

# SEPARATE AND INVISIBLE

A Carceral History of Australian Islands

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## Abstract

This article examines the history of four islands used for incarceration in Australia: the 'secondary punishment' of convicts on Norfolk Island; the management and quarantine of indigenous people on Palm Island; the quarantine of all new migrants and visitors on Bruny Island; and the incarceration of enemy aliens on Rottneest Island. Incarceration has been used throughout Australia's history as a method of social and political control, targeting categories of people perceived to pose a threat to the racial composition, social cohesion, or national security of the Australian community. By providing a space both separate and invisible to the community, Australia's carceral islands served as a solution to a recurring problem for a young nation apprehensive about the composition, durability and security of its community. The human consequences of incarceration could be devastating.

## Keywords

Incarceration, Australia, history, Bruny Island, Norfolk Island, Palm Island, Rottneest Island

## Introduction

Islands have always played a powerful and evocative role in the governance and imagination of nation states. They are at once part of a states' territory under law, yet geographically separate from it. National rules apply, but islands seem curiously free of the gaze of the authorities. Today, these are reasons why islands are attractive holiday destinations for travellers seeking to 'get away from it all'. The qualities that attract today's tourists, however, are the same qualities that make islands well-suited for banishment, exile, segregation and control. Australia's history of white settlement began as an island for the banishment of English convicts. Since that time, Australia's islands have continued to serve as important sites of incarceration, and the practice remains today.

This article examines the history of four islands used for incarceration in Australia. Norfolk Island, a territory of New South Wales, served as a site of 'secondary punishment' from 1825 to 1855 for convicts who committed a second offence while in Australia. Bruny Island in Tasmania was the site of a human quarantine station for all new arrivals to Tasmania from 1885 to the late 1920s. Palm Island, in Queensland, was the most punitive in an interlocking system of Aboriginal reserves from the 1890s to the

1960s. Finally, Rottnest Island in Western Australia served as an enemy alien internment camp during World Wars One and Two. The policies, social and political function, and human consequences of each are examined in turn.

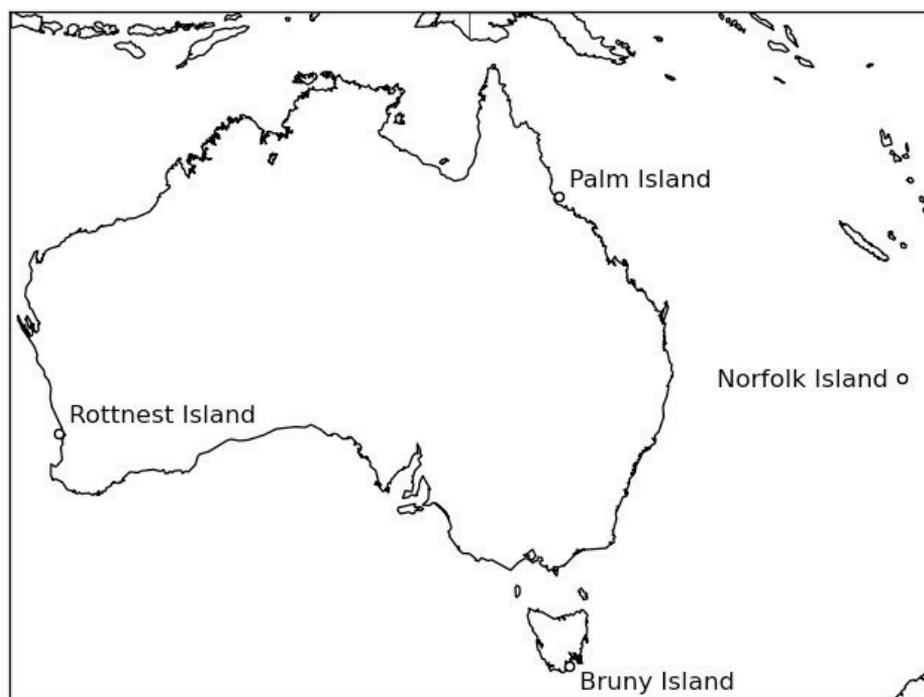


Figure 1 – location of carceral islands discussed in this article

At first glance, these four forms of incarceration seem to be quite dissimilar: targeting different groups of people in different times at different geographical locations around Australia. Yet when we compare these histories, patterns emerge. The original settlement of Australia as an English penal colony created a model for subsequent government responses to perceived social and political problems. In a path-dependent manner, incarceration has been used throughout Australia's history as a method of social and political control, targeting categories of people perceived to pose a threat to the racial composition, social cohesion, or national security of the Australian community. By providing a space both separate and invisible to the community, Australia's carceral islands served as a solution to a recurring problem for a young nation apprehensive about the composition, durability and security of its community.

Each of these forms of incarceration also had a special relationship with the law. Three of them – Bruny, Palm and Rottnest – were forms of administrative detention: that is, people were incarcerated by order of the executive government, and not the courts. There are a number of important differences between administrative detention and judicial imprisonment. First, the decision to detain people in administrative detention is a quite different from the processes of imprisonment in the judicial system. In the latter, imprisonment occurs only after a substantial process of laying charges, trials and

sentencing. In contrast, people are subject to administrative detention because they meet certain administrative criteria, without rigorous investigation into whether the detention is correct and justified, and few opportunities of review. Whole groups of people could be subject to administrative detention, not as the result of an illegal action, but because they belonged to a particular social category. In some cases, this means people could be detained because of who they are. Finally, the conditions of administrative detention are not subject to the same regulations as judicial imprisonment. Unlike prisoners in the judicial system, for example, administrative detainees are not informed of the length of their sentence before incarceration, and may be detained indefinitely.

Norfolk Island is the exception. As an early part of the colony of New South Wales' judicial imprisonment system, convicts were sent to Norfolk after a conviction and trial. The brutal treatment convicts received on Norfolk was arbitrary, however, in that it sat outside the laws of the mainland at that time, and successive Governors of NSW encouraged such treatment to continue. Norfolk Island formed a precedent for the character of treatment experienced by detainees in other forms of island carceral institutions. Arbitrary treatment occurred on all four islands: the geographical separation of the islands from the mainland made the conditions of detention, and the interactions between detainees and the authorities, invisible. As a result, the human consequences of incarceration could be devastating.

### Norfolk Island

Norfolk Island is a small island in the South Pacific, 1,670 km north-east of Sydney. Originally settled and abandoned by Polynesians, it was rediscovered by Captain James Cook on 10 October 1774. The British first settled on the island in 1788 with a mix of convicts and free settlers, but this settlement was eventually abandoned in 1814 because of its high cost. The island was not long abandoned, however, and in 1825 a so-called 'second settlement' was established. This was a place of extreme punishment for two categories of convict: 'secondary offenders', or men who committed 'secondary offences' during their sentence; and 'capital respites', or men who had had their death sentences commuted for a life of hard labour in chains. Both these groups were considered incapable of reform, and, apart from a short period of time under the Governorship of Andrew Macdonochie, the punishment metered to them at Norfolk was brutal.

Extreme physical punishment of convicts was intended from the outset of the establishment of the second settlement. When he was directed to reopen the settlement on Norfolk as a penal colony for secondary offenders, the Governor of NSW Sir Thomas Brisbane replied that because access to Norfolk Island is so difficult, "it is not suited to receive many prisoners or frequent transportations. I have therefore thought it advisable to reserve that place as one for Capital Respites and other higher class of offences. I could wish it to be understood that the felon who is sent there is forever excluded from all hope of return" (Hazzard, 1984: 109). In a later letter, Brisbane explained that "my object was to hold out that Settlement as a place of the extremest punishment short of Death" (ibid: 111).

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Life for prisoners on Norfolk was indeed harsh. They worked during daylight hours, often in chains, on tasks that included building, brickmaking, stonecutting, woodcutting, excavation, agriculture, lime-burning and grinding corn at the crankmill (ibid: 111). Prisoners' poor diet, which consisted of a daily ration of one pound of salt beef or pork, and one pound of maize-meal, was the cause of much illness and death from dysentery (ibid: 117, 147). The worst aspect of life on Norfolk, however, was the free distribution of brutal physical punishments. Floggings were carried out daily for small offenses, and were distributed so numerous that officers had to begin flogging before sunrise, and end after sunset, in order to carry them out (ibid: 123-124, 134). In addition, men were subjected to solitary confinement and torture techniques.

Secondary offenders were sentenced to Norfolk by a court in Sydney. The day-to-day conditions of imprisonment on Norfolk, including physical punishments, were a matter for the discretion of the Island's Commandant. A convict's diary entry in 1929 described well the power of the Commandant:

*The Commandant has power to visit crimes with 300 lashes and could sentence to any time he thinks proper, in cells on bread and water... [he] could sentence him to gaol in heavy irons or add 3 years to his original Colonial sentence. All at different times were inflicted (ibid: 124).*

The distance from the mainland meant that the conditions and treatment convicts received was largely invisible to authorities on the mainland, further increasing the discretion of Commandants. Consecutive commandants took advantage of this invisibility to inflict extreme violence on their prisoners.

The years 1840 to 1844 were a period of respite. This was the time of the commandant Alexander Maconochie, who had made his name as a penal reformer in the years before his posting to Norfolk. Maconochie had developed the theory of 'reform through moral suasion'. He replaced the brutal floggings with a complicated 'marks' system: marks were awarded for good behaviour, removed for bad, could be bartered between convicts, sold for food and clothing, and collected to earn the convict a 'ticket of leave' on the island. After the days' work was done, the men could grow vegetables, which they could 'sell' to each other in exchange for marks. Floggings were kept to a minimum, and good behaviour was rewarded with alternative work, personal time, and independent sleeping arrangements. Men received lessons in reading, writing and music, and religious instructors were provided for the Catholic, Anglican and even Jewish convicts. By Maconochie's own account, and the observations of visitors to the island including the previously sceptical Governor Gipps of NSW, the marks system made an enormous improvement on the lives and behaviour of convicts (Morris, 2002).

Maconochie was removed after only four years on Norfolk, and the circumstances of his removal illustrate well the problems that can be caused by communication over the distance between Norfolk, Sydney, and England. In 1844 Governor Gipps had grown increasingly concerned about Maconochie's regular dispatches, particularly about the lack of floggings. The Governor wrote to England requesting permission to remove Maconochie. While waiting for a response, he travelled to Norfolk to inspect the settlement for himself. Arriving unannounced, Gipps was impressed by Maconochie's reforms. His change of heart came too late, however, and the letter ending Maconochie's tenure arrived at Norfolk from England on the same boat that was to take the Governor back to Sydney (Hazzard, 1984: 179). Maconochie was replaced by a

commandant famous as a disciplinarian, and the settlement returned to its former state. Indeed, the violence inflicted by the new commandant was so extreme that the settlement was abolished eleven years later in 1855.

The violence on Norfolk Island was the result of a system characterised by arbitrary decision-making and a high degree of discretion granted to the settlement's commandants. Convicts had no avenue to appeal their treatment. The distance from the mainland and the authority of the New South Wales Governor and – even further – the authorities in England who had the final word, meant that fates of convicts were at the behest of the Commandant, who was rarely accountable for his actions. Maconochie used this autonomy to his advantage: to transfer from paper into practice his social experiment of the 'reform by moral suasion', an approach to incarceration that remains radical today. The same autonomy granted Maconochie's colleagues the ability to exact extreme violence.

Prison reforms introduced in the second half of the nineteenth century meant that prisons became more regulated, and we have not seen a repeat of the authorised brutality in a judicial prison since that time. Nevertheless, the second settlement on Norfolk Island, itself following the model of transportation of convicts, formed a precedent for later forms of incarceration. The next three forms of incarceration examined here are forms of administrative detention, or detention of non-criminals (Bashford and Strange, 2002: 509), and as such, operate outside of the regulatory framework that began to mitigate prisons. We first examine Bruny Island quarantine station, where special attention was paid to segregating and controlling particular races and classes in the name of restricting the spread of disease.

### Bruny Island

Bruny Island nestles in close to the south-east coast of Tasmania at the mouth of the port of Hobart. Originally home to the Nuononee people, and birthplace of the famous Aboriginal woman Truganninii (Duncombe, 2004: 3), Bruny was first settled by the British in the 1820s. In the 1880s, Tasmanian officials recognised that Bruny's location positioned it well to serve as Tasmania's quarantine station, and it operated as such intermittently until the late 1920s. Thousands of people, mostly servicemen returning from wars, passed through Bruny's facilities on their way to Tasmania or the mainland.

Between the 1830s and 1950s, all vessels, cargo, crew and passengers entering Australia were quarantined before being permitted to join the community. Originally a term meaning a measure of time – forty days – today quarantine is better defined as a spatial segregation (Bashford, 2004: 130). Peninsulas and islands were considered good options for isolating passengers and crew of all arriving vessels, and people were detained whether they displayed symptoms of disease or not. The 'incubation period' averaged fourteen days but it was not uncommon for people to be kept for months before entry to the country was granted (Maglen, 2005: 200).

The quarantine station on Bruny Island was one of the few Australian quarantine stations that were purpose-built for the function, with the first permanent buildings erected in 1885. The station was not immediately well-utilised, however, and after a few quiet decades it housed its first significant population as an enemy alien internment camp during World War One. The Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918-19 led to the

return of the station to its original use and expansion, with the construction of twenty-two buildings, for the quarantine of over 9,000 servicemen on their return from war. Reports of this time recall the frustration the men experienced by their confinement so close to home, but generally no other discomfort.

Most people held in quarantine were healthy. They were not a threat to the community, yet were confined nonetheless. On the whole, people subject to quarantine found it more of a frustration than a hardship. Nevertheless, quarantine was arbitrary in the legal sense of the term, as passengers had no legal recourse to appeal their confinement. Moreover, in a reversal of liberal democratic notions of the right to liberty, the onus was on the quarantined to 'prove' that they were healthy, and should be released. There was no regulation or streamlining of quarantine policy and practice between colonies and states of Australia, and the success of the quarantine in keeping out infectious disease, and the experiences of those detained, was largely variable between stations. Early federal parliamentary debates (1907a, 1907b) point to the fact that quarantine policy was used more to control the entry of humans than other cargo. Animal and plant diseases were of secondary concern to legislators, despite the potential to devastate the new Australian economy. Indeed, a plant quarantine room was only added to the Bruny Island quarantine station in 1955, seventy years after its establishment.

Quarantine, therefore, was first and foremost a method of controlling entry of people into the country. This control had two characteristics. First is the role of quarantine played in notions of hygiene and public health. Australia was a new nation at the turn of the twentieth century, and at a time of scientific discoveries linking germs and disease, authorities were preoccupied with hygiene and public health. Importantly, ideas of cleanliness corresponded with ideas of whiteness. These ideas formed the second characteristic of quarantine: for non-British subjects, particularly Asian travellers after the introduction of the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*, quarantine was a buffer zone that served to keep certain groups of people out of the country. Chinese passengers, for instance, were detained for disproportionately longer than the accepted incubation period, contrary to evidence that the most serious risk of smallpox came from passengers travelling from England. Class was also a factor in the implementation of quarantine, and the Bruny Island quarantine station was a good example of how distinction was made between different classes of passenger. After the most substantial renovations were completed in 1920, Bruny's buildings included separate accommodation for steerage, saloon and first class passengers: steerage passengers slept in long dormitories, while saloon passengers enjoyed a weatherboard building with separate cubicles for sleeping, and a large wood-lined living room (Duncombe, 2004: 61). The upper classes were able to make the most of the inconvenience of quarantine. Lower-class citizens, as well as Asian visitors, the stay in quarantine could be long and uncomfortable, with few personal freedoms.

Australia's maritime quarantine program continued into the mid 20th century, more than fifty years after quarantine had ceased to be used in Britain, Western Europe and North America. Already in 1847, Britain was moving away from the use of quarantine because it slowed immigration and trade, and did not guarantee security from infectious disease (Foley, 1995: 59). Britain officially stopped using quarantine in 1896, at the very same time that Australia was debating how its policy could be strengthened. There are three possible explanations for the longevity of quarantine policy in Australia. First, as an island nation with a small population, the Australian community was remarkably free from infectious disease. The geographical position of Australia meant that it was far

from so-called 'disease founts' of Britain, Western Europe and Asia. This distance meant that disease was easy to detect, because the symptoms of those infected were often apparent before the vessel made it to Australian shores. This distance also meant that, unlike in Britain, the maintenance of Australia as relatively disease-free was actually possible. Second, it was suggested that any outbreak would cause disproportionate panic in the community, and as a result, extreme precautions were taken against any spread of new diseases (Maglen, 2005). In this way quarantine became a matter for national security, a measure for protecting society from external threats to community peace and security (Bashford and Strange, 2002: 515). A third reason lies with quarantine's function of restricting the movement of non-white people into Australia, and through segregation and confinement, reassured Anglo-Australian concerns about race and disease (Bashford, 2004). The incarceration of Aborigines on Palm Island was more explicit in its function of segregating races, and it is to this carceral island that the article now turns.

### **Palm Island**

The tiny, tropical Palm Island is found halfway up the Queensland coast, fifty-seven kilometres off the coast of Townsville. It appears just like typical tropical islands, with white sandy beaches and coconut palms that lean towards the water. Palm Island has a troubled history, however. From the 1890s to the 1960s this picturesque landscape formed an important part of a large, interlocking system of Aboriginal reserves. Like Norfolk Island, Palm Island functioned as a site of extra punishment within the broader reserve system that already functioned to control the lives of indigenous people.

While there were complex reserve systems in every state of Australia, the Queensland reserve system was the most restrictive on the lives of Aboriginal people. This is largely due to its extensiveness: in 1965 reserves in Queensland held 8,500 people, or about forty percent of the estimated Aboriginal population (Rowley, 1981: 133). It is also due to the extensive powers granted to the 'Chief Protector', the public servant with responsibility for managing Aborigines. Queensland's Chief Protector had control over nearly every aspect of Aborigine's lives, including where they lived, marriage, employment, schooling, their ability to travel, their access to rations and resources (Kidd, 1997). Initially the reserve system was set up as a series of 'protectorates'. This was ostensibly a way that the state would keep Aboriginal people safe from the frontier violence that resulted in the deaths of many thousands as the colony extended into the country. By the late 19th century, disease and violence had devastated the Aboriginal population throughout Australia. Full accounts of the drop in population after 1788 are hard to determine, but in Queensland it is estimated that the population decreased from 100,000 in 1788 to 26,670 in 1901 (Chesterman and Galligan, 1997: 31). Influenced by the social Darwinist ideas of the time, protectorates were also designed to 'smooth the dying pillow' (Bolton, 1982: 59) for a people considered to be the last remnants of a stone-age race and destined for extinction. By the early twentieth century, when it became clear that Aboriginal people were not dying out, authorities' concerns shifted to the notion of 'miscegenation'. The many children born of mixed parentage caused a problem for policy-makers: should they be treated as Aboriginal, or white? By segregating children of 'mixed blood' and training them as labourers and domestic servants, the reserve system once again provided a convenient solution to this problem until the early 1970s.

Palm Island was the most extreme example of incarceration within the Queensland reserve system. It was designed as a place where delinquent or rebellious residents of other reserves were sent as punishment, or as a way of pre-empting any attempts of unified resistance. Aborigines could be removed to Palm Island if they were considered troublesome or even “cheeky” (Hammill, 1999: 38), for “causing discontent”, or being “too old to work” (Watson, 2010: 37). Between 1928 and 1971 almost 4,000 people were removed to Palm Island (Watson, 2010: 38), many of whom remained on the Island for the rest of their lives, and had children who were raised there. Palm Island had its own criminal justice system including Aboriginal policemen; a white superintendent who was also the police chief, judge and jury; and a gaol for residents convicted of ‘offences’. Stories of abuse of power were common, including extreme violence, sexual abuse, arbitrary imprisonment and floggings, and the control of rations until starvation. Epidemics of introduced diseases devastated the population, resulting in a death rate of sixteen percent in the early twentieth century, compared with nine percent in the general population (Watson, 2010: 39). Some had to work in chains, and wages were unpaid. On Palm Island, children were separated from their parents into dormitories from a young age, leaving women as well as men to provide labour in the building projects on the island, or on contract to mainland employers.

Like the other carceral islands examined in this article, the level of control on Palm Island was augmented by its geography. The historian C.D. Rowley (1971: 97) phrased it well when he wrote that, “the surrounding ocean gave real meaning to the predicament of being ‘under the Act’”. The distance of Palm from the mainland meant that it was effectively a prison for those who were sent there. The invisibility of life on the Islands meant, too, that Aboriginal people could be subject to the whims of the superintendents who controlled every aspect of their lives. During the 1920s, Superintendent Curry inflicted severe corporal punishment on the Island’s residents, including children. In one example from 1929, Curry ordered a specially-designed ‘cat o’ nine tails-like-whip’ be made, which he hung on the girls’ dormitory door as a warning, before eventually using it on a girl until she lost consciousness (Watson, 2010: 45). During the 1930s, Superintendent Gribble’s fiscal restraint led to severe malnourishment and the death by starvation and disease of many residents. The period from 1953, under the command of Superintendent Bartlam, was characterised by extreme police brutality and the arbitrary imprisonment of inmates in the Island’s prison facilities, including solitary confinement cells. During this time men were arrested and sentenced for failing to have a haircut or otherwise being untidy, for being out after 10pm, or in the case of women, for wearing a dress above the knee (ibid: 104-105).

The conditions of Palm were such that people on the mainland dreaded being sent there, and thus Watson (2010: 39) argues, played a crucial role in suppressing Aboriginal political activity in Queensland, while in other states Aboriginal people were forming associations such as the Aboriginal Protection League. While there was some resistance by Aboriginal people to their treatment on Palm Island during the 1960s and 1970s, this was largely ineffective in producing substantial change. The legacy of this history is complex: today many of Palm Island’s residents are themselves, or are the children of, those confined to Palm under the reserve system. Tensions with white authorities remain. For example, the death in police custody in 2004 of Aboriginal man Cameron Doomadgee, the community riots that followed, and the decade-long investigation into his death has reinforced existing tensions between the legal authorities and the local Aboriginal community (Hooper, 2008).

Without the full rights and protections enjoyed by white citizens, Aboriginal people on Palm Island experienced a far more brutal life even than prisoners at the time. Without the oversight of regulators, superintendents had enormous discretion over every aspect of the lives of those in their care. Like the secondary punishment carried out on Norfolk Island, Aboriginal people were subjected to the most cruel and brutal violence, without avenue for appeal. Furthermore, their island banishment meant that, apart from the Superintendent and other officials, many Aboriginal people lived their whole lives entirely segregated from white society. The article now turns to the final case study: the use of Rottnest Island as an enemy alien internment camp during the two World Wars.

### Rottnest Island

The final example of island incarceration examined here is the enemy alien internment camp on Rottnest Island, eighteen kilometres off the coast of Fremantle in Western Australia. A low-lying island with white sandy beaches and bays, Rottnest gets its name from the Dutch 'Rattenest', or 'Rat's nest', referring to the native rat-like quokka that inhabits the island. Today it is a popular tourist destination, but its early history under white settlement was as a site of incarceration. Like Palm Island, Rottnest was used as a prison for Aborigines between 1838 and 1931. As a good example of how carceral sites were recycled, the facilities on Rottnest were also used as an enemy alien internment camp during the two World Wars.

Enemy alien internment was deployed in both World Wars One and Two to segregate and contain anyone who may be a threat to Australia's war effort. During World War One up to 1700 Austrian Slavs and Germans were interned on Rottnest Island between 1914 and 1915. Most of the Austrian Slavs had come to Australia in their teenage years and found work in the Kalgoorlie mines. From Yugoslavia, these men were technically Austrian and therefore allies (Fischer, 1989: 158-159). Their internment suggested a deliberate misunderstanding of their allied status on the part of Australian authorities: a result more of union campaigns to remove 'foreign workers' from the Kalgoorlie goldfields, than their threat to the Australian war effort (Fischer, 1989). In his memoir of his internment as a teenager during World War Two, Anthony Splivalo (1982) recalls being summoned to the local Kalgoorlie courthouse, then immediately being put onto a train to Perth without an opportunity to tell his host family or to collect belongings. The German internees were crews of merchant ships unlucky to be sailing in Australian waters when war broke out.

Overcrowding was a problem for the Rottnest internment camp. At the end of May 1915, Rottnest Island was the second largest internment camp in Australia, with 628 people (Fischer, 1989: 177). This number expanded the following month, with the internment of the Austrian Slavs, and in September 1915, Rottnest held 998 prisoners, guarded by 127 Australian troops (ibid: 158-159). Facilities were not designed to accommodate such a large population, and any development was hindered by the fact that every piece of equipment needed to be shipped to the Island (ibid: 189). Internees lived in cramped, unsanitary, and (in winter) cold conditions. Men slept in groups of nine to each tent, some of which had bunks (Splivalo, 1982), others with bare floors (ibid: 190). Sleeping on the floor affected the men's health, as one intern wrote:

*Owing to our scanty clothing and bad food, during the present cold weather, we are entirely and pitifully frozen. Rheumatism cases are the*

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*order of the day because people have to sleep on the damp ground without bedding or covering* (Fischer, 1989: 191).

Water supply and sanitary facilities were insufficient, particularly as numbers in the camp grew: there were two pumps, and interns had to form queues to wait their turn to fill water in buckets. Food was supplied daily to each person, and each tent cooked their own food on a fire in a cast-iron camp oven. Food consisted of:

*Beef and mutton, white bread, potatoes that had already begun to sprout, a few limp, leafy vegetables, even fewer onions, and on the rarest occasions, as if by inadvertence, a tomato or two. There was also tea, some sugar, and Jones' IXL jams. The online parts of this issue that were really good quality were the mutton and beef, but there was so very little of either* (Splivalo, 1982: 65).

The camp's rubbish was thrown into pits between the tents causing an unbearable smell. The men were at first given permission to use the water latrines, but lack of experience on the part of some of the Slavic men (to the frustration of the more urbane Germans) soon put them out of order (ibid: 78). Trenches were subsequently dug for latrines, but not partitioned (ibid: 190). A canteen outside the camp sold a few items (ibid: 71) that had to be paid for with interns' own money and were crucial for men who were interned without the opportunity to gather their possessions. When men ran out of money, or had none to begin with, there was little opportunity to earn more.

Internment on Rottneest had some pleasant aspects. Internees were allowed to walk about the island during the day, although they had to report back to the camp at 5pm for muster. On the beaches they sunbathed and caught fish to augment their rations (Splivalo, 1982). Conditions deteriorated as the camp became overcrowded, however. There were reports of mistreatment from camp guards (Fischer, 1989: 191): prisoners complained of guards using objectionable language, of "using their bayonets freely on the prisoners" (ibid: 177), and of threatening prisoners with rifles and firing shots into the camp (ibid: 192). An investigation resulted in the replacement of the superintendent and the removal of a number of guards. Although correspondence was censored, news of this treatment reached London through the foreign offices in Berlin and Vienna, which undoubtedly led to the decision to close the camp in 1915 and transfer internees to the Holdsworth internment camp in New South Wales (ibid: 194).

During World War Two, Rottneest was used for the temporary internment of Italian enemy aliens from June to November 1940. This time internees consisted of men who were removed from their homes and businesses in Fremantle, crews from Italian vessels, and prisoners of war sent from England and other colonies to the Australia for internment. Like the Slavic miners, most of the Italians were unskilled workers, listing their occupations as labourers, market gardeners, farmers, fishermen, greengrocers, shop assistants and shopkeepers (Cresciani, 2003: 104). In fact, authorities raised concerns that the internment of this workforce would seriously threaten the supply of fresh produce to Fremantle and Perth. The number of people interned at Rottneest during World War Two is uncertain, but it was possibly around 1400 people (Bosworth and Uglolini, 1992: 114). Whatever its size, the use of Rottneest for internment this time was short, and internees were transferred to a camp at Harvey on the mainland within five months. During their time on the island, internees were employed for clean-up operations and building renovations on the prison facilities, removing barbed wire, filling

trenches, replanting trees, cleaning the camps and cottages, so that Rottneest could once again become attractive destination for tourists (Wiltshire, 2004: 52).

Enemy alien internment was made possible by the grant of special powers to the executive during wartime. Like other forms of incarceration examined here, internment meant the detention of groups of people without charge for an indefinite amount of time, with little recourse to appeal their situation. Interning people on arbitrary grounds was not unusual: the disclosure to authorities of anonymous 'evidence', which comprised mostly of gossip with an element of 'patriotic hysteria' (Saunders, 1993), led to the internment of many hundreds, if not thousands, of people during both wars. Pre-existing facilities on Rottneest made the challenge of interning hundreds of people at short notice possible, and perpetuated incarceration as the solution in matters of national security, identity, and social order.

## Discussion

Separate and invisible, islands have been used throughout Australia's history to confine, segregate, and control specific groups of people. As a new nation with a small and vulnerable population, government control over community membership was not only preferable, it was thought possible. Thus convicts deemed irredeemable were subject to a brutal system of punishment far from the mainland. Thus indigenous people were segregated from the white population in a vast system of reserves, a measure targeted at controlling miscegenation. Thus newcomers arriving by boat were quarantined to control contagion, long after other countries had abandoned the practice. And thus so-called 'enemy aliens' were confined in camps to manage their threat to Australia in wartime. In times of Australian history when certain categories of people were perceived as threats to social order, national security, or identity, incarceration provided a convenient political practice to manage the problem. Through this history we can identify specific temporal social anxieties. For each the government's solution was always incarceration.

The growing interest among scholars and the general public in Australia's carceral history has been attributed to the idea that, in the absence of a shared ethnic origin, incarceration has become "an inherent component of [a] shared post-colonial mythology" about Australian identity, replete with heritage sites (Casella and Fredericksen, 2004: 119-120). What is often missing from this discussion is the continuity between these institutions, how each one provides a model for the next. As David J. Rothman (1971) explains, incarceration in Western societies is enduring in nature: incarceration has been a government mechanism, repeated, recycled and refined over time, to separate categories of people identified as a threat to society. The reason for its enduring nature lies not with the fact that these forms of incarceration were successful in achieving their aims, as often they were not. Instead, Rothman explains, 'the likely answer is that it was fulfilling the needs of those outside, if not inside, its walls' (ibid: xlvii). In the emerging Australian nation, achieving a *sense* of control over threats to society and government was paramount.

This history spans an era when great reformers in Europe and North America were debating the function and form of incarceration in Western societies. The idea that human nature was not predetermined but instead changed in response to social experience challenged previous ideas about society, religion, and authority. These ideas not only impacted on how people were incarcerated, but the sites of incarceration

themselves were regarded as ideal case studies for studying exogenous influences on the human spirit. During the nineteenth century in particular, carceral practices shifted from a regime designed to punish the body to one of disciplining the mind (Foucault, 1977, Spierenberg, 2004). For most of its history, practices of incarceration in Australia dragged behind the reforms implemented elsewhere in the West. The brutal violence and torture of 'secondary offenders' on Norfolk Island was taking place as the prisons of Europe and North America were being reformed into sites of reform and rehabilitation. As this article has explained, Australia's quarantine system was dismantled in the 1950s, nearly a full century after the practice was abolished in England and Europe. Similarly, Aboriginal people were still segregated in reserves in the 1960s, decades after colonial understandings about race were challenged. Finally, Australia's system of enemy alien internment was so extensive that it received prisoners of war from across the Empire for internment for the duration of the two world wars.

Maconochie's social experiment on Norfolk Island in 1840 was an exception, a radical departure from carceral practice at the time, in Australia and elsewhere. On his return to England, Maconochie was dismissed as Governor of Birmingham Prison after holding the post for only two years, again because of the radical nature of his ideas. His legacy is substantial, however, and today many of his ideas are now a common part of carceral practice, although others remain too radical (Morris, 2002). The experiment on Norfolk is best understood as part of the larger push for reform of incarceration. Rather than bemoan the fact that Maconochie's experiment was so short-lived, however, it could be well argued that the invisibility of Norfolk Island, so far from overseers on the mainland of Australia, enabled such a radical experiment to take place in the first instance.

The legacy of this history of island incarceration can be found in the contemporary practice of immigration detention. Christmas Island, 1600 km north-west of Perth in the Indian Ocean, has been used since the mid-1990s to detain asylum seekers while their applications for protection status are processed, and since the mid-2000s has served as the primary immigration detention centre for all asylum seekers arriving in Australia by boat without a valid entry visa. Historical analyses of immigration detention have been limited. Accounts have either been literal and ahistorical, marking the beginning of the practice in 1992 with the introduction of the policy of mandatory detention (Neumann, 2004: 11). Alternatively, immigration detention practices are presented as an extension of the White Australia policy (Bashford and Strange, 2002: 511). This latter comparison facilitates the argument that immigration detention centres function to exclude membership to Australia on racial grounds. An analysis of immigration detention that places it within a history of island incarceration enables a deeper understanding of the social and political function of current day immigration detention practices, where concerns about ethnic and racial issues are present, of course, but so too are concerns about national security, social cohesion, contagion, and identity. Like these other carceral institutions, too, immigration detention is not designed to exclude asylum seekers, but to manage the process of assessment of who belongs in the Australian community, and who doesn't (ibid: 510). As indefinite administrative detention, Christmas Island shares many characteristics of its institutional predecessors. The distance of the Island from the mainland means that asylum seekers are kept separate from the Australian community, where they might receive emotional support and legal assistance. The harsh treatment that they receive remains invisible. Today, as in the past, the human consequences of this island incarceration can be devastating.

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