

THE DOCKYARDS: A CHRONOLOGY

- 1831 Small boats being built and ships being repaired at Port Arthur.
- 1833 Port Arthur Dockyards established.
- 1834 John Watson appointed Shipwright in April, Master Shipwright's house erected; first boat dock on shore below (where lime kiln was later built).
- 1835-36 New dock built to west of original one. Schooner *Eliza* and whaler *Wallaby* among vessels built. Dockyards established as virtually self-contained industrial complex. David Hoy, late of Macquarie Harbour Penal Station, became Master Shipwright on Watson's departure.
- 1837 December *Fanny* (288 tons) launched, the largest ship yet built in Van Diemen's Land.
- 1841 New blacksmith's shop built on site of present Clerk of Works' house. Dockyards reached highest output to date.
- 1843 Production rate drastically reduced, possibly due to complaints of unfair competition from private builders.
- 1844 Hoy's position reduced to Superintendent at half salary. Proposal to close Dockyards.
- 1845-46 Temporary revival of ship-building with construction of steamers, colliers and schooners.
- 1848 Closure of Dockyards, with Hoy's retirement, on grounds that it was inefficient and unnecessary and that labour was needed elsewhere. Master Shipwright's house and newly-built Clerk of Works' house used as officers' quarters.
- 1854 Lime Kiln built on early dock site, burning sea shells to make lime. Ceased operating 1873.
- 1850s-73 Clerk of Works' house and Master Shipwright's house used as residences for civil officers, including Clerk of Works and Schoolmaster.

- 1861-63 Proposals for re-opening Dockyards rejected as wasteful and unnecessary.
- 1877 Port Arthur Penal Settlement closed.
- 1878-85 Attempts to sell Dockyards houses and land; Rev. Joseph Woollnough became owner in 1884 and demolished several buildings.
- 1937 Church of England bought and let Master Shipwright's house.
- 1948 Dockyards area purchased by Government but houses still privately let.
- 1959-60 Recommendation to Scenery Preservation Board that Master Shipwright's house be demolished to provide bricks for maintenance elsewhere. Withdrawn on advice that it was historically significant.
- 1980-81 Series of archaeological studies of Clerk of Works' house before and during conservation work.
- 1981-82 Clerk of Works' house restored for use as National Parks and Wildlife Service staff residence.
- 1982-83 Master Shipwright's house investigated by archaeologists; lime kiln stabilised and capped with sandstone.
- 1983-84 Conservation work on Master Shipwright's house for use as maritime museum and early convict period setting. Archaeological study of outbuildings.

MASTER SHIPWRIGHTS OF PORT ARTHUR

Both John Watson and David Hoy, Port Arthur's Master Shipwrights, had long and successful careers in shipbuilding.

Watson, born and apprenticed in Southampton, England, arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1831. He was 33 when he took up his appointment at Port Arthur in April 1834, bringing his wife and five children.

In his three years here, he supervised construction of the schooner *Eliza* (noted for its speed and later to become the first Australian-built gunboat) and the whaling ship *Wallaby*. He designed the barque *Fanny*, then the biggest ship built in the Colony.

Watson was later a successful Hobart shipbuilder and building contractor. He died in 1887 at the age of 86.

David Hoy was born in Scotland about 1787, and arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1824. In 1827 he went to Macquarie Harbour to supervise the penal settlement's shipbuilding industry. He designed the ship *Frederick*, and was marooned at the abandoned settlement when convicts seized the vessel and sailed it to South America.

In 1833 Hoy turned down a position as Port Arthur's Master Shipwright, preferring instead to work privately. He finally came here in 1836 when he was 49. In 1838 he married, and his wife and stepdaughter lived with him in the Master Shipwright's house.

Hoy guided the Dockyards through its busiest times in the early 1840s. He supervised construction of a number of well-known vessels, including the convict transport *Lady Franklin* (later, as a whaler, re-named *Emily Downing*), the schooner *Eleanor* and the paddle-steamer *Derwent*.

Hoy retired when the shipyard closed in 1848, and went to live in Hobart until his death in 1857, aged 70.

OPERATING A CONVICT SHIPYARD

The benefit of having facilities to repair ships at Port Arthur must have been obvious even when the settlement began in 1830. Port Arthur had plenty of good timber (that was why it was established), a safe port and a large labour force, and depended completely on sea transport.

At first, maritime industry was confined to small-scale repairs to boats and ships and construction of a few small boats. But by 1833 the new Commandant, Captain Charles O'Hara Booth, saw the value of extending these operations. In 1834 he secured the appointment of John Watson as Shipwright.

Watson quickly transformed the settlement's maritime operations into a full-scale shipbuilding industry, supervising the establishment of the Dockyards on this site.

The labour force varied from year to year, but in 1846, a productive year, the Dockyards employed 64 convicts full-time and another 36 part-time. The convicts often worked in water, even in winter, and the difficult conditions may have led to sabotage or deliberate 'loss' of tools.

The work gangs were administered by the shipwright, an assistant shipwright, a clerk and overseers. A blacksmith produced and repaired metal fittings at the yard, and a wood craftsman operated wood-bending 'steamers'. Sails were designed, cut and sewn on site.

Away from the Dockyards, a much larger convict work force was employed to fell trees, cut timber and carry it to the yard; their work, often under brutal overseers, was the most hazardous and arduous of all. At Point Puer, boys were instructed in various shipbuilding trades. A few, probably a small minority, were on release successfully employed in private industry.

An escape by sea was an obvious temptation to convicts working at the yard; they were therefore guarded by soldiers, segregated from crews of ships being repaired and taken to the Prisoners' Barracks before dark.

THE DOCKYARD IN 1836

By 1836 the Port Arthur shipbuilding industry had become part of the settlement, despite some official questioning of its viability. The basic layout of the yard that was to function a dozen more years had been established by John Watson in 1834-35.

There were two dwellings, the Master Shipwright's house and a one-roomed overseer's hut next to the garden (the Clerk of Works' house did not exist until the Dockyards had closed.)

Numerous other buildings and operations emphasised the site's industrial function. There were two 'boat sheds' for joinery, sail making and other small-scale work, a storage shed, two steamers for bending wood, a smith's shop for the many metal-working tasks, two sawpits for cutting large beams into boat-building sizes, boat docks for major building and repair jobs and a slip for smaller work.

A vegetable garden at the rear provided for the needs of the Shipwright and his family.

SHIPS AT PORT ARTHUR

The number of vessels built and repaired at Port Arthur may have exceeded 200. In the ten years to 1844, records show the total to be over 160.

Of these, more than a third were whaleboats: sturdy schooner-rigged open boats with a crew of five oarsmen and a steersman used in both off-shore and deep-sea whaling and as a general-purpose vessel. Many were ordered from Hobart Town, which in the 1840s became one of the world's busiest whaling ports.

A few were ships of between 100 and 300 tons. These included convict transports, supply ships, deep-sea whalers, steam ferries and gunboats.