. In this paper we take one particular example of commemorative material culture, the postcard, as a way of thinking about the inscriptions at the Quarantine Station.

The picture postcard is one of the most familiar artefacts of travel in modern consumer society (Figure 3). The postcard is a form of communication and consumer product that dates from around 1860, although it has its antecedents in forms of visual and textual communication such as visiting cards, trade cards, ornamental writing paper and decorated envelopes that can be traced back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Staff 1979: 9-22; Stevens 1995). Although postcards were never intended to be permanent memorials to personal travel experiences, through the contemporary phenomenon of popular collecting postcard collections from the late nineteenth century to the present day have been preserved to create an archive not only of the visual representations of travel but also of the more intimate forms of personal communication between ordinary people. Postcards sit quite literally on an edge, occupying a liminal space that veers between the mass production of shared iconographies of nation, place, history, nature and culture and the highly personal and intimate textual expressions of journey, experience and event.

Unlike other forms of greeting card, the postcard is a highly public form of communication. On their journeys, from the postboxes of tourist locales to the letterboxes of family, friends and work colleagues, they are open to be read and viewed by all those who handle their transit. In this sense postcards are a locale where public and private spheres are in direct contact, the image for public consumption on the front and the text box for private view on the back. Postcard form is highly standardised; the back for writing, the front for images, text on the left, address on the right, stamp in the top right hand corner. The graphic vocabulary of postcard imagery is likewise produced according to a set of culturally understood conventions. When we go to purchase a postcard we expect to be able to choose from a familiar set of representations; the use of framing devices around an image, multiple images representing a location, views of built and natural features and



Figure 3: Postcard of an ocean liner at sea, 1908. From the collection of the State Library of Victoria, Accession number: H42531/128. Image courtesy of the State Library of Victoria.

wildlife, humorous captions and cartoons, cultural groups photographed in local dress and so on. The more personal element of the postcard, namely the handwritten text on the back is also produced according to a set of conventions and standardised textual formats; abbreviated lists of experiences, an anecdote of an amazing event, place or sight, the clichés of ‘wish you were here’, ‘see you soon’ ‘back on the 10th’, and the ‘love Bazza xxx’ of signing off.

Cultural studies of postcards have emphasised the ways in which postcards maintain and create the notion of travel destinations as authentic and exotic and how they use a standardised set of visual images to reify specific narratives of history, place and identity. For example, Markwick (2001: 417) in an analysis of postcards from Malta, an important destination for British tourists, writes that the postcard ‘serves both as a personal memento of the experience and as a means of extending it to other potential tourists as recipients’. She also notes that ‘postcard imagery draws on a number of universal and specific themes’ (Markwick 2001: 434). Similarly, Waitt and Head (2002: 323) argue that postcards from the Kimberley region of north Western Australia communicate particular mythologies of destination in this case the timelessness and primitiveness of the frontier. They suggest that the images carried by postcards have a permanency that the cards themselves do not (Waitt and Head 2002: 319). Postcards exist as ‘a mechanism by which the traveller’s experiences are authenticated for both the purchaser and the recipient of the postcards’ (Waitt and Head 2002: 232). Postcards are thus seen as mementoes and indices of the experiential and authentic, as well as cultural artefacts that reinforce and direct the visual canons of travel and tourism.

Pritchard and Morgan’s (2003: 125) analysis of postcards from Wales also reiterates the role of the postcard in producing, consuming and performing landscapes, identities and places. They demonstrate how particular visual narratives embedded within modern Welsh postcards make and remake place and identity to create three imagined countries, a modern urban Wales, remote wild Wales and a traditional Wales (Pritchard and Morgan 2003: 127). It is these ideas of postcards as metonyms for the journey framed by a limited and familiar set of visual representations that produce and reproduce place and identity, past and present that we draw upon.

THE QUARANTINE STATION

In the early days of the NSW colony passengers and crew were quarantined on their ships (Foley 1995: 10). In 1814 a decision was made to use land-based quarantine when convicts and guards from the HMS *Surrey* were landed near Milsons Point (Foley 1995: 10). North Head became the site for quarantine in 1828 and in July of that year the first ship to be quarantined at Spring Cove was a convict ship called the *Bussorah Merchant* (Foley 1995: 18). An outbreak of smallpox occurred during the long voyage from England and on arrival the convicts and their guards were housed in tents on the shore of the cove. In 1837 the *Lady MacNaghten*, an immigrant ship, arrived in Port Jackson with passengers and crew already stricken by typhus and scarlet fever on the voyage. Of the 412 immigrants to the colony, 10 adults and 44 children died on the voyage, followed by 14 more during their lengthy quarantine (Foley 1995: 25). The quarantine of the *Lady MacNaghten* was the catalyst for the establishment of a permanent Quarantine Station on North Head and following the allocation of funds by the Legislative Council, buildings began to be erected on the site.

Over its 157 years of operation the Quarantine Station site

was continually developed so that its multi-layered historical fabric now includes a range of brick, weatherboard and fibro buildings. There are accommodation quarters, a hospital, isolation ward, morgue, staff quarters, wharf facilities and a range of associated quarantine infrastructure such as auto-claves and showers where passengers and their possessions were fumigated on arrival. These buildings now form the heritage tourism site operated by Mawland Quarantine Station Pty Ltd which was granted a lease to manage and operate the Quarantine Station in 2000 (Q Station: <http://www.qstation.com.au/history.php>).

Today, a dominant feature of the built environment is the class-based accommodation system. Completed in 1886, this provided different standards of lodging, dining and recreation facilities for passengers arriving in Australia based on the class of ticket purchased. In 1902 Asiatic quarters were built with an adjacent open air kitchen and dining facility, a highly tangible demonstration of the social attitudes and government policies towards non-European migrants. Another major period of building occurred in the first decades of the twentieth century when the wharf precinct was redesigned to include a luggage shed, state of the art disinfection block, laundry and powerhouse, waiting shelter and bathing blocks for each of the three classes. A modern isolation block was constructed to house up to 30 cases of suspected infection, additional dining, kitchen block, accommodation for up to 300 steerage passengers and quarters for 100 second-class passengers were added. A cable tramway, electric lights and new staff cottages were also constructed. During this period the administration of quarantine passed from State to Commonwealth control and in 1909 a national system consisting of 12 official quarantine stations was established (Honey 2006: 26). From 1828 to 1984 around 580 ships and more than 13,000 people were quarantined at North Head (Foley 1995: 11). Some 572 people were buried in one of the three burial grounds at the station. These stark statistics provide some sense of the scale of the quarantine operations against which the 1000 or so inscriptions can be placed.

Inscriptions at the Quarantine Station

Read purely as historical documents the inscriptions at the Quarantine Station provide a rich archive of ships’ names, ports of origin, dates of arrival, names of crew and passengers and give some indication of the diverse ethnicity of migrants with inscriptions in Chinese, Japanese, Cyrillic, Greek, Hebrew and Arabic, in addition to those in English. However, beyond reading the inscriptions as an inventory of quarantine, it is also possible to view them as an assemblage of rock art, to ask a set of questions about processes of representation. Why did people choose to carve themselves into the fabric of the Australian continent using a limited, formal and repeated set of graphic elements? Why did people use the conventional graphic forms and content of official commemoration and memorialisation in physical and social contexts where they might be expected to express a sense of outrage, dismay or rebellion at their enforced quarantine? Is the reproduction of such a formalised iconography a self-conscious act of class and ethnic mimicry or even irony, or did people use a recognised graphic vocabulary to create a permanent record of their presence that would continue to be valued and thus conserved for the future? As a form of cultural representation and production, the inscriptions produce a new view of peoples’ lives and experiences in a liminal setting a long way from home. By analysing the form, content and iconography of the inscriptions, we hope to gather some insight into the ways in which people chose to represent their cultural identities and their experiences of travel and quarantine.

The inscriptions range in size and complexity from basic initials, dates and symbols to more complex arrangements made through a combination of engraving techniques, including bas-relief. There are several large examples, up to one square metre in size and incorporating shipping company insignia, lists of names all enclosed in a decorative border (Figure 4). The earliest surviving inscription dates from 1835 and reads 'J. Dawson landed here to perform quarantine on the 11th September A.D. 1835 with his wife Emily, 3 sons and 5 daughters from Lincolnshire on the ship Canton of London in the reign of William IV of Britain and Ireland'. The 234 immigrants aboard the ship *Canton* were quarantined at the Station from 3 September to 6 October 1835 because of an outbreak of smallpox during the voyage. This example provides an indication of how some inscriptions work to personalize the quarantine experience, as individuals seek to convey their identity through key details, such as name, age, kinship, sovereign and nationality. By comparison some inscriptions record only the name of the ship.

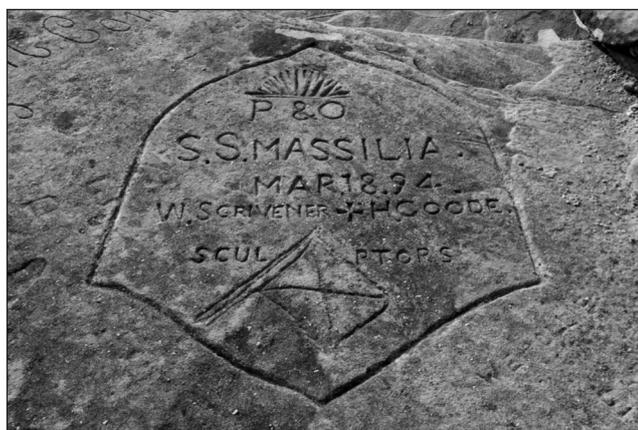


Figure 4. Historic inscription from Old Man's Hat, showing text, motifs and decorative framing. Photograph courtesy of Ursula Frederick.

Other historical information inscribed at the site includes the names and ranks of ships' officers and medical staff, the names of ships, ports of origin, and dates of quarantine. In addition to this factual content, some inscriptions include deeply personal and poetic statements or humorous accounts of quarantine experiences. One inscription at Old Man's Hat reads '*HMAS (Oct) (1895) Cuzco, In Loving Memory of Irish Stew*'. Variation in the textual content of the inscriptions demonstrates not only that people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds recorded their voyage and quarantine in different ways but that there were different experiences of quarantine. This is reinforced by the oral testimonies recorded from some voyages, such as the *Aorangi* quarantined due to smallpox. One passenger, Isabel Brierley, described the period of quarantine as a continuous holiday in her poem 'Life in Quarantine' (Charles 1988):

*Oh to be in Quarantine now that Summer's here,
Phoning to your friends at work, sending out for beer;
Bathe by day and bridge by night, life of endless play,
Oh to be in quarantine, banking up your pay.*

However quarantine was also unpleasant and other passengers shared their feelings of vulnerability and dread. This is evident in a Chinese inscription made at the Wharf Precinct. It communicates the pessimism felt by its creator during his stay, a warning to those that may come and a blessing for those who read this text:

*Sky ... Ocean
I am very frightened of having the disease.*

Moreover the doctor is helpless to control the sickness.

Feeling pessimistic and despondent.

I am not used to maintaining hygiene yet.

If you asked me the feeling about the voyage.

I shall persuade you never come here for pleasure.

Wish you good health and a long life.

Xie Ping De, a resident of HE Country

Early Summer, Ding Ji Year

(Xia and Zhou 1986)

Ships, flags and crew: characterising the assemblage

In 1983 consultant archaeologist Wendy Thorp carried out a detailed survey of the historic inscriptions in and around Spring Cove at the Quarantine Station for the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (Thorp 1983a, b). This comprehensive survey remains the only detailed study of the Quarantine Station's unique heritage of non-Indigenous, historic inscriptions. Given the rapidity with which many of the engravings have physically deteriorated over the last 27 years the photographic records and data produced by Wendy Thorp provide an invaluable baseline for both the conservation and any analysis of the inscriptions. The analysis presented here is based upon the summary data in Thorp's unpublished 1983 report whilst the interpretations and theoretical frameworks are those of the authors. In addition to the report Thorp also produced a detailed inventory of all the inscriptions (Thorp 1983b). Rather than return to the raw data contained in the inventory volumes we have used Thorp's summary data and our own observations to draw out salient elements of the assemblage that relate to the concepts of the memorial, the souvenir and the expressions of collective and individual identities.

Spatial distribution and content of the assemblage:

Approximately two-thirds (67 per cent, n=575) of the recorded assemblage is concentrated around Spring Cove, the arrival and departure point for those quarantined upon arrival into Port Jackson. Of the remaining, 32 per cent (n=269) occur in the hospital precincts of the Station, generally where those who had fallen ill were nursed and only one per cent of inscriptions were recorded at Cannae Point and at the road (or land) entrance to the Station (see Figure 2 for inscription densities).

A dominant feature of the assemblage is its textual character, with 87 per cent (n=744) of inscriptions incorporating some kind of textual component, and 63.8 per cent comprising only text. The majority of these are in the English language with initials, names and monograms especially prevalent. Other recurring alphanumeric themes in the text-based assemblage include dates which occur in 24 per cent, 14.3 per cent include the names of ships, 5.3 per cent include the names of particular places, presumably the port of origin, and 2.7 per cent incorporate an individual's rank. Mottos and shipping company names are amongst the other themes repeated within the inscriptions.

The dominance of a small category of textual themes reveals the very structured and conventionalised nature of the inscription activities. This is reinforced by the legibility and formalised style of the characters/fonts in use. One key reason why this may be so is that those creating or commissioning the inscriptions drew upon a visual language and traditions of stone inscription strongly informed by a commemorative aesthetic and maritime iconography (Stewart 2007). Examples of such an aesthetic are found not only in the more portable

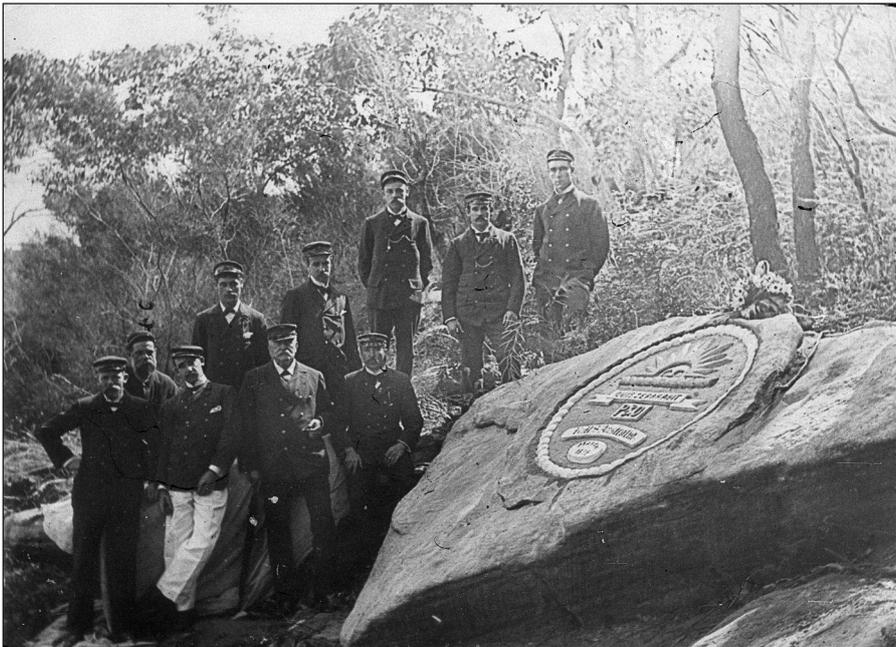


Figure 5: "Carving on rock at Quarantine Station at North Head. Cut by engineers from RMS Australia while quarantined. Engineers posing next to the carving – Sydney, NSW" – March 1898. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Call Number: At Work and Play – 06067, Digital Order Number: bcp_06067. Image reproduced courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.

material culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as coins, shields, plaques and medallions but also in the script and ornamentation evident on gravestones, monuments and statuary (Mytum 2004; Stewart 2007; Tarlow 1999). These themes and techniques are related though perhaps more formalised than the pictorial ship graffiti evident in other sites throughout the world (Rivera-Collazo 2006; Turner 2006; Walsh 2008). Stone masons were amongst those quarantined and their skills and practice of working stone undoubtedly contributed to shaping the style of inscription evident at the Station. These traditional craftsmen were instrumental in the creation of 'collective identity' inscriptions, such as that which appears in Figure 5. These decorative emblematic inscriptions subsume the identity of the passenger majority into a single name, that of the ship upon which they shared a journey.

In her description and analysis of the inscriptions Thorp (1983a:10-11) draws a distinction between what she calls 'panels', 'plaques', 'frames' and 'motifs'. A frame, as defined by Thorp, is as its name suggests, a painted or engraved line that forms a square or rectangular shape around the primary inscription. It may also be a raised square or rectangle into which an inscription is cut. A panel is 'a raised surface of a shape that is not square, rectangular, or recognizable as some object'. A 'plaque' denotes an engraving of an object, such as a shield into which the primary inscription is engraved. A motif is a decorative element such as a 'flag, ship, flower or anchor'. These distinctions reveal important differences in terms of how the inscriptions were produced, giving us some insight into the technical approaches and degree of labour undertaken. Yet for the purposes of this paper, we would argue that frames, panels and plaques may be regrouped collectively as framing devices since a frame is simply a shape which encircles, sets apart or contains regardless of its shape. Considered as a whole then, inscriptions with some kind of framing comprise 13 per cent (n=113) of the entire assemblage.

In keeping with the premise of our paper, we suggest that these framing devices are as inherently meaningful as other components of the inscription. Framing indicates both the desire and the intention to set the inscription into and apart from the parent rock. This suggests a convention of demarcation that has stylistic continuities with other sites of inscription such as stone tablets, headstones and commemorative

plaques. The highly stylised nature of the inscriptions is further evident in the discrete number of consistently reiterated motifs. These too have an emblematic feel and evoke something of an ordered approach to the inscription process. A total of 100 inscriptions (11 per cent) incorporate motifs.

Although Thorp's summary report does not provide detail about the subjects represented by the motifs, those that are described include ship's wheels, flags, shields and a bell. Such motifs were commonly linked to religious, nationalist, maritime and memorial themes. They are consistent with those observed by the authors in the Old Man's Hat precinct including a Star of David, the sun, lifebuoys, anchors, wreaths, floral motifs and a bird. The overall impression of the motifs is the use of a limited iconography which is highly symbolic of the experience and memory of a maritime journey, of the uncertainty of quarantine and arguably of the 'funerary' conditions under which people were living.

Techniques and media of the inscriptions

The assemblage analysed by Thorp reveals a body of inscriptions produced largely by techniques of engraving and which is, by majority, a text-based tradition. Considered in more detail, it appears that 93 per cent of inscriptions involve some kind of stone working technique, such as engraving and only 6.9 per cent (n=59) were produced as paintings. The low proportion of paintings may be, in part, a consequence of differential preservation. However, the presence of 'coloured' engravings (that is those revealing some evidence of pigment application) suggests that painting was used in combination with engravings, presumably to enhance their visibility. Of the engraved inscriptions, 14.2 per cent (n=113) reveal some colouration suggestive of painting over engraving. What is difficult to know is the extent to which painting was combined with engraving at the time of inscription production. Thorp (1983a: 14) records the presence of a range of different pigment colours including 'green, blue, red, yellow, pink, grey, maroon, cream, orange, brown, buff, silver and ochre'. What is not noted in this breakdown is the frequency of monochrome, bichrome and polychrome painting applications nor which inscription types appear to have been repainted. This information may provide some indication of the type of inscriptions most valued by the Quarantine Station

inhabitants (both workers and those in quarantine) to warrant repainting. Oral histories indicate that a tradition of repainting certainly existed amongst quarantine administration staff in the later part of the Station's history (Thorp 1983a: 14). This activity seems to have become something of a tradition and forms part of the cultural practices associated with the fabric of the site (Commonwealth Department of Health 1968).

Interestingly, painting was a technique more favoured by the foreign language speaking of those quarantined. While evidently used only rarely as the sole technique of production by English speakers. Of the 50 inscriptions that incorporate foreign languages more than half (56 per cent) were painted rather than engraved. By contrast only four per cent of the total inscriptions incorporating English text (n = 694) were paintings. Of all the inscriptions made with paint (n = 57) almost half (49 per cent) were in foreign languages. Despite the relatively small number of painted inscriptions they represent a diverse group of nationalities. Preliminary fieldwork carried out at Old Man's Hat seems to support this observation. The inscriptions in Greek and Cyrillic are painted in pitch and some in Asian scripts are painted with black paint and engraved. Future study may yield further insight into correlations between cultural background and material/technique selection.

Postcards on the edge

The opening premise of our paper was that the inscriptions at the Quarantine Station can be viewed as postcards from the past, framed by a distinct and familiar set of visual representations that produce and reproduce place and identity, past and present. They commemorate both the personal and collective experiences of voyaging to a new country or returning home. The metaphor of the postcard is we would argue, a productive way of thinking about the liminality of the quarantine experience; the state of suspension between old and new homes, the city and the bush, the water and the land, life and death. Even though it is often received after the journey has ended the postcard is sent in the process of journeying, as a marker of transition – a state of being in-between. Immigrants arriving in Australia literally inscribed themselves into the fabric of the continent whilst waiting for release beyond the edges of the Quarantine Station. Regardless of the precise words written on the back, the meta-narrative of the postcard acts to announce our location in the world and to create points of fixture in the transitional state of travel. When we are travelling we like to stop and acknowledge to ourselves and others, precisely where we are, what we are doing, what we see. In recording this experience we temporarily fix our place in space and time and we create a highly personal and intimate historical narrative of ourselves through the medium of a shared set of mass-produced visual representations.

Many of the inscriptions record the names of ships and their port of departure as well as denoting other maritime iconographies. This emphasis on origins and journey evocatively captures what Burns (2004: 269) identifies as the central ambiguity of postcards, the tension between the 'pull of away vs the pull of home'. The liminality of the Quarantine Station environment and the experiences of people incarcerated there reinforces this tension. Despite having left one place (often the land of their birth) being in quarantine meant that people had not fully arrived in Australia. With their journey at a standstill and geographically isolated on the margins of the settlement, it is no wonder that so many of those quarantined sought to inscribe their names at the very boundaries of the Station, between the bush and the township, the sick and the healthy, the land and sea. The great majority

of inscriptions occur at these edges, on the beach at Spring Cove and on the cliffs at Old Man's Hat overlooking the ocean. Thus, on the one hand the inscriptions are a mark of landing and arrival, on the other it is almost as if their placement, particularly at Old Man's Hat where Sydney may be seen on the horizon, is pushing at the perimeters of their confinement. The inscriptions are an acknowledgement of and a challenge to this state and experience of social and physical marginality.

Stewart (1993) writes of souvenirs as objects which act as metonyms for the authentic and original experience of travel. Souvenirs in her analysis '... exist as a sample of the now-distanced experience, an experience which the object can only evoke and resonate to, and can never entirely recoup' (Stewart 1993: 136). Souvenirs refer to events where the materiality of the experience has long since dissipated and which subsequently come into existence only through narratives, narratives which invoke longing and nostalgia for the place of origin and for the past (Stewart 1993: 135). We can see these metonymical elements of the souvenir in the iconography of the inscriptions at the Quarantine Station where the repeated use of formal fonts, commemorative framing devices, a limited set of motifs and contracted textual formats stand in for and invoke places of origin, the maritime journey and the experience of quarantine. The inscriptions become souvenirs of these events by capturing the viewer into a reverie that restores a sense of the contexts and times of their creation (Stewart 1993: 150). This, we would argue, is the most powerful legacy of this unique assemblage of rock inscriptions.

Unlike the postcard, which embarks on a physical journey between writer and recipient, the Quarantine Station inscriptions are fixed in their place of composition. The inscription without an identified addressee is written to all those who visit. When viewed in the context of their cross-cultural circumstances and the difficult conditions of quarantine the inscriptions undoubtedly became both a powerful proclamation of identity and a testimony to survival. This accounts for the high incidence of names, initials, and monograms as individuals sought to reassert their own existence; I am here, I arrived, I am alive.

CONCLUSION

The Quarantine Station was a place where thousands of people spent some time. There were domestic and international visitors to Sydney, some were workers on foreign vessels moored in Port Jackson and others were Australian servicemen returning home. The great majority were immigrants who saw the opportunity to settle in, what was for them, a new land. Of these thousands, many hundreds chose to inscribe something of their presence, their crossings and the lives they left behind. But in creating inscriptions of who they were and where they came from they were not simply looking back. They were asserting their existence and their survival and they were performing acts of belonging. They were writing themselves into the future, into the land, and into our lives. And in this respect the inscriptions remain for us as postcards from the past. They are the little reminders of futures held in the balance, of the onward journeys resumed and of destinations never realised. We are the recipients of these mementoes. It is our chance to read their messages and perhaps learn and wonder about the experiences and passage of people from another time. Perhaps it is in the performance of anchoring oneself in a process of transit that postcards are most similar to the historic inscriptions we have examined. Perhaps it is also this heightened presence of being in the now that we, as professionals, attempt to draw from the past.

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Abbreviations

HMS – Her or His Majesty's Ship
NPWS – National Parks and Wildlife Service
NSW – New South Wales

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