

Shadows of the Past



Folklore & History of the Heritage Highway

Keep an eye out between Tunbridge and Kemton for sixteen silhouettes. Some are quite close to road, some are high on the hilltops. What stories can they tell us about the history of this intriguing region.

***Two hundred years on
there's still plenty of ways to get
held up on the Heritage Highway***

The Silhouette sculpture trail along the Southern half of the Midland Highway is completed, nine years after it was started by locals Folko Kooper and Maureen Craig.

The trail between Tunbridge and Kempton, has become an enjoyable feature of the journey along the highway.

Installation of four coaching-related sculptures at Kempton earlier this year marked completion of a trail which now has 16 pieces.



Leaving Outlands towards the North, on the right side of the Heritage Highway.



Troop Of Soldiers—St Peters Pass

Van Diemen's Land was first and foremost a British military outpost. Soldiers accompanied the convicts on the transport ships, supervised the rationing of supplies, and guarded the chain gangs. They also supervised construction of bridges public and private buildings— as well as watching out for the French! Most didn't stay long. There were other British interests around the world to defend. Many of the convicts they guarded had also been soldiers, but were reduced to committing crime once the wars they were fighting ended and they were out of a job.



Chain Gang—North off York Plains Turn-off

There was a lot to do to build the colony of Van Diemen's Land. Convicts with skills were in high demand and were often assigned to wealthy landowners and treated quite well. Convicts without special skills were relegated to road gangs. Doing time with the notorious chain gang was not a normal experience for convicts. The chain gang was an 1826 colonial innovation designed to break the spirit of those who were insolent or questioned authority. Men were made to break rocks and dig ditches with their ankles chained together. The greater the punishment, the shorter was the chain. The pain was excruciating. The threat of the chain gang helped to keep the convicts in line.



Emus - South of Tunbridge

Tasty, flightless and far too curious for its own good!

Did you know that a Tasmanian species of emu ran wild across the island until the mid-1800s? It was smaller than its larger mainland relative, but probably just as inquisitive. Aboriginal women gathered emu eggs.

Aboriginal men trapped and hunted these flightless birds with spears. They probably also tricked the nosy creatures with bunches of feathers tied onto sticks. Once close enough to a concealed hunter, a noose was slipped around the emu's neck. One emu made a good-sized meal. Early settlers, too, feasted on the bird - so much so that the Tasmanian emu has been eaten into extinction.

Leaving Oatlands towards the South, on the left hand side of the Heritage Highway.



Gentlemen in a gig - South of Oatlands

Who am I? If this was 1821 I could be doctor William Redfern, who accompanied Governor Lachlan Macquarie on his final tour of Van Diemen's Land when he decided the location of many of the towns along this Highway. Ten years later and I might be the a landowner and Police Magistrate Thomas Anstey going to decide the fate of accused wrong doers at the beautiful new Court House in Oatlands. If it was 1852 then I could be Anstey's son, Henry, heading to Oatlands' newly built Catholic Church, having made a substantial donation to its construction fund. It was designed by Pugin, the famous architect of the Interior of the Houses of Parliament in London.



Bushranger

A number of convicts chose to be bushrangers because it was better than the chain gang and the land provided them with food and shelter and a sense of freedom - but freedom was often short lived. Convicts took advantage of the rewards and pardons offered for hunting down bushrangers. By capturing or killing bushrangers, convicts could gain their own ticket to freedom.



Surveyor and Chain Man

My job was to map the landscape so that the best routes from one place to another could be found and to ensure that land was accurately measured to prevent disputes. I walked the hills and valleys with my chain man, taking readings with my theodolite and mapping the contours. My job was to turn the track between Hobart Town and Launceston into a road capable of accommodating the increasing coach traffic that was generated as the settlers established their farms and businesses from one end of the island to the other.

As you travel the Heritage Highway today you are tracing some of my work, and also ancient Aboriginal routes that I often followed.



Tasmanian Tiger - North of the Stonor turn-off

In colonial times, Van Diemen's Land was the last stronghold of an animal known as a wolf, hyena, Tasmanian tiger or thylacine. Long since vanished from the mainland where only rock art drawings of it remain, the thylacine was hunted to the brink of extinction in Tasmania. It was blamed for the deaths of many sheep and lambs, but the real culprits were often wild dogs and hungry convict shepherds.



Professional Hang man - South of Stonor turn off

Being the hangman was a reviled and feared profession, but it was essential to the convict system. Those willing to take on the gruesome task could expect rewards for service. Hangman Solomon Blay took his job seriously, taking care to dispatch his 'clients' quickly and efficiently. Hanging was a frightening punishment which was used to control the population.



Shepherd, his flock and dog - South of Jericho

This shepherd was a convict and some of these sheep belong to him. Contrary to the usual image of convicts in chains, in 1817 about half of all the sheep in Van Diemen's Land were owned by convicts or emancipists and these men and women were able to wander across the open grassy woodlands in comparative freedom. Landowners often gave their convict shepherds some of the new season's lambs as an incentive to protect the flock from predators and thieves.



Stage Coach - Spring Hill

We might like to think of travel in the 1800s as a sedate and dignified affair. In fact, it was fast and furious. Coach stations where horses were changed were built every few miles. People and mail were carried at considerable speed and accidents were not uncommon. There was a lot of money to be made and competition was considerable. Coach services were established in Tasmania long before Cobb and Co began in the Mainland.



Horse and Rider - Lovely Banks

Can you see the rider racing up the highway carrying a mailbag? He is a messenger employed to deliver letters and small packages to the settlers. He could be James White, a stonemason accused of house breaking and transported as punishment in 1831. Convicts weren't locked in prisons very much in the early days of the colony. They were the workers who made the colony function. White was entrusted with the job of postal messenger from 1834 to 1836. After that the growing coach services carried the post.



Policeman with drunk - Near Melton Mowbray Hotel

Alcohol was one of the biggest social problems in Van Diemen's Land. It was supplied from government stores according to strict rationing guidelines, which meant that who you were determined the amount you got. Of course there was illegal home-made liquor, and a brew from cider gum that settlers learned about from Aboriginal people. No doubt many wanted to forget the hardships of life in the colony, and that they were such a long way from home. As the colony's police constables often had to work more or less alone, the Government issued wheelbarrows for carting off inebriated offenders to the cells. Here in Melton Mowbray the cells were behind the police cottage, which was near where the hotel is today.

Kempton is 50km from Hobart on the Heritage Highway



Stage Coach - Northern end Kempton

From 1847 onwards, there was extremely fierce competition between the three coaching services operation on the Hobart to Launceston route. Prices plummeted and drivers often raced each other in a bid to be first at their destination, creating much discomfort and concern for passengers.

By the end of each stage the coach horses would be sweating profusely and quite exhausted. (The horses were changed every hour). A rub down, rug in a warm stable, together with an occasional quart of hot beer, soon relieved their distress.

Lasting 44 years, it was possibly the most important time in the developing colony. This period saw the establishment of towns along the way, which built up around coach stops.

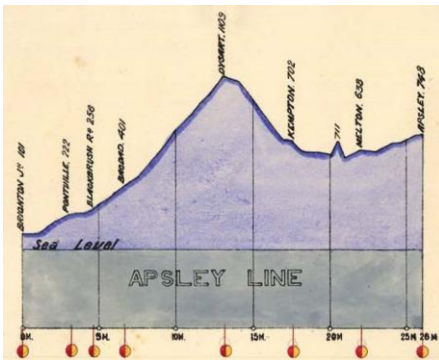


Waiting for the Coach - Next to The Wilmot Arms



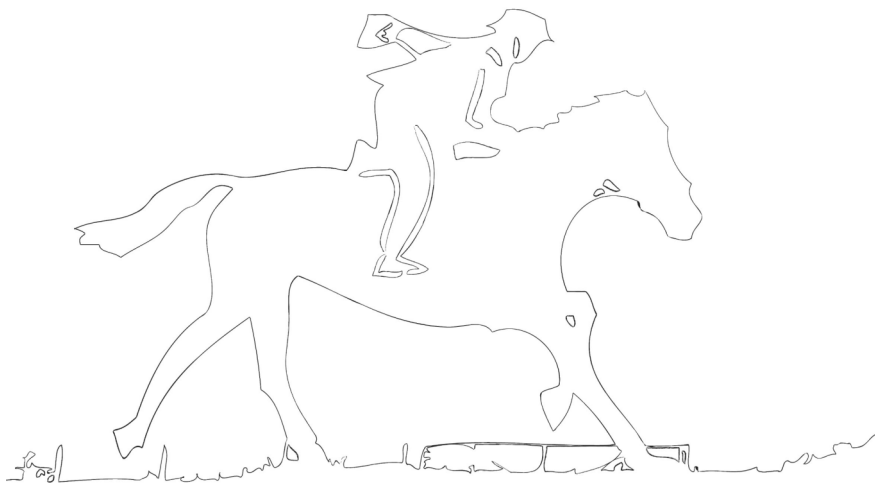
Stage Coach- Southern End of Kempton

Coaching led to the opening of some of Tasmania's finest grazing and cropping areas, settled by families whose names are still a part of the Midlands heritage today.



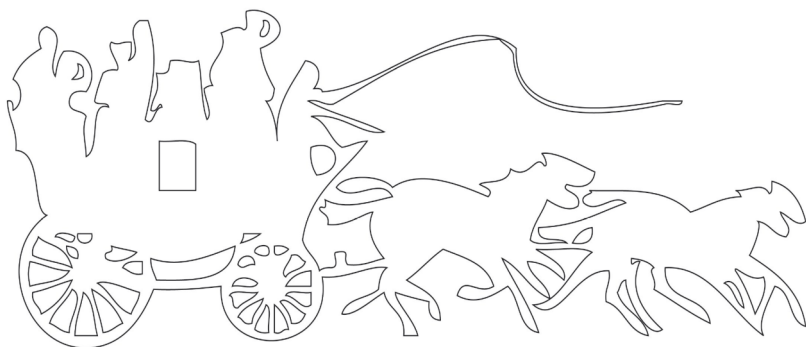
Pulley Northern Exit - Apsley Railway Line

This line was one of a group of lines in the south of Tasmania approved for construction in the early 1880s to complement the then privately owned Main Line. Construction commenced in 1888, and the line was officially opened for traffic by the Tasmanian Government Railway on April 22 1891. Also known as Green Ponds Line (Kempton). The line started at Brighton station, just on the Hobart side of the Jordan River, before crossing the river on its own bridge (parallel to the then Main Line railway bridge) and then generally following the river to Pontville. Between Pontville and Bagdad, and Kempton and Melton Mowbray, the line ran along a similar alignment to the current highway. From Melton Mowbray to Apsley, the route paralleled the current main roads with the exception of going around the other side of Nannygoat Hill. Between Bagdad and Kempton, the line winds its way around the hills and next valley to the west of the current highway.



Shadows of the Past
Horse and rider, Lovely Banks

Shadows of the Past
Stage Coach, Spring Hill



The Artists

Shadows of the Past is a project initiated by local artists, Folko Kooper and Maureen Craig, that puts a contemporary slant on the eighteenth century art form of the silhouette, creating poignant reminders of early colonial life on the Heritage Highway.

The Research

This material is drawn from records kept meticulously by the colonial authorities. There is no such comprehensive record of Aboriginal voices of the time. We can try to imagine the Aboriginal peoples' experiences. It is likely they would tell a very different story of these events.

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