



Threads of Conservation

Social fabric • Fabric and place • Conserving fabric

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Nerida Moredoundt is a Western Australian Heritage Councillor and a member of Australia ICOMOS. She is the Principal Heritage Architect at consultancy firm *TPG Town Planning, Urban Design and Heritage*, where she leads a team of heritage planners and architects.

Nerida has extensive experience in heritage assessment, conservation planning and heritage management within the local, State and National legislative and planning frameworks. In addition to her on-going consultancy work for local and state government agencies, private property owners and community organisations, her recent work includes cultural heritage strategies that aim to integrate the identification, interpretation and management of Indigenous, natural and built heritage.

Prison and Playground: The Conflicting Roles of a Coastal Island

Paper Abstract

Rottneest Island/Wadjemup lies in the Indian Ocean, 20 kilometres west of metropolitan coastline of Perth. It is recognised as one of Western Australia's iconic tourist destinations, but has a tenebrous past that is embodied in both the tangible and intangible attributes of the Island.

The preparation of a Cultural Landscape Management Plan built on previous studies that had identified the values of various elements of the Island, including geological markers of climate change, maritime exploration, colonial establishments and defence installations, but is distinguished by the consideration of the Island as an interacting and evolving whole. The cultural memory of the Noongar people and the work of numerous artists and writers informed the identification and articulation of the Island's values.

The use of the Island as a place of recreation and respite contributes to the strong emotional attachment the Island holds for many Western Australians. It embodies the quintessential Australian holiday experience of the twentieth century that was neighbourly, practical and democratic. However, it has a particularly sad history as a purpose-built Aboriginal prison that operated from the earliest days of the Swan River Colony. It continues to hold a wellspring of grief for Aboriginal people all over Western Australia for its role in the removal, punishment and enforced labour of Aboriginal men and boys during the immediate Contact and post-Contact periods, many of whom died on the Island.

In comparison to Robben Island, where proposals during the mid to late twentieth century to turn the Island into a recreation reserve were soundly defeated, the former prison cells on Rottneest Island/Wadjemup were converted for use as tourist accommodation with little, if any, recognition of the traumatic history associated with the Island.

This paper explores this difficult past and poses the question; is there a role for healing and reconciliation on Wadjemup and if so how can this be achieved?