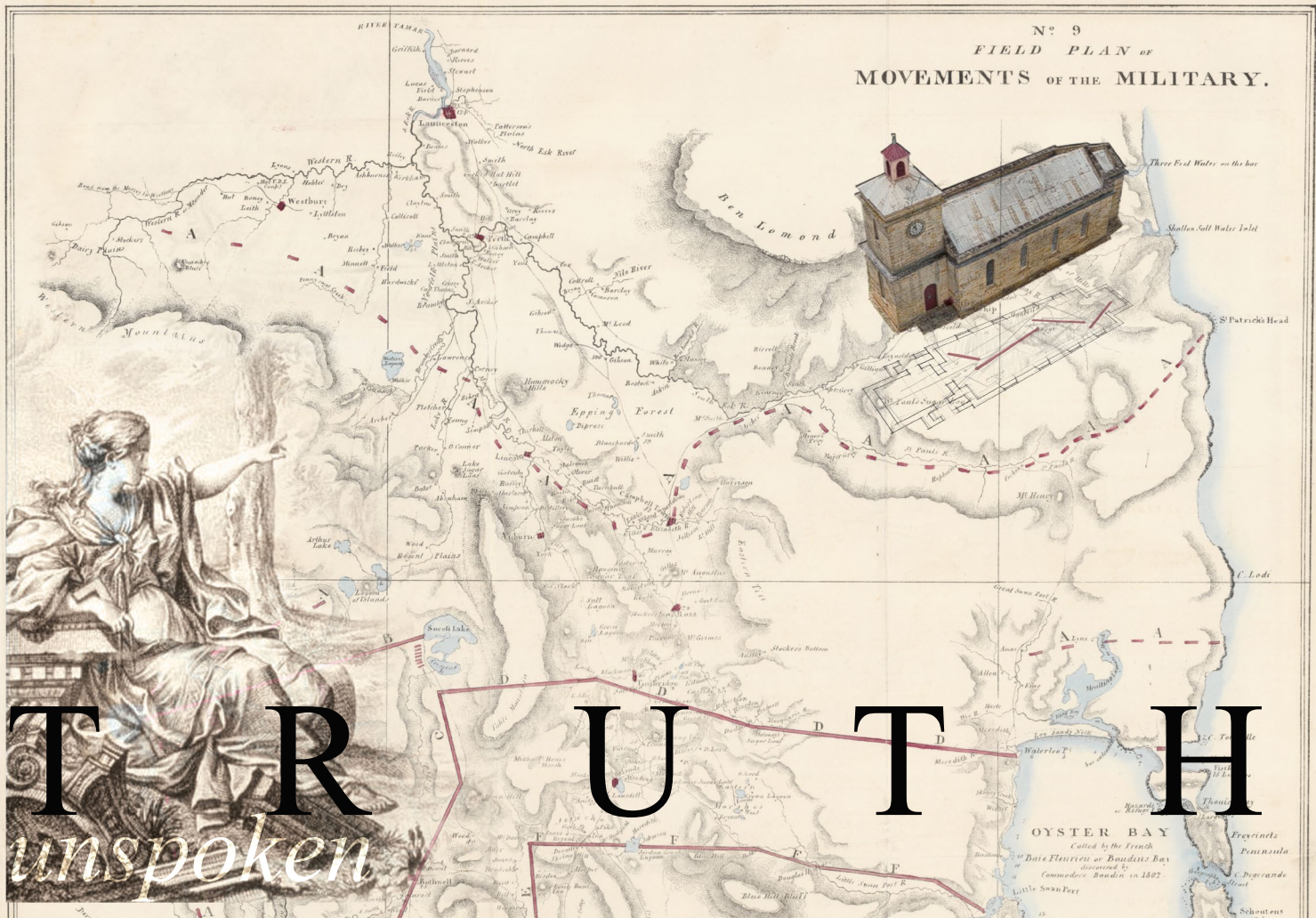


MILITARY OPERATIONS AGAINST THE ABORIGINAL INHABITANTS OF VAN DIEMEN'S LAND.

Nº 9
FIELD PLAN of
MOVEMENTS OF THE MILITARY.



UNSPOKEN

an Enquiry into the Absence
of the Historical Account
of Colonization in the
representation of Colonial
Buildings of recognised
Historical Heritage value in
Tasmania.

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an axis disrupted

what are the implications for significance?

postscript - the return of landscape



Shhh, whispers the wind
you can know our secret
of what was once here
many lifetimes ago

Can you hear the laughter
of the children that played here?
of mothers and babies
singing each other to sleep.

Can you see the trees
that once sheltered those who knew the secrets of time and
carried it in their minds?

Can you smell the blood,
of the people who lived here
and were killed here by those who couldn't control their spirits?

Shhh, whispers the wind,
dying, slowly, silently,
away with the memory
of that time long ago.

Two Rivers: A Reflective Journey

a 'celebration of the work of a group of young Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people from a variety of schools of the Derwent Education District, Tasmania.'

We write on the land of the Mouheneener people of lutruwita who did not survive invasion.

We recognise their culture had developed for more than 35,000 years to a level of sophistication that we cannot apprehend, however, we know they cultured a land of plenty that sustained a civilisation rich in diversity.

With this appreciation, we bring the humility of acceptance of how little we know, respect for one of the world's most ancient cultures and compassion for the history of colonial violence, dispossession and genocide.

(after James Boyce in First Australians, 2008)

Presence and Privilege



As a young boy I can recall my family visits to the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. It was here that I first confronted the strangeness of the place I call home. The representation of the 'Tasmanian Aborigine' as shown in a life size diorama with a painted backdrop was troubling. I would ask my mother 'who are these black people?', why don't they wear clothes? and ... where are they now?

We learn in Tasmania not to question the past, it is as if we are in some kind of perpetual denial, or cultural amnesia? The past is often sanitised ... and the pages ripped from the archive books ...

However, as an architect in Tasmania you are immersed in history. We seem to stumble over it continually, as if surprised the past still had a presence. Often considered an obstacle, and without an understanding of its value to contemporary life, it is removed or hidden, without question or consideration.

Questioning our presumptions and responses is a fundamental part of making sense of the world and this is especially true in making architecture in Tasmania... as the past is never presented in a conclusive manner.



fig 2.

Tasmanian Aboriginal Diorama exhibit
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery
photograph: Paul Johnston

fig 3

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery
1966 Extension
Architect: Public Works Department
Photograph: Paul Johnston

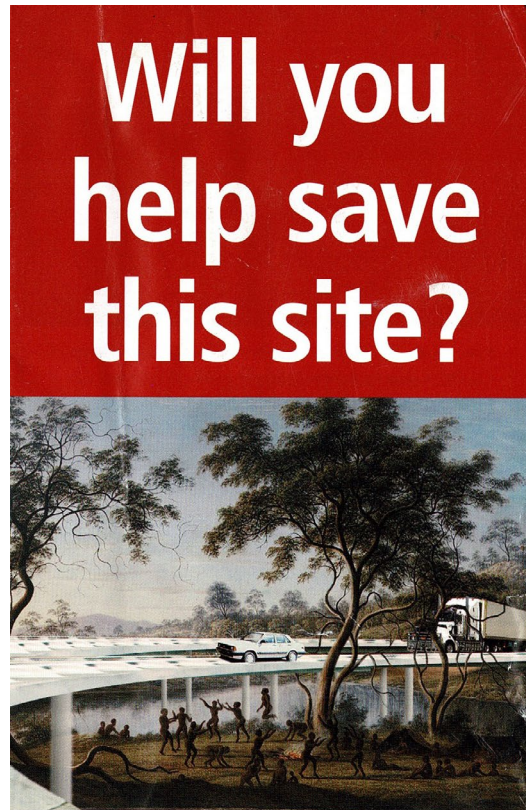
Much of the modern architecture realised in Tasmania, (if not Australia), has been enriched by the objective eyes of the migrant architects who questioned the prevailing ideologies of this place. It was they who first questioned ... What is a Tasmanian architecture?

As a Tasmanian with a ancestry of Scottish and English migrants who travelled to this place from the earliest years of colonisation, I am laden with cultural privilege.

The process of decolonization is one of self-realization ... the realization that my presence in Tasmania, and the cultural privilege that allows me to be here, is one that continues today. The benefits associated with my place within society today arises at the expense of the indigenous peoples of this land.

To be truly present in this place, I believe, requires a questioning of the underlying precepts that constitute society today.

Heritage and History



**Aborigines DO NOT oppose the Brighton by-pass
being built near to the levee. The only question is:
WHERE will the by-pass cross the River Jordan?
Will the bridge destroy the Aboriginal site?
Or will the bridge be moved 300 metres away
and preserve the site?**

fig 4

Campaign brochure opposing the
Brighton Bypass construction over the
Jordan River levee
Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre and
Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania

Working within the statutory framework for 'heritage' highlights an inherent problem with values from the earliest times of settlement that are embedded within that framework and remain without question.

As a practice that has championed the significance of modern architecture that has otherwise been neglected and omitted from historical appreciation, we have always been concerned with the reasons why buildings are constructed, as well as the manner of their design, always looking to arrive at an understanding of the role and place of those buildings in society...as recognized in *the Burra Charter*, in that the making of a place is intimately related to its significance (article 7 USE).

Importantly, we acknowledge that the places of modern architecture are often related to universal values of a civil society that are typical of the close relationship between modernism and social democratic values. However, these values are seldom properly understood, appreciated or protected by our statutory authorities and even if they are recognized and listed, they are expendable.

Conversely, when we undertake heritage conservation and the adaption of colonial structures, the reverse is apparent where colonial heritage exists without an understanding of their making within the context of colonization.

Recognized by statutory authorities as inherently significant, often on the basis for historical values and by the wider community for aesthetic and landmark values, colonial structures tend to exist without critique or examination, and yet the making of these structures is often neglected in their histories.

Typically, the histories of colonial architecture as recorded in statutory data sheets with their significance set against specific criteria, which are intimately related to the story of settlement. But it's an understanding of settlement conveniently separated from the perspective of the indigenous peoples, for whom 'settlement' is entwined with the invasion and dispossession of their homeland and culture through violence.

Heritage, within the structures of government and development planning controls, is a value system that operates within a civil and democratic society that recognizes the importance of places. We designate places as having heritage value, fundamentally because as individuals and collectively as communities, who and what we are is shaped by where we come from and what we have been. Heritage is what is inherited...the places and artefacts that are provided to future generations.

The material world of artefacts, buildings and landscapes also provide the 'evidence' by which our shared historical memory can be understood, and from which we as a community can find orientation and direction as a society. Places of heritage significance thus embody ways of understanding of society reflecting the uniqueness of its environment and its historical development over time and its history, from its origins to the present day. Such places containing layers of meaning to a wide part of Tasmanian society that is both rich and complex, but also interrelated.

The cultural heritage value of a place, ... the way memory and history are embedded within artefacts, buildings and landscapes, is then the starting point for an appreciation of heritage significance.

In Tasmania, with a history of colonial violence that is particularly evident in the history of its institutions, the explicit recognition of this history, a cultural 'truth telling', is especially important.

Truth Telling as Strategy

Heritage is fundamentally grounded in narrative and story-telling and heritage places provide the tangible evidence embodied in those stories.

Across Australia heritage legislation has conveniently separated Historic and Aboriginal heritage, making a distinction with history that has been recorded in text or image as well as artefacts and built structures.

In Tasmania, Aboriginal Heritage is largely defined as 'relics' and reduced to archaeological remains of sites of former occupation and largely considered expendable.

However, all colonial places include aboriginal stories that are seldom recognized in official 'Heritage' histories even when these structures exist as the result of colonization. And while these buildings often represent for the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community the systems and institutions of invasion and dispossession, the places in which those places are located, often hold a significance that arises out of an aboriginal past that is prior to colonization.

Such places continue to have significance for the living culture of the Palawa Tasmanian Aboriginal Community today.

The 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart, calls for an Indigenous Voice to Parliament embodied within the Australian constitution, as well as a process of agreement making, and truth telling of our history. It has at its heart the idea of Makarrata - the coming together after a struggle.

Truth telling is a key component in reconciliation, but truth telling also depends on the places in which those truths and their telling are embedded. The history of the making of these places are inherently entwined with stories of dispossession, oppression and often violence.

The Burra Charter approach is to promote the coexistence of conflicting values rather than conserving one at the expense of the other. (see Article 13 Burra Charter).

Allowing places, time and resources for indigenous people to tell their story of invasion, war and dispossession also contributes to a meaningful understanding of the heritage of events and places in their entirety.

This means, however, that the history of settlement must be expanded and revised in a manner that is inclusive of the history of confrontation, violence and genocide and this is an essential element in the truth telling process. Through such truth telling, the community can come to terms with the difficulties of the past enabling a more confident and inclusive culture into the future.

The proposal set out here is for a colonial truth telling orientated to the rethinking and revisioning of heritage places as a basic strategy for in the process of Decolonization.

This proposal will be informed by a reflection on a recent architectural project, revisiting the site and reconsidering the context and history of that site as part of a re examination of the making of that place.

This will enable a shifting of the focus towards the origins and intentions of colonial architecture within the colonial system and a reexamination of its cultural heritage significance and at the same time, questioning whether the current heritage frameworks perpetuate a colonial mythmaking that is detrimental to historical understanding, to the advancement of equality and to the advancement of reconciliation.

This process requires a re-examination of the historical record from which too many stories and voices have otherwise been omitted. Written almost entirely from the colonial perspective, that record needs to be reinterpreted within the wider context of settlement and invasion. The colonialist impulse that drove settlement must be questioned along with the historical context of the social and cultural forces with which it was associated.

In this respect, the making of places, how they came to be, provides a key to understanding the role that architecture played within the colonial system – a role often neglected and ignored.

With this appreciation, a revision of the historical significance of colonial architecture can be considered and new strategies may emerge enabling forms of architectural design that enable these histories to be represented and explored. A more critical approach to contemporary architecture can more clearly reveal how Australian architecture is itself embedded within European cultural history... and how far it remains from being truly an architecture of this place.

However, it is in relation to the notion of 'truth telling' and its role in the process of reconciliation within contemporary Australian society, that the cultural heritage significance of the architecture of colonial settlement will become evident.

The following is a brief survey of the pattern of settlement in colonial Tasmania and the way this resulted in confrontation and war with the aboriginal population.

The enquiry focuses specifically on the Anglican Church of St Thomas at Avoca as representative of colonial settlement and relates the architecture within its historical, cultural and social contexts, to its role in colonisation.

Invasion and Settlement

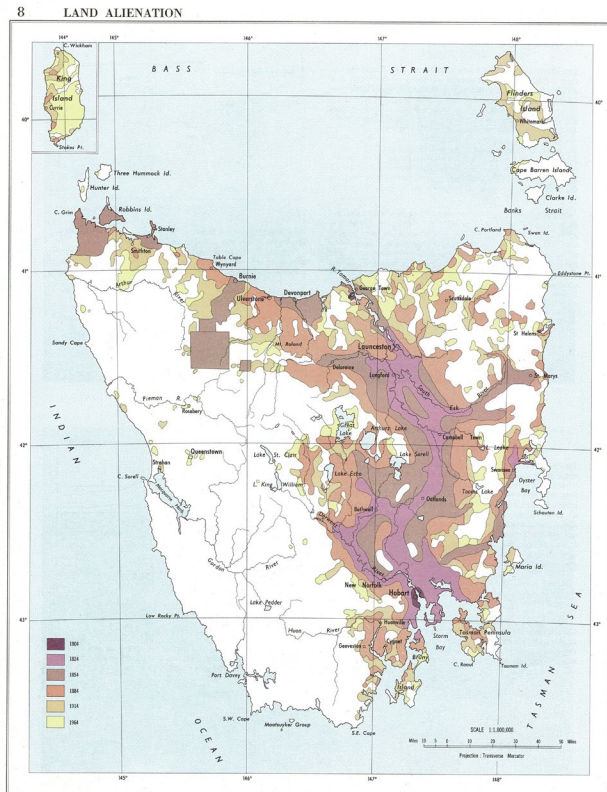


fig 6
Land Alienation Tasmania
Atlas of Tasmania,
ed.J.L. Davies
Land and Surveys Department, Hobart
1965



fig 5
Wurati, Woureddy
Thomas Bock 1831

https://www.tmag.tas.gov.au/programs_and_learning/learning_resources/online_

Hobart Town was in the territory of the Mouheneenner band of the South East people, and the area was known as Nibberloone of Linghe.

Woureddy, later recalled that when his compatriots saw the first ship coming, they all were frightened and said it was Wragewrapper, the devil:

'that when the first people settled they cut down the trees, built houses, dug the ground and planted; that by and by more ships came, then at last plenty of ships; that the natives went to the mountains, went and looked at what the white people did, went and told other natives and they came and looked also.' (Plomley, Friendly Mission)

The Rev. Robert Knopwood regularly entered in his diary details of the country around Hobart being set on fire by the natives. This practice was undertaken to drive out game and regenerate the bush. In April 1805 he noticed 'at 1 pm the country from government farm (New Town) to sandy bay all on fire by the natives.' (Pierce Doyle 2002. p6)

The hunting grounds of the aboriginal peoples, were the vast and open plains, between the settlements of Hobart Town and Launceston, which became known as the 'Midlands'. They were plains scattered by trees and ringed by forests at the foot of surrounding hills. They were intricate managed landscapes created over millennia with fire burning to achieve an ecosystem of abundant resources to support the Aboriginal people who traversed the land from season to season interacting with neighbouring bands and sharing those resources through cultural rights.

'Banks are more like a Nobleman's Park in England than an uncultivated country; every part is beautifully Green and very little trouble might clear every valley I have seen in a Month ... in many places the plough might be used immediately' (Gammage 2011 p250)

The early colonial settlements remained small and almost forgotten by the English authorities back in England. The colonists resorted to a subsistence economy reliant on hunting kangaroo and emu. The use of dogs in particular enabled hunting to be very successful and eventually the hunting range required to feed the settlements were ever increasing into the established hunting grounds of the aboriginal peoples.



fig 7
The Table Mountain from the End of the
Jericho Plains,
Thomas Lycett 1824
National Gallery of Australia
<https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-135712140/view>

War and Deception



fig 8

Military Operations against the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land
Field Plan of Movements of the Military
nla.obj-274524964-1

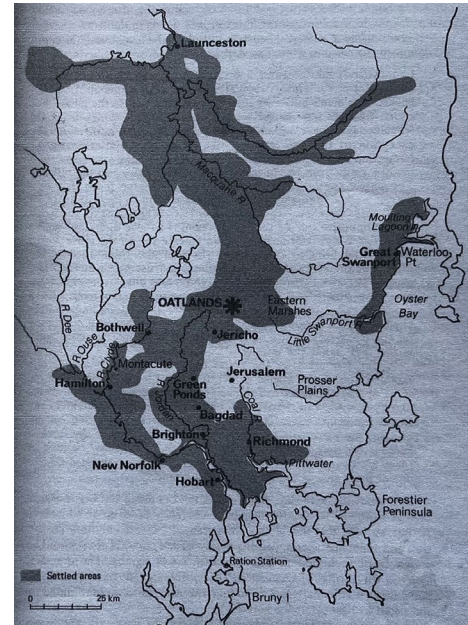


fig 9

Sites of killings by Aborigines 1829- 1830
in Ryan, L, The Aboriginal Tasmanians 1982 p105

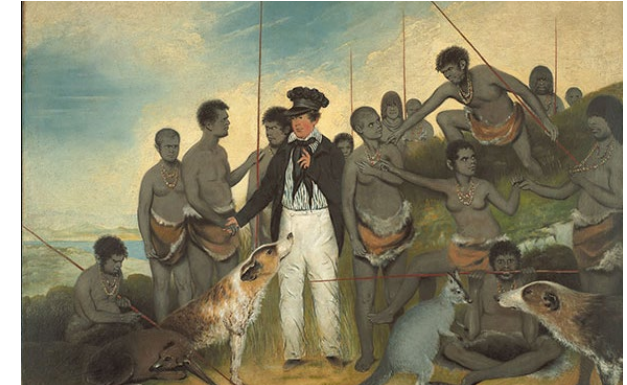


fig 10

The Conciliation
Benjamin Duterrau, 1840
https://www.tmag.tas.gov.au/whats_on/exhibitions/current_upcoming/info/the_national_picture

Conflict was inevitable but it wasn't until around 1824 with the massive increase in land grants through the 'midlands', primarily to the new emigrant aristocracy well connected to the colonial government, did conflict reach levels of confrontation that were referred to as 'war' by the colonial government from 1828 to 1831.

The declaration of martial law in 1828 legalized the killing of aboriginal people within the 'settled districts' and roving parties were encouraged with monetary rewards for their capture but in reality many more were killed for the capture of a few.

Petitions from affluent and influential land owners to the Colonial Government resulted in the Black Line military campaign in 1830. The plan to drive the remnant aboriginal population of the 'settled districts' south and into the Tasman peninsula, enlisted all convicts and free settlers in a continuous line across the landscape. Though few aboriginals were reported to have been caught it is now considered that few actually remained.

From 1830 to 1835, the government emissary George Augustus Robinson, led a small aboriginal group in missions across the island. They believed that an agreement for land to live their cultural life would be offered to the remaining aboriginal people and that this was the only opportunity for survival. The agreement was never honoured and following incarceration on Flinders Island with many deaths from illness, the remaining few lived their lives at Oyster Cove and a few years after its closure in 1874 the remaining aboriginals died in Hobart a few years later.

Within a single generation, almost an entire indigenous population had been wiped out.

Englishness and Landscape



It was the search for a new Arcadia that attracted the accomplished English painter of the 'Picturesque', John Glover who had made a significant reputation in capturing the Englishness of a landscape that existed in a pre-industrial England, albeit with an Italian sensibility influenced by the French painter Claude.

Arriving in Van Dieman's Land in 1831, he found a landscape 'rich and picturesque' where 'almost everywhere, to drive a carriage as easily as in a Gentleman's Park in England.'

His arrival also coincided with the conclusion of the 'Black War'.

Glover established his home 'Patterdale' in Deddington on the Nile River on the Mills Plains in the Northern Midlands.

The landscape was often likened to that of an English estate, cultivated in the Picturesque, because of the open grasslands framed with trees on the foothills... 'in England Arcadia had to be made; in Australia it is found'

(Michael Rosenthal, Quoted in Hansen, John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque, 98.)

Glover's artistic depictions of the Van Dieman's Land landscape was significant because of his inclusion within the scenes aboriginal people, despite the fact that they had only recently been removed as a consequence of a bloody war. However, his paintings also form a record of the created and managed landscapes that formed the aboriginal hunting grounds.

Referred to as 'fire stick farming', aboriginal peoples cultivated and managed vegetation with regular, seasonal burning that regenerated plants and fertilised the soil to provide new grasses to attract the kangaroo, leaving small clumps of trees as cover for hunting.

So it wasn't just the land that had been appropriated by the invading sheep graziers, but the colonists appropriated the managed aboriginal hunting grounds as their antipodian version of the English 'natural' country side.

fig 11

Mills Plains, Ben Lomond, Ben Loder and Ben Nevis in the distance
John Glover 1836
TMAG

Confluence



fig 15

Map of the settled Part of VAN DIEMAN'S LAND
copied from a Map in the possession of
HIS EXCELLENCY COLONEL GEORGE ARTHUR
Lietenant Governor of the Island and its dependencies
Thomas Scott Surveyor General
Hobart Town 1834
NLA.obj_231305092

fig 12

Maps of the territory and
seasonal movements of the
North Midlands, Ben Lomond,
and Oyster Bay tribes.
in Ryan, L, The Aboriginal
Tasmanians 1982 p105

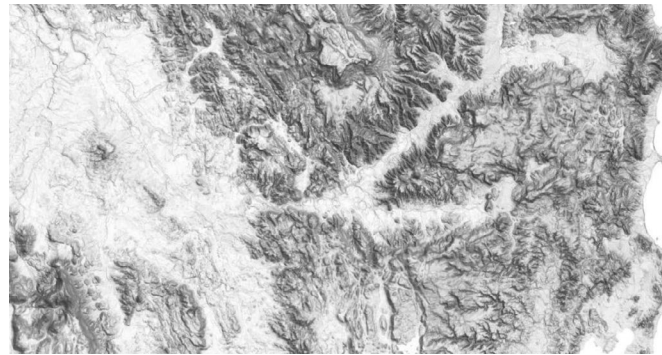
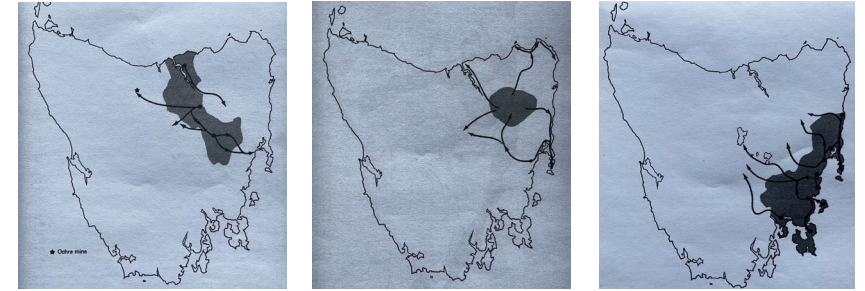


fig 13

Hillshade Grey Topographic map ListMap
showing the Fingal Valley and St Paul's Plains meeting at Avoca



fig 14

Aerial Photograph Avoca 1921
TAHO NS 5748-1-47

The St. Paul's Plains were settled in the 1820's along the valley following the plipatumila / South Esk River flowing from Ben Lomond plateau to meet the Meander and cascading into the kan-amaluka / Tamar River at Launceston via the Cataract gorge. It is the longest river in Tasmania.

The South Esk river runs through, and forms the borders of, traditional lands of two nations of the Palawa. The Ben Lomond Nation occupied territory enclosed by the river's western and southern stretches and occupied the entire upper reaches as far as its northern watershed. The Panninher, Tyrenotepanner and Leterremairrener clans of the North Midlands Nation occupied the territories to the west of the river and the Oyster bay tribe frequented the valley with seasonal visiting rights that were reciprocated with neighbouring peoples. The Aboriginal clans exploited the hunting grounds in the valley and remnants of their campsites and toolmaking have been found along the river.

The confluence of the South Esk with the St. Paul's River marks a site that rises from the river with a small escarpment which was favoured as a resting place for travelers following the valley to the East Coast.
It was known by the early settlers and travelers as Camp Hill.

The Church and Avoca

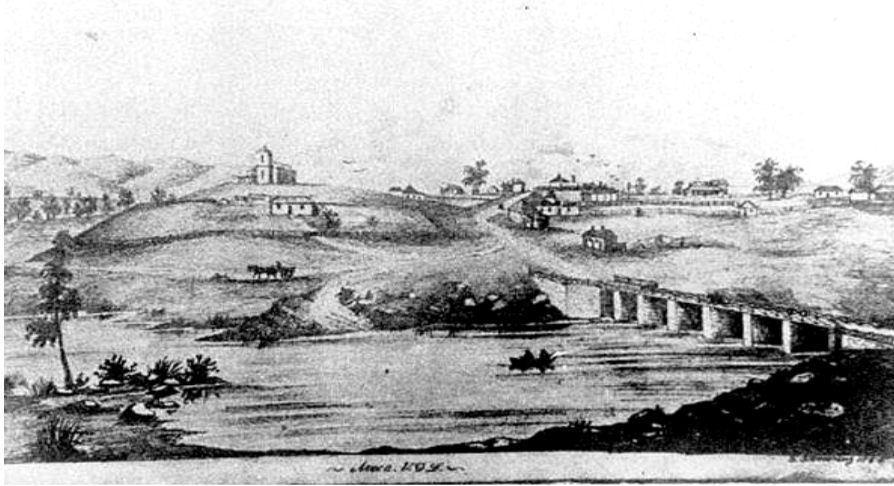


fig 16 Avoca
Emily Bowring c1850
in Masters D. Avoca a Brief History 2013

A convict station was located at Camp Hill in the 1830's and the St. Paul's Plains was designated a police sub district during the 'Black War.'

With the conclusion of the war and the removal of aboriginals from the plains, the agricultural district expanded. With an increased convict labour force the town ship emerged as a natural centre in the district.

It was named in 1838 'Avoca', after the name used in the Thomas Moore poem 'The Meeting of the Waters'.

The Anglican Church sought dominance in the colonies to counter Presbyterian and Roman Catholic influences. Arch Deacon Hutchins, arriving in 1837 with the new Lieutenant Governor John Franklin, established over the next four years seventeen churches.

Hutchins supported the new land owning 'gentry' who petitioned the Colonial Government for the erection of a place of worship. To access government funding and convict resources, the community required Anglican signatories and a considerable monetary contribution. The substantial wealth gained by the district in the development of the wool industry ensured Avoca achieved its church ahead of many poorer communities.

The Public Works Department of the colonial government, produced a design attributed to architect, surveyor and engineer James Blackburn.

The Anglican Church of St Thomas at Avoca in Van Dieman's Land was constructed in 1839 and opened in 1842 to a congregation of 120 parishioners.

Blackburn arrived in Van Dieman's Land in 1833 as a convict following his sentence for forgery in London. As architect within the Public Works Department he was put to work on a variety of projects across the penal island. While it is not known of his training, his work is distinctive for his use of English pattern books and published designs. As a result, his designs are characterized by the use of styles selected as appropriate for the circumstances of each project.

The use of pattern books in the design of buildings wasn't new, nor particularly English, but it was influenced by cultural changes within England that originated with the rising middle classes following the advent of the industrial revolution and the end of the Napoleonic Wars. The rural landscape in Britain was changing with a new land owning class wishing to participate in rural lifestyles previously reserved for the aristocracy.

The earlier Enclosure Acts allowed for common land to be appropriated for private title but without the financial and professional resources of the aristocracy, the new landowners resorted to new 'handsomely illustrated publications' that provided all the necessary advice for establishing an idyllic rural lifestyle. The publications set standards in 'taste' that in turn created distinctions in class. The aspiration was reinforced by the Romantic movements of the early 19th century in painting and literature as well as the ongoing development of the Picturesque movement which significantly included both landscape gardening and architectural design. The result was an interest in the visual relationship between architecture and landscape and the painterly aspect of vistas and views in a constructed naturalistic manner and became seen as a distinctly English character that was also politically distancing England from the French and their Enlightenment and revolution.

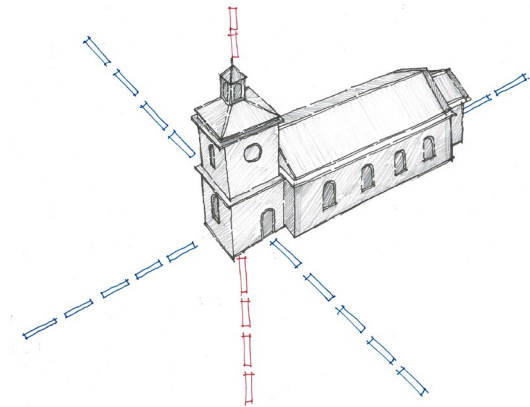


fig 17 Avoca Church
architectural drawings
TAHO PWD 266-1-1126/7/8/9

Style and Siting



fig 18
St Thomas's Anglican Church, Avoca
Photograph: W.H. Reece
The Weekly Courier, February 28 1907



The design for the Church of St Thomas is a reduced or simplified version of an early Romanesque style, typically identified by the use of the semicircular Roman arch.

However, the early use of this style is more likely derived from Norman influences in England (Lewis 20012 p86).

The use of Norman architectural elements applies a simple geometry including the semicircular arch and the tower with a low pitched pyramidal roof that produces a fortress like quality to the architecture.

The stylistic origins of the Romanesque were a desire to relate the Romanesque to the early Christian Church.

The use of Norman styled Romanesque may have been a response to the limited construction capabilities in the colony which tended to prohibit the more technical Gothic.

The four Anglican churches designed by Blackburn in Van Dieman's Land were all Norman influenced and the church at Avoca the simplest in its form and detailing which may have been due to the remoteness of its location.

The siting of the Church on the elevated escarpment places it on the edge of the settlement but overlooking the confluence of the rivers and visible when approaching the town. It can be seen as the most appropriate place to erect a landmark where it can be seen from afar as a visual marker or reference point. Symbolically it is a visual identifier of settlement within the landscape as well as a centre for a new community to gather and congregate.

The church's prominence within the landscape forms a commanding aspect suggestive of authority and power. The architecture can thus be read as a signifier of authoritative power, both of Church and State.

The church is composed of three volumes that relate to the plan arrangement of narthex, nave and altar, each connected with semicircular arched openings. The narthex forms the tower and the altar is a reduced projection off the nave and celebrated with a tripartite stained glass window. The church is a symmetrical composition formed around two crossing axes that centre on the tower. The primary axis orientated west to east forms the central aisle of the nave. The geometry of the parti follows classical traditions associated with ecclesiastical architecture in England, albeit as a simplified version.

It is this relationship between European traditions in geometry, its symbolic value and use, and the landscape of colonial settlement, that suggests that the Church should be read in the historical context of colonization.

Heritage and Significance



fig 20 Church at Avoca 1957
Photograph: Thomas Edgar Burns
TAHO LPIC1/3/128



fig 21 Church at Avoca 1900
Photograph: unknown
TAHO LPIC1-147/1/66



fig 22 Church at Avoca 1957
Photograph: Thomas Edgar Burns
TAHO LPIC1/3/138

In 2018, the Anglican Church in Tasmania released a list of 73 properties that would be sold on the open market. Many were churches, often in rural regions where congregations had dwindled and services had ceased.

The proceeds of sales were to fund the church's contribution to the National Redress Scheme. The National Redress Scheme provides acknowledgment and support to people who experienced institutional child sexual abuse.

It was created in response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which estimated that 60,000 people experienced institutional child sexual abuse in Australia.

Redress is an alternative to seeking compensation through the courts.

<https://anglicantas.org.au/national-redress-scheme/>

The Church of St Thomas at Avoca was one of these properties and following a deconsecration service in 2019, the church and its property was sold by tender in 2020.

The sale of the church angered the local population of Avoca as well as a considerable number of people with historical connections to the place. An attempt was made to form a community organization to purchase the place for the benefit of the community but the bid was not accepted by the church.

The Anglican Church provided a 'Concise Conservation Management Plan' for the place and Heritage Tasmania, the administrative arm of the Tasmanian Heritage Council (THC), provided an updated data sheet entry in the Tasmanian Heritage Register.

The history of the Church in the Conservation Plan begins with the petition by land owners to Lieutenant Governor Franklin in 1838.

The history in the data sheet commences with an acknowledgement of the place as 'land traversed by the Oyster Bay, Northern Midlands, Ben Lomond and North eastern Aboriginal tribes' and refers to 'Prior to European occupation, the region had been managed by the Tasmanian Aborigines using traditional land management practices, including low density burning. Europeans in the early colonial era viewed the resulting landscape as well suited to stock raising and cropping'.

While recognising the significance of the architect James Blackburn, and his use of stylistic elements associated with the 'Romanesque', the significance of the church lies in its intactness, its collection of fittings and artefacts, and the relationship to the landscape, both in terms of its visual prominence through its elevated position, considered 'a tradition' and its role as a centre for settlement and the importance of religious life to the development of the community.

As a consequence, the statutory constraints, reflecting its cultural heritage significantly are primarily concerned with its visual presentation to the exterior and the retention of its landmark qualities. In heritage terms, its cultural significance is reduced to a reminder, a marker in the landscape of a past that no longer exists.

Unspoken and Spoken

The statutory data sheets that accompany places listed on the Tasmanian Heritage Register outline the cultural heritage significance of the place. They are fundamental to an understanding of why those places are 'heritage' and how the place may be managed into the future in a manner that retains those heritage values.

The story of the making of the place is represented as a benign activity. It is presented as a story of settlement where conflict is left UNSPOKEN.

While prior occupation is acknowledged, there is no recognition that this place was part of the 'settled districts' and the violence of the Black War, or that the people of this community petitioned for the removal and eradication of the aboriginal population. And yet it is this UNSPOKEN story that underpins settlement, and which is essential to any genuine historical assessment of the place.

The 'spoken' history recognizes the importance of the place within the landscape, both in terms of its prominence on an elevated ground above the confluence of two major rivers, within the open plains of the valley, and its symbolic centre to settlement. And yet this relationship to landscape is merely interpreted as 'traditional' and by traditional it can only be interpreted as its 'Englishness'.... the Church makes the village complete in its 'Englishness'.

What remains UNSPOKEN, is the story of the making of this place. The reason why it came into being and how that happened... it remains a story not recognised.

And it seems there remains no place for the telling of the stories of those aboriginal peoples that first lived and nurtured this landscape. A landscape they created that was so attractive for the English invaders to possess at the exclusion of its indigenous peoples.

The place where the rivers meet was a place for the meeting of aboriginal peoples... a place of reciprocal rights and sharing. This stands in stark contrast to the colonial violence of dispossession that allowed the Church at Avoca a place within this landscape.

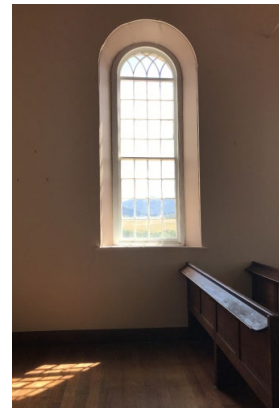


fig 23 Church at Avoca 2022
Photograph: Paul Johnston

the architectural project

The architectural project responds to the program initiated by clients as the new owners of the Church.

The proposal requires the church, once a place for the community to gather, to be adapted into a home for a family of extended generations to also gather and share time and experiences. It is a place to visit rather than a place to dwell.

The new program requires the small church to cater for a variety of small groups and provide a good level of amenity. With little opportunity for extension or addition due to heritage constraints to preserve the landmark character of the place, a bathroom and kitchen are inserted into the interior.

In proximity, the church is experienced as an internalized space where the attentions of the congregation are directed towards the alter set within a semicircular proscenium. The entire interior is dominated by the ever presence of the symbolic elements of alter, pulpit and stain glass windows.

The design strategy, determined by the program, was to conceive the solitary internal volume as a series of spaces, semi and fully enclosed that created a variety of niches. Organizing the spaces along the east west axis created by the nave, allowed the northern glazing to become the primary orientation that would maximize sun and allow for the expansive views across the valley. The interior also provided a counter to this axial alignment with a solitary stained glass window to the south depicting Jesus Christ, together with the pulpit suggesting offset and opposing orientation devices.

The natural tendency to follow the geometrical structuring of nave and alter and reinforce the symmetry and its focus towards the alter and tripartite stained glass window was then rejected for an approach to fracture the internal volume along the axis. The visual indication of the Black Line, recorded in the Military Operations map became suggestive of the the broken axis marking across the landscape.

The fractured longitudinal axis could then be manipulated to form the spatial diversity required by the program.

An important component to this new composition is careful masking of the alter and stained glass windows with the creation of an intermediate space, a kind of threshold that is encountered before the whole space is revealed. It acts to focus or shift attention away from the 'intended' alter and withhold the spatial experience of the whole. As such it provides a moment of pause for reflection.

The creation of a mezzanine level that fills the volume and creates a distinct separation between an active ground and passive elevation also allows views out of the tall windows that are otherwise restricted. The elevated platform within the church counters the raised level of the pulpit, which remains, as a requirement of the statutory heritage authorities.

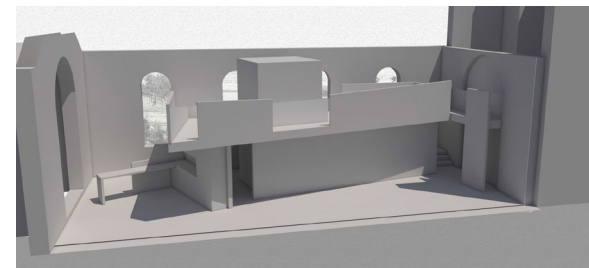
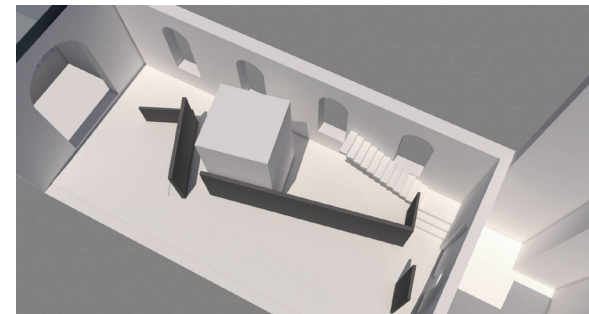
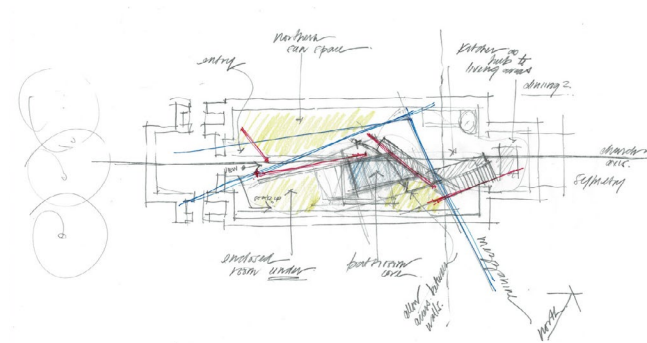


fig 24
Architectural Drawings
Adaption of St Thomas's Church
to a summer house.
Paul Johnston Architects and
Nejad Studio

an axis disrupted

This approach can be seen as a kind of 'deconstruction'.

While it is now recognized as a formal aesthetic discourse, perhaps deconstruction can offer a discursive analysis for decolonization by challenging the accepted formal geometrical qualities of colonial architecture.

Architecture, simply by the nature of it as a construction that requires investment, and that construction creates a physical entity that occupies a place, often where no other construction has been before, thereby providing a degree of psychological certainty, a reassurance through its stability and longevity. The building marks the landscape in an enduring manner.

Through its intention to provide shelter, architecture provides the means for creating a place or home in a fragile or hostile world. In this respect, the Church is not only a place of gathering, but a symbol of security and permanence... a 'grounding' that is the basis for stability and is represented in the horizontal ordering of its cross axis.

As a place of religious practice, the church conveys a sense of the divine. This aspirational idea is represented in the vertical ordering of the tower of the church as represented by the heavens and the sky but could also come to represent ideas of power, domination and conquest. It could be argued that it reinforces the conceit of the superiority of a western civilisation, and that is the moral basis for legitimising colonisation.

In this respect, the intended 'authority' of the axial geometry is disrupted and the formal representation of the pure forms, inherent in this structuring, are countered. The language of colonisation is called into question and in this process the opportunity for new readings are introduced.

If we understand the 'power' of the colonial architecture is the manner it utilizes the geometry of classical architecture, and all its meanings, derived from notions of (western) civilisation and within the contemporary aesthetic traditions of Palladianism and the Picturesque, to supplant itself within and over a landscape, then we can read the architecture of the colony as a device to not just command attention, or display authority, but to signify ownership. And in the traditions of English law, this ownership is primarily concerned with property.

The ownership of land is central to the story of colonization.

The assumption that nomadic hunter gather peoples had no legitimate claim to land that had not been 'improved' was central to the English understanding of property and its inherent rights. Land without the signification of ownership was effectively 'free for the taking'.

The claiming of ownership of that land required the symbols of property.

In this respect, the Church symbolized the 'completion' of the townscape in the likeness of an English village.

The once 'Nobleman's Park, devoid of structures, required, as part of its colonial appropriation the erection of the symbols of settlement. The town with the church and its tower, bell and clock, was that symbol of settlement, as if a flag fixed into the ground is a symbol of possession.

Today, the church on the hill stands without the authority of the Church. It has been deconsecrated and despite its affections from the local people of the district, it is now a place withdrawn from the community. What was once a place open for all is now subjected to private ownership. Access is restricted.

In reflection, what was once part of the community has now been taken away, recalls the original dispossession of the land from its aboriginal people... of course there is no comparison but the thought lingers... community and attachment to place are central to this story.

Design is a process.

The design for the church at Avoca evolves with consideration of site, history and program.

Use is fundamental to its significance and central to the use of the church is the idea of a place of gathering.

... with resonance to its site as 'camp hill' and as a confluence of rivers and indigenous peoples.

A new program is evolving in the design of the church which responds to a place of welcome, community and gathering.

what then are the implications for significance ?



fig 25 Avoca
Website image

<https://northernmidlands.tas.gov.au/avoca>

The church remains as a symbol of community complete with its origins entwined in the story of settlement, as a tangible connection to the past. The church had not performed as a place of gathering for many years. In this sense it was abandoned by the community and allowed the 'economic reality' of obsolescence to initiate its sale.

Regardless, it remains a significant landmark celebrated by the local municipal council and has become the defining image of the district. The church is the defining image of Avoca.

A retelling of colonial history inclusive of the invasion, war and dispossession will require a revision of the cultural heritage significance of colonial places. It is necessary to ensure our heritage is based in truth and as a result the historical significance of these places will only become more important. The aestheticisation of these places

It is the contribution of these places to the truth telling of the historical story that needs careful consideration... what becomes significant is how interpretation of the stories of past events can provide an understanding and appreciation of the past and its implications for the First Nations peoples as well as the cultural integrity of contemporary Tasmania.

What does it mean for a society to finally come to terms with its past?
How is this to be brought about?

Importantly, the past cannot be effaced.

The establishment of the 'settled districts' depended on the appropriation of the hunting grounds that were the basis for aboriginal life and culture.

In this context, Aboriginal resistance, against overwhelming odds, should be recognised and commemorated.

In any appreciation of the cultural heritage significance of the structures of settlement, there needs to be acknowledgement of the way the making of those structures came at the

expense of the indigenous peoples. This is a fundamental part of the history of these places and as a truthful record of the past, this cannot be dismissed.

As a consequence, the Picturesque qualities of these places, celebrated today as they were in colonial times, carry a darkness.

Perhaps places such as the Church in Avoca, prominent colonial structures within the landscape of Tasmania should become new cultural landmarks? ... and their prominence utilised for other readings of history.

As places of reconciliation they have the potential to provide the necessary rereading of the past ... where the stories of the past are told?

Perhaps these places should be where First Nation peoples have the opportunity to tell their story.

postscript - a return to landscape

By the time of the colonization of Australia, the 'natural' qualities of an English landscape had been lost to the early onset of industrialization.

A nostalgia had emerged for an Arcadian past of the naturalistic English landscape.

In England this had to be made, ironically with the new tools of industry, and designed by landscape architects that took their cues from the Picturesque paintings of Italy.

In Van Dieman's Land, the naturalistic landscape, which had been managed over generations with fire, could be 'found.'

Landscape is a central element in this story.

By the time Glover had painted the plains of Van Dieman's Land and the 'Black Wars' had concluded with the eradication of aboriginal peoples, it was already transforming as the seasonal burning had ceased.

The landscape is an evolving element in this story.

Today the prominence of the church is slowly being erased by a new landscape.



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