

Age (1 item)

From high security to high rise

 Age, Melbourne, General News, Peter Norden

13 Jun 2014

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Heritage Victoria is deciding if a developer can bulldoze H-Division to build an apartment block. But if it gives the go-ahead, will part of Australia's social and penal history be demolished too, asks former prison chaplain Peter Norden.

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Keywords

boy(1),building(3),education(1),Heritage(11),historic(2),National Trust(1),Register(2),site(4),Victoria(5),Victorian(2)

 130,767 CIRCULATION

Surf Coast Times (1 item)

Local groups share in historical grants

 Surf Coast Times, Surf Coast, Regional Changes - Bellarine, James Taylor

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THE Torquay and District **Historical Society** and volunteers at Barwon **Park** are among the 63 Victorian community groups shining a light on Victoria's history with support from the latest round of the state government's Local **History Grants Program**. The society will put its \$6,408 share of the nearly \$350,000 worth of grants towards its Virtual Collection project The **National Trust** of Australia (Vic) has been

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Keywords

education(1),heritage(1),Historical(4),History(7),National Trust(1),Park(2)

 35,584 CIRCULATION

Tarrangower Times (1 item)

Extension for Heritage Awards Nominations

 Tarrangower Times, Maldon VIC, General News

06 Jun 2014

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CALLING all trades people, builders, architects, community groups and owners to consider your recent projects and nominate for the 2014 Mount Alexander Heritage Awards. The closing date for nominations has been extended to Friday 13 June. Each eligible nomination will receive a voucher from Tonks Hardware.

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Keywords

buildings(1),gardens(1),heritage(8),historic(1),Historical(1)



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From high security to high rise

Heritage Victoria is deciding if a developer can bulldoze H-Division to build an apartment block. But if it gives the go-ahead, will part of Australia's social and penal history be demolished too, asks former prison chaplain **Peter Norden**.



ardened criminals were either broken, or made bitter and more dangerous, in the cells and labour yards of H-Division at Pentridge Prison. No one ever knew what the outcome would be. That's the way it is with our complex human nature.

I once described the place as made up of "dungeons of brutality and degradation". An exaggeration? Not from my experience of visiting that place from 1976 through to 1992, four years before it finally closed in 1996. Right throughout that time it was infamous for "the reception biff", handed out to every inmate received into the division from other parts of the prison system.

Upon being frogmarched down the

ramp to H-Division, each inmate was stripped naked for a security search. Surrounded by several prison guards armed with batons, he was beaten repeatedly until he fell to the ground.

"You're in H-Division now, the rules outside don't apply here. Now you know who is in charge," the representa-



tives of Her Majesty's Prison Service would say.

If the inmate responded with verbal or physical defence he would be kicked repeatedly until he looked like a broken man. But what was going on inside? Often, we did not find out until he was released back onto the streets of Melbourne.

My predecessor as chaplain at Pentridge, John Brosnan, often said that the regime there "turned bike thieves into murderers". That

reception biff only partly explained the conclusion he had drawn "after 30 years in the nick".

Prisoners were generally separated from one another. Certainly all were held in individual cells for most of the day. Some were only allowed one hour's exercise, others went to the labour yards from 8am until 4pm most days where, until 1976, their job was to break bluestone slabs into small stones the size of marbles.

In later years, the yards were rearranged into common areas where contact between inmates was common and the solitary isolation regime broke down. Several times, wardens turned a blind eye to extreme violence as avowed enemies were allowed to come face to face with one another - in a corridor, in a labour yard, or through the delivery of meals. Some died, others carried the scars into the later years of their lives.

Heritage Victoria is now assessing an application to bulldoze H-Division, which for many decades was the maximum security unit of the Victorian prison system designed for punishment and isolation, and is now part of a sought-after residential location in Coburg.

The new owners of the site, property developers the Shayher Group, have grand plans for the area, including the

construction of a seven-storey residential tower and a service road running right through the H-Division labour yards. They are seeking to demolish the yards - and the memory of this part of Australia's social and penal history.

The company's heritage impact statement, submitted to Heritage Victoria in support of the changes,

acknowledges that the "demolition of H-Division would clearly result in a loss from a heritage perspective, [but that] this must be balanced by the gains for the site in terms of overall design outcomes".

Shayher suggests in its impact statement that the historic H-Division and the rock-breaking yards be replaced with "the footprint of the building traced in the ground, cruciform installations, peepholes, interpretive flaps and art installations".

But are peepholes any replacement for the real thing - a building of such immense historical significance?

H-Division is listed under the Victorian Heritage Register and the National Trust as of "state significance" and was also included on the Register of the National Estate by the Australian Heritage Council.

In my heart I know that the place is hugely significant in the social history of this country and needs to be retained and protected, although it holds so many bad memories. Indeed, a society which selectively removes those dark elements of its cultural heritage is often doomed to repeat them.

This historic area represents our government's attempts at social con-

trol in dealing with the dramatic consequences of the gold rush of the 1850s, the two major world depressions of the 1890s and the 1930s, two world wars and, of course, the social turmoil and change that has consistently occurred in our society since the 1960s.

It was here in 1958 that William O'Meally became the last man to be flogged in Australia - the long and bloody story of the cat-o'-nine-tails ended in this place. O'Meally was found

guilty of the murder of constable George Howell in 1952 and went on to become Victoria's longest-serving prisoner.

Quite by chance I ran into him in Young and Jackson's Hotel on the very day of his release in 1979. He had served 27 years and seemed a broken man.

I can still see him now, standing alone, recognised by all, looking like he had not a friend in this world. I wandered over and shook his hand, with office workers observing us from a distance, wondering who the young guy with the Ned Kelly beard could be.

We stood in the downstairs bar sharing a beer and reminisced on his years inside. O'Meally moved interstate and worked as a barber in Queensland until his death in around 2005. I imagine his clients wondered about "old Billy", and what memories his silent eyes contained.

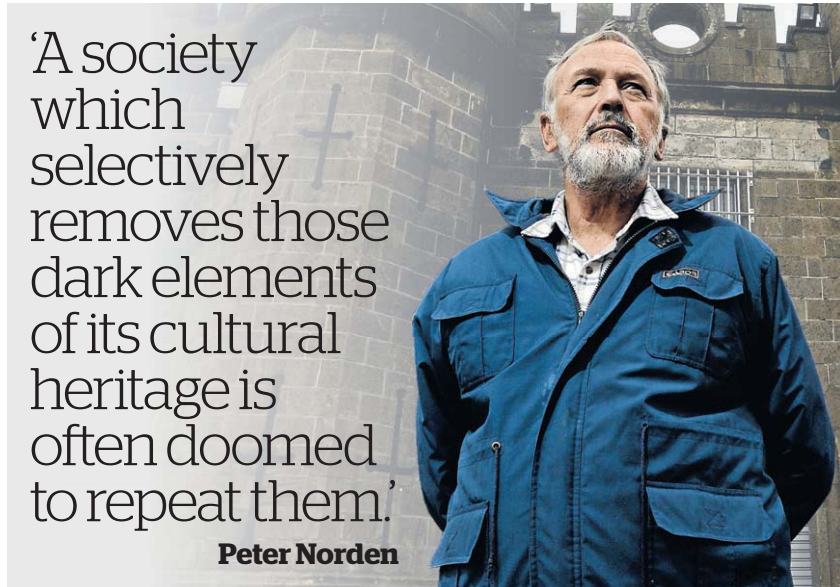
Many took a different path after their release. Gregory David Roberts and I were students at the University



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of Melbourne together in the early 1970s. He fell into drugs and armed robberies and was known as the “Gentleman Bandit” for his manners and toy pistol.

He was sentenced to 19 years’ imprisonment, but after two years he escaped over the front wall of Pentridge in broad daylight. He was 10 years on the run, eight of which were spent in Bombay (now Mumbai), where it was alleged he worked as a street soldier for the Bombay mafia. He was recaptured in Germany in 1991, extradited to Australia and spent two years in solitary confinement in H-Division.

He was released in 1997 and wrote

the international best-selling memoir *Shantaram*. I visited Greg regularly during 1991, always in his H-Division cell, since the authorities were determined he would never escape again.

In one of the very cells Shayher hoped to demolish, Roberts wrote the 900 pages of his novel on toilet paper, since he had no other writing material. The first two copies were found and destroyed, the third one made it to the light of day.

Ronald Ryan, the last man hanged in Australia, spent his last night alive in H-Division before his execution in 1967. It was where he planned his escape within a few days of the execution, but Ryan decided that he didn’t want to put the lives of others at risk in order for him to obtain freedom from the gallows. He died a proud man, with real dignity.

I was privileged to facilitate the exhumation of his remains and their return to his three daughters in recent years. He is now finally at rest, his cremated remains next to his wife, Dorothy, in a cemetery in Portland.

I spent many hours in the laundry yard of H-Division with Mark “Chopper” Read, who worked there in the latter years of his final prison sentence. He took the opportunity of a regular chat to catch up on the gossip from around the prison.

In those years he became very philosophical about life, reading widely on a broad range of topics. For example, on one occasion he displayed his knowledge of the Jesuit Order his admira-

ledge of the Jesuit Order, his admiration for its community building work

with the indigenous people in South America and opposition to the slave trade back to France and Portugal. If only he had received a proper education in his early years, perhaps a scholarship to the Jesuit-run Xavier College, his life journey might have been very different. Proper mental health intervention certainly would have helped during his adolescent years, instead of the electro-convulsive therapy he received at that time.

Another character whom I got to know very well was Jimmy Loughnan, a member of Chopper Read’s “overcoat gang” in H-Division in earlier years. He too had been a mental health patient as a teenager, at a time when there was little specialised treatment for adolescents.

One one occasion, Loughnan and Read escaped from H-Division, remaining on the roof for several hours as a public protest.

On another occasion, in order to prevent Chopper from carrying out a major siege in the division, Jimmy stabbed him several times, then proceeded to give him a cuddle and a kiss on the cheek before he was taken off to hospital.

Loughnan was a Richmond boy, in the days when Richmond was known as Struggletown, a working-class suburb and a tough neighbourhood. There is a Loughnan Street in Richmond named after his grandfather, who had been the mayor.

During my years as prison chaplain I lived at St Ignatius on Richmond Hill, so we had a natural affinity. In 1977, Loughnan successfully escaped from Pentridge at night but damaged his ankles as he fell from the wall, landing

in the grounds of St Paul’s Catholic Church next door. He told the priest, Father Sean O’Connell, that he had fallen over and asked for a lift to Richmond. O’Connell obliged and was later convicted for assisting an escapee, but the conviction was later quashed on appeal.

I conducted Loughnan’s funeral after he died in the Jika Jika fire in 1987, along with four others, protesting about the conditions that then attorney-general Jim Kennan called “an electronic zoo”, designed as it was

as a modern alternative to H-Division.

The Shayher Group is a development consortium with extensive projects in Queensland. Its purchase of the former Pentridge Prison site in recent times has attracted much attention, given the slow progress that was being made by the previous owners in the restoration and development of the north-western part of the site.

Just this month, Shayher announced the discovery of the foundations of three panopticon airing yards, from the very first years of Pentridge in the 1850s, which had been demolished and covered over after 1920.

What of the undue social impact of losing this vital part of our history?

If Shayher’s application is approved by Heritage Victoria, many say it will be a significant loss to this state and indeed the nation, which, after all, was built on penal beginnings. If we lose H-Division, might we be burying a significant part of our social, cultural and penal heritage?

Peter Norden is an adjunct professor at RMIT University and was the chaplain at Pentridge Prison from 1985 to 1992.



Clockwise from top left: the old Pentridge prison, William O'Meally, Mark "Chopper" Read's back, the H Division gate, one of H Division's most notorious inmates Chopper Read, Ronald Ryan (centre). Far left, Former Pentridge chaplin Peter Norden, outside the prison's main entrance. Photos: Joe Armao, Jack Atley, Justin McManus



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Local groups share in historical grants

BY JAMES TAYLOR

THE Torquay and District Historical Society and volunteers at Barwon Park are among the 63 Victorian community groups shining a light on Victoria's history with support from the latest round of the state government's Local History Grants Program.

The society will put its \$6,408 share of the nearly \$350,000 worth of grants towards its Virtual Collection project.

The National Trust of Australia (Vic) has been

granted \$9,430 to create an innovative multimedia project to bring the stories of Barwon Park's wine cellars to life through sound and narrative recordings.

The grants are supporting a range of projects aimed at documenting Victoria's history, including book publishing, recording oral histories, digitising collections, the creation of websites and apps, microfilming, training and education, heritage trails, exhibitions, catalogues and historical collection preservation.

Other supported projects include the creation

of an e-book to record the history of community activism to save St Kilda's iconic Espy Hotel; the reinstating of a collection of historic memorabilia from the Marysville Cricket Club which was lost during the 2009 bushfires; and an historical trail through Woodvale which will educate visitors about its fascinating past.

Announcing the grants last week, Minister for the Arts Heidi Victoria said the funding would support projects that worked to preserve and record the state's history, while sharing it with the community and future generations.

"The Local History Grants Program provides access to stories that may have otherwise remained untold.

"The funded projects rely heavily on the extraordinary work of avid community historians, devoted to collecting and recording the stories of our past.

"These fascinating projects will provide us with an understanding of our past, our place and our people."

The Local History Grants Program is managed by Public Record Office Victoria.



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Extension for Heritage Awards Nominations

CALLING all trades people, builders, architects, community groups and owners to consider your recent projects and nominate for the 2014 Mount Alexander Heritage Awards.

The closing date for nominations has been extended to Friday 13 June. Each eligible nomination will receive a voucher from Tonks Hardware.

The Awards aim to celebrate those in our community who conserve and restore our heritage buildings, gardens, historic collections and other places.

The Award categories include heritage trade skills, sustainability, re-use of

heritage places, new architectural work, restoration of heritage places and preservation of collections.

The awards are celebrated at a presentation evening at the Castlemaine Art Gallery and Historical Museum on Thursday 28 August 2014.

For more information or to obtain an application form, visit the Heritage section of Council's website. If you need assistance with filling out the forms please contact Sera-Jane Peters, Heritage Officer at Council on 5471 1827 on Monday – Wednesday. Forms can be dropped at the Civic Centre in Lyttleton Street or emailed to s.peters@moun-talexander.vic.gov.au.