

**PORT ARTHUR HISTORIC SITE
20TH ANNIVERSARY MEMORIAL SERVICE
SPEECH BY HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE
WARNER AM
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
PORT ARTHUR, THURSDAY 28 APRIL 2016**

Good afternoon everyone. Can I begin by acknowledging and paying respects to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community as the traditional and original owners and continuing custodians of this land.

The beauty of this site with its overlaying tragedies will mean that its beauty will always be an aching and haunting one. Perhaps it is this contrast of beauty and tragedy which makes the reality of what has happened here so hard to comprehend. Twenty years after the massacre which killed 35 people, wounded 23 others and traumatised countless others, the layers of tragedy of this place become more apparent.

The first layer of tragedy is that of Aboriginal dispossession. It was here, on the peninsula, that Lieutenant-Governor Arthur's infamous Black Line of 1830 was to end. As is well known the Black Line failed, and those Aborigines who survived the wars were from 1832 taken to a different prison, on Flinders Island.

The second layer is Port Arthur's history as a penal settlement, as a place of harsh secondary punishment to discipline and punish convicts. Between the 1830s and its closure in 1877 nearly one in six convicts spent time here. Its punishments for infringements of its strict rules were at first brutally physical and later brutally psychological, a form of discipline that was even more debilitating.

After the penal settlement's closure new residents moved in and created a town in and among the old buildings, but it was its history as a penal settlement that lured tourists and sustained the town which by the 1920s and 1930s had three hotels and two museums, catering to tourism.

By 1996 the site was managed by the Port Arthur Management Authority and Port Arthur was the state's top tourist attraction. Thinking about this anniversary I have re-read Margaret Scott's book, *Port Arthur: A Story of Strength and Courage*, published the year after the massacre. Her account of it is chilling. The peace on that idyllic day, always tinged by the knowledge of its violent convict past, was shattered by gunfire, disbelief at first and then fear, trauma and sadness. Shock waves travelled widely and the whole nation grieved.

The events of 28th April 1996 have added another layer to a place that has endured so much.

It has often been pointed out that the loss experienced by family and friends was harder to bear because the rampage was so inexplicable – the gunman appeared to have no comprehensible motive for his actions. And for it to happen in remote Tasmania seemed unthinkable.

The National Firearms Agreement, the resulting introduction of uniform gun laws around the country and a national firearms buyback and gun amnesty were at least, positive, long-lasting outcomes. Remembering the Port Arthur massacre should remind us to be vigilant about weapons which can allow one man to kill so many people so quickly and efficiently.

The events of 20 years ago took a punishing toll on individuals and families, on businesses and community confidence. But with enormous grit the community has pulled together. Port Arthur has reclaimed its place as one of Australia's greatest heritage attractions.

For many the anguish and pain will never end. By acknowledging the massacre today we are saying to the world that this event happened and we won't forget it or the suffering it caused. Rather it will become part of the narrative of this place, another layer in its history, and it will be a demonstration of the solidarity, resilience and recovery of the Tasman community.

And recover it has.

It is enormously difficult to find the right words in a speech such as this. I feel I cannot do better than finish by quoting the words of two others who lived or live in this community.

First from Margaret Scott, who ends her book with these words:

We live in a place of extraordinary beauty. The beaches, the rock formations, the forests are still there in the autumn sunlight. ...
When we look at them if we can remember these thirty five deaths in a way that makes us live more humanely, more intensely, with broader sympathy, then some good may be brought out of this evil.

And Mayor Roseanne Heyward, who said in an interview reported in the *Mercury's* magazine last weekend:

We're 20 years down the track and we've come a long way. The place is now a World Heritage site; we have huge tourism numbers, lots of businesses. It's a really good place to be.

...

We'll never be able to forget [the massacre], it will now forever be part of our history. But there is more to this place than that. It is not what we are.

Thank you.