

Journal of Australian Colonial History

A Refereed Journal
ISSN 1441-0370

Department of Archaeology, Classics and History
University of New England
Armidale NSW 2351
Australia

<http://www.une.edu.au/jach/>

Julia Clark, 'A Question of Attribution: Port Arthur's Convict Portraits', *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, Vol. 12, 2010, pp. 77-96.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

This material has been reproduced and communicated to you by the University of New England. You may download, display, print and reproduce this material in unaltered form only for personal, non-commercial use only, for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, all other rights are reserved. Enquiries should be made to the Editor.

© Editor. Published by the University of New England, 2010

A Question of Attribution: Port Arthur's Convict Portraits ¹

Julia Clark
Port Arthur Historic Site

The best known photographic portraits of nineteenth-century convicts in Australia are those cartes de visite (cdv),² and a smaller number of postcards, which are understood to have been taken at Port Arthur in 1874. Once a secondary punishment station, Port Arthur had by then also become a welfare station, with a lunatic asylum, paupers' depot and hospital. The establishment still accommodated a few hundred men under sentence – the so-called 'Effectives', or men who, despite various disabilities and ailments, were deemed still capable of work.³ By then the decision had been made to close Port Arthur, and the inmates were gradually being transferred to institutions in Hobart.

The photographing of prisoners had already begun elsewhere. In South Australia in 1867, Frazer Crawford of the Adelaide Photographic Company was instructed to photograph prisoners at

¹ I am indebted to Margy Burn and Sylvia Carr of the National Library of Australia; Alan Davies of the Mitchell Library, Sydney; Kaye Dimmack of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery; Vicki Farmery of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery; Jane Harrington of the Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority; Chris Long, photographic historian; State Archivist Ian Pearce and his ever-helpful staff at the Archives Office of Tasmania; Brian Rieusset, Penitentiary Chapel Hobart; Kim Simpson, formerly of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery; and the staff of the Public Records Office of Victoria.

² The cartes de visite format was introduced in Europe in the 1850s. They were paper prints mounted on cards, about the same size as a playing card. Cheap to turn out in large numbers and predating the capacity of newspapers to print photographs, they enabled people of all classes to acquire images of royalty and other distinguished personages. Albums were produced in which collections could be mounted and displayed. See A. Maxwell, *Colonial Photography and Exhibitions*, London, 1999, p. 202; J. R. Davies, "'I Have Seized the Light': A review of the Significance of the miniature and the early portrait photograph to the colonist, c.1840-1890", PhD thesis, University of New England, 2004.

³ In 1872 there were 277 men under sentence, 89 paupers, 60 hospital patients and 93 lunatics. Establishment at Port Arthur Report for 1873, *Tasmania, House of Assembly Journal, (HAJ)*, 27/1873/76. On the Port Arthur paupers, see M. Weidenhofer, *Port Arthur: A Place of Misery*, Port Arthur (Tas), 1990 [1981], pp. 111-20.

Yatala prison 'for police purposes'. He estimated that he could take ten subjects daily in an extemporised outdoor studio, each carte de visite costing twopence worth of raw materials to produce.⁴ In 1869-1870, the New South Wales' Comptroller General of Prisons, Harold Maclean, instigated the systematic photographing of prisoners at Darlinghurst Gaol (Sydney).⁵ The Port Arthur photographs, however, became the most renowned and notorious examples of criminal photographs, probably because they best articulated the haunting and infamous memories of convict transportation with which Port Arthur had become so intimately associated.

During the nineteenth century, as the focus of punishment shifted from the physical body to the mind, the photographing of criminals became, in Susan Sontag's words, a 'useful tool of modern states in the surveillance and control of their increasingly mobile populations', easily absorbed into the wider apparatus of 'rational – that is, bureaucratic – ways of running society'. Photographs were 'enrolled', she notes, 'in the service of important institutions of control', including the police, 'as symbolic objects and as pieces of information'.⁶ The Port Arthur photographs need to be understood and interpreted in this context. But before that can happen, there are some basic questions of attribution that need to be addressed. Where exactly were these photographs taken? Who took them, and why? How were they used? And who were these men?

* * *

⁴ R. J. Noye, 'Photohistory SA', 1998, <www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/noye/> (29 July 2009).

⁵ D. Beck, *Hope in Hell; A History of Darlinghurst Gaol and the National Art School*, Sydney, 2005, pp. 37, 45; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 January 1872.

⁶ S. Sontag, *On Photography*, New York, 1977, pp. 5, 22; M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, A. Sheridan (trans.), London, 1977. See also J. Schroeder's remark, that to gaze 'implies more than to look at – it implies a psychological relation of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze', J. Schroeder, 'Consuming Representation: a visual approach to customer research', in B. Stern (ed.), *Representing Consumers: voices, views and visions*, London, 1998, p. 208.

There are 182 known images that are inscribed 'Taken at Port Arthur 1874'.⁷ These occur in cdv, postcard (bearing the cdv image) and quarter plate print formats, and are dispersed in four major and two small collections.⁸ Unfortunately, the history of each collection is hidden. The images were acquired at different times and from different sources, and they continue to turn up in private hands. As we do not know if they were ever gathered together as a coherent single body of work, they should more properly be referred to as a 'series' rather than a 'collection'. The images represent at least 161 individuals. Sixteen have not been identified, and some have been only tentatively identified using cross-comparison between collections. There is more work to be done in identifying the individuals photographed, as far as that will be possible, and we cannot say with certainty exactly how many men are represented.

Twenty-seven other images have in the past been included in this series, not because they have any demonstrated association with the Port Arthur photographs, but apparently because they also present men who are known or assumed to have been prisoners. These exhibit such significant differences in their clothes, hair, beards and pose that they are unlikely to have been taken at Port Arthur, and indeed they do not bear the inscription 'Taken at Port Arthur 1874'. Most are inscribed with dates in the 1880s, and details of the crime for which the subject was imprisoned. Their names do not appear in the lists of men present at Port Arthur for 1873 or 1874 and, although their records catalogue a long criminal career that often included time at Port Arthur, they do not appear to have been there when the photographs were taken.

⁷ There are 67 others, uninscribed, that are copies of the inscribed images. These are postcards, made from original cdvs; quarter plate images, most of which are glued down and so incapable of dorsal inspection; and a set of cdvs held by the National Library.

⁸ The largest collection of 114 images, depicting 94 individuals, is held at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston (QVMAG). The National Library of Australia (NLA) holds 81 images, representing 69 individuals. The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG) in Hobart holds 53 images, representing 51 individuals. The Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority (PAHSMA) holds 15 images. The Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT) holds eight images. Three images are held in a small private collection.

The format of the oval-framed cdvs is remarkably uniform. Each shows a clean-shaven, neatly dressed man sitting and facing either slightly right or left, arms apparently at his sides. Convict uniforms were issued in three different colours, indicating the labour class to which the man belonged (black and yellow for men under heavy labour, yellow for the majority in the middling ranks, and grey for servants and others undertaking the lightest class of labour). The style of the uniform in every one of the photographs consists of a jacket with a short collar, a vest (simply the jacket without sleeves), a collarless shirt and neckerchief that was tied in a knot at the throat. Judging by the shades and degree of contrast in the black and white cdvs, the men are probably wearing the grey uniform. In the arrangement of the jacket some individuality is allowed – sometimes buttoned-up, concealing the vest, sometimes with one or more buttons undone, but never entirely un-buttoned. A few men wear a heavy, dark double-breasted pea jacket, also usually neatly buttoned-up, and a vest (sometimes concealed but assumed to be present since it is invariably revealed when the jacket is not completely buttoned-up), shirt and neckerchief.

The quarter plate images are presumably printed straight off the original glass plates. Photographers often used quarter plate negatives for cdvs.⁹ Most of these quarter plate images occur in a set of three framed groups of images attributed to Hobart photographer, John Watt Beattie, a well-known collector of convict-related material. Beattie produced postcards from many images taken by himself and others, and enjoyed a roaring trade. Many of these were originally on glass plates, but were all destroyed in a catastrophic fire at his studio in 1933. These first generation prints are fewer in number than those in cdv format; when they duplicate a cdv, they usually show the man facing in the opposite direction. They reveal that the original composition was a half-length portrait, the man seated and photographed from the waist up. The subject's name sometimes appears written up one margin in negative. Very

⁹ A. Davies, Curator of Photography, Mitchell Library, Sydney, pers. comm., 6 April 2004.

occasionally, there is also a number corresponding to the number shown on either the front or back of the cdv.

These complete images reveal something of the atmosphere in which they were composed. Henry Baden Pritchard of the Photographic Society in Britain, who visited Pentonville Penitentiary in 1882 to research the techniques of prison photography, observed that 'a more docile body of sitters than our convicts do not exist ... they sit quieter and steadier, and are more ready to fall in with the exigencies of photography than their brethren in freedom'.¹⁰ The Port Arthur cdvs, however, do not indicate such complete passivity and servile obedience. In the quarter plate print it is possible to see a degree of variation in the original pose assumed by the sitter. Sometimes the arms are almost jauntily placed at the hips, some hang loosely, in others the hands are placed submissively in the lap.¹¹ As noted, jackets are buttoned to varying degrees. This sign of agency is only hinted at in the heavily cropped cdvs, when buttoning arrangements are visible. The degree of individual expression permitted by the photographer hints at a more relaxed relationship between the photographer and his subjects, born perhaps of a longer familiarity than a visiting photographer would achieve in one sitting.

Most of the inscribed images bear an identifying number on the front and the back. These two numbers are different and are written in different hands. Most of the NLA holdings only have a number on the back, but two have the same number front and back, and two have both numbers on both sides. They appear to be part of two different systems of record keeping, either referencing different

¹⁰ J. Richardson, 'Picturing the landscape', *Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media & Culture*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1991, (np) <www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/6.2/Richo1.html> (29 November 2009).

¹¹ Such latitude in choosing one's pose was also characteristic of early English prison photographs. A prison registration card held for Ann Graham, convicted in Newcastle in September 1873, shows the young woman in a pose that is coquettish and confident, even slightly seductive, rather than cowed by her situation or the photographer's gaze. This image is far removed from the later Bertillon formula of prison photography, in which the subject is rigidly posed in proscribed ways to exhibit 'diagnostic' features like profile, hands and ears. Prison Registration Card for Ann Graham, 13 September 1873, #10416236, Science and Society Picture Library <www.scienceandsociety.co.uk> (17 October 2009).

things, or referencing the same thing using a different system. There are several hands evident in the inscriptions on the back across the series, but usually the basic information (name, ship, any known alias, 'Taken at Port Arthur 1874' and the number) appear in the one hand on each card. Some have the subject's date of arrival in Van Diemen's Land entered in another hand. There is a high degree of consistency in these inscriptions; one person seems to have written most of them, and the inscription is laid out in exactly the same way even when written by another, indicating the high probability of a central processing office.¹²

Importantly, these numbers are not the prisoner's number as it appears on his convict record, but seem instead to be related to the process of transferring the man from Port Arthur to Hobart Gaol in the mid-1870s. The Archives Office of Tasmania holds an 'Alphabetical register of prisoners admitted' to Hobart Gaol and House of Correction, on the front of which is an annotation: 'Numbers in red ink refer to Prisoner's photo number'. These numbers are placed in the column headed 'Date when received', and are the same numbers as on the front of each cdv. This number was clearly used to identify each man with a photograph and a new paper-based record upon admission to the Gaol.¹³ On a few pages of another register titled 'Record of general employment of individual prisoners', there is a space where 'No. of photo' could be entered, but this has not been done.¹⁴

Some of the quarter-plate prints bear a number written on the back along one margin. This is the same number that appears handwritten on the back of the cdv for that individual. If we assume that these represent a first generation print taken straight off the glass plate, they are closer to the source than the later portraits framed by an oval mount. We can therefore hypothesise that this is the original

¹² Chris Long, pers. comm., 12 March 2006.

¹³ Alphabetical Register of Prisoners Admitted to Hobart Gaol and House of Correction, AOT: GD35/6.

¹⁴ Record of General Employment of Individual Prisoners, AOT: GD76/1/2. Another column titled 'No. of warrant' has numbers entered, but these are not the same as those on either the front or the back of the cdvs, presumably referencing some other convict record.

number given by the photographer. These numbers bear no relation to the man's convict record number. Prisoners were sent up to Hobart in small groups, usually of ten to twenty, but it does not seem that they were photographed in these groups. The numbers on the back of each cdv do not run sequentially when they are compared with the lists of names in each group.

* * *

So who took these photographs? Two men have been credited – Adolarius Humphrey Boyd, the Commandant at Port Arthur (June 1871 - April 1874), or Thomas J. Nevin, a Hobart-based photographer in the late-1860s and early-1870s. There is a considerable range of attributions on the databases of the holding institutions. The Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (QVMAG) in Launceston attributes the work as: 'Photographer unknown but possibly taken by AH Boyd or TJ Nevin'. The Archives Office of Tasmania obtained their images from QVMAG but seem to have followed only the Thomas Nevin attribution, as did the National Library of Australia (NLA). The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery attributes their images to A. H. Boyd. The Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority makes no attribution on its own holdings, but the copies obtained from QVMAG are attributed to Boyd. None of the institutions involved can shed light on this confusion. Today, descendants of Thomas Nevin make public and very strident claims that their ancestor was responsible for this famous work.¹⁵ Anecdotal evidence suggests that Boyd's descendants remember him as an avid photographer, and they confidently recognise these images as his.¹⁶

John McPhee, who curated a 1977 exhibition at QVMAG, followed that institution's attribution and credited the images to Nevin. Similarly, most researchers and writers have simply repeated the attribution supplied to them by whatever institution they used. Thus, some credit Boyd, some Nevin, and some have a bet each way.

¹⁵ 'Thomas J. Nevin, Tasmanian Photographer', <www.tasmanianphotographer.blogspot.com> (6 September 2009)

¹⁶ Kim Simpson, pers. comm., 2 November 2005. This perspective was gleaned during an open day at Port Arthur in the early 1990s, from a woman who identified herself as Boyd's granddaughter.

Ann Marie Willis in *Picturing Australia* (1988) discusses two convict cdvs and attributes them to 'AH Boyd/TJ Nevin', indicating that in her view the authorship remains unproven and unclear.¹⁷ *The Dictionary of Australian Artists* (1992) notes that some of the cartes de visite 'have been attributed to Nevin because they carry his studio stamp', and that he 'possibly held the government contract for this sort of criminal recording'.¹⁸ Actually, only three of the cdvs bear Nevin's stamp.¹⁹ Some further confusion has arisen because the NLA holds an album of Port Arthur cdvs known as the 'Nevin Album'. The title implies the album was compiled by Nevin, or was at least composed of work known to be his. In fact, the NLA compiled it in preparation for an exhibition on colonial photography in 2003, 'In a New Light; Australian Photography 1850s-1930s', curated by Helen Ennis. However, when the album was taken apart it was discovered that not one of the images bore the Nevin stamp.²⁰

Others, notably Chris Long, one of Australia's pre-eminent historians of photography, have attempted to clarify matters. In the absence of hard evidence to the contrary, Long favours Boyd as the likely photographer, given that the Commandant was 'a very keen amateur photographer and is known to have had a room fitted up in his garden as a studio and darkroom'. Moreover, a 'number of photographic glasses despatched to Port Arthur, in July [actually August] 1873 represents a scale of photographic activity rather greater than that which an amateur, taking photographs purely for pleasure, would require'. The nature of the wet-plate process, and the scale of the photography, required a permanent, onsite darkroom, and it seems 'highly unlikely that there would have been a darkroom there apart from the Commandant's own'.²¹ While Long acknowledges that Nevin may have taken some of the convict photographs, he cautions that 'commercial photographers sometimes

17 A. M. Willis, *Picturing Australia; A history of Photography*, Sydney, 1988, p. 98.

18 J. Kerr and G. Stilwell, 'Thomas Nevin', in J. Kerr (ed.), *The Dictionary of Australian Artists: Painters, Sketchers, Photographers and Engravers to 1870*, Melbourne, 1992, p. 568.

19 Two are in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, being photographs of William Smith and James Mullins. QVMAG holds another copy of William Smith (see below).

20 Sylvia Carr, NLA, pers. comm., 14 September 2007.

21 C. Long, *Tasmanian Photographers 1840-1940, a Directory*, Hobart, 1995, pp. 35-6.

printed and mounted photographs from amateurs' negatives. So such examples may also be by Boyd'.²²

In examining these images for his Master's thesis, Warwick Reeder noted that the only clues to the photographer's identity were one cdv at QVMAG bearing Nevin's stamp, three held at TMAG bearing the stamp of the Anson studios, and one stamped 'JR Milner'. While Nevin worked as a photographer in Hobart between 1867-75 and again in 1880-84, and the Anson Brothers were well known between 1878-95, nothing is known about Milner. Reeder concludes that 'the evidence strongly suggests' Boyd was the photographer.²³ To account for the range of studio stamps, Reeder postulates that commercial photographers, such as Nevin, Anson Brothers or J. W. Beattie, may have acquired the plates after Port Arthur closed in 1877. Since the Nevin-stamped cards are probably later police photographs they will be returned to later. Anson Brothers worked in Hobart until 1895 and Beattie only began business in his own name in 1891 (by taking over Anson Brothers). Beattie's postcard and stamped images must have been produced over a number of years, perhaps starting in the early-1890s. This coincides with the burgeoning of the tourist trade at Port Arthur.²⁴ Reeder, however, feels that the plain cdvs (that is, those not rendered as postcards) do not exist in sufficient numbers for them to have been part of the tourist trade. Rather, 'the surviving copies may have come directly from Boyd's tenure at Port Arthur, Boyd making copies to circulate to police authorities as directed by the Colonial Secretary in 1874'.²⁵ This hypothetical usage is discussed below.

²² Chris Long, pers. comm., 12 March 2006.

²³ W. Reeder, 'The Democratic Image: the carte-de-visite photograph in Australia 1859-1874', MA thesis, Australian National University, 1995, pp. 71-2. The two held at the Mitchell Library were then unknown to Reeder, as were the collections at the Archives Office of Tasmania and the Port Arthur Historic Site, which also include Beattie postcards. Boyd quit his post on 31 March 1874. *Mercury*, 25 February 1874.

²⁴ D. Young, *Making Crime Pay: The Evolution of Convict Tourism in Tasmania*, Hobart, 1996, pp. 59-83.

²⁵ Reeder, *op. cit.*, p. 73.



Figure 1: James Calhoun, native born, 'Taken at Port Arthur 1874'. National Library of Australia, P1029/4, AN 24612393.



Figure 2: James Harper, per Sir Robert Peel, 'Taken at Port Arthur 1874'. National Library of Australia, P1029/23, AN 24612822.



Figure 3: George Ormiston. Possibly native born, probably taken at Hobart Gaol c1800. National Library of Australia, P1029/65, AN 24612704.

Although some archival catalogues credit Nevin as the photographer, presumably based on the three cdvs bearing Nevin's stamp, the weight of evidence attributes authorship to Boyd. Though the inscriptions on the back of the cdvs state they were 'Taken at Port Arthur 1874', the photography of Port Arthur convicts was in the planning, if not actually underway, well before then. A photographic studio was operating at Port Arthur from as early as November 1872, when a list of work and repairs to buildings at the settlement included an entry: 'repaired lock, photographic house'.²⁶ This, and further 'fittings at Photograph House' in July 1874, were both ordered by Commandant Boyd, rather than as was usual by the Overseer of Works, possibly indicating the Commandant's proprietorial or personal interest. Given the nature of early photography, which required the wet-plate to be developed immediately after exposure, it must have contained both a studio space and some kind of darkroom facility. The precise location of the building was not stated, though a Boyd descendant, Edith Mary Hall, recalled seeing 'a room fitted up in the garden' of the Commandant's house to cater to Boyd's 'mania for Amateur Photography'.²⁷ Further evidence is contained in a December 1877 report to the Colonial Secretary, listing damage done during a visit by 'daytrippers'. This includes 'Photographic House; small window at back forced in'.²⁸ The damaged buildings are listed in order, from east to west along the hill on the south side of Mason Cove, placing the photographic house among the other administrative buildings between the Commandant's House and the Hospital, somewhere near the Reading Room in the Law Courts, and the Commandant's garden fits this hypothesis.

Indents of the cargo carried from government stores in Hobart via the government schooner *Harriet* show the arrival of a series of items associated with photography. On 28 January 1873, for example, the Port Arthur storekeeper received two bottles of 'acids', and on 11

²⁶ Works and Repairs, 6 November 1872, Tasmanian Papers, Vol. 16, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

²⁷ E. M. Hall, 'The Young Explorer', typed script of a story read at a literary society meeting c1930, CRO.PQ820.A HAL, State Library of Tasmania.

²⁸ Caretaker to Colonial Secretary, 30 December 1877, AOT: CSD10/58/1360.

February, 'chemicals for photographing convicts'. In the ensuing months the settlement also received two thermometers, '288 photographic glasses' and 'one bottle of crystal varnish' (used to coat collodion plates), one case of 'photographic material', one ounce of 'pyrolignite acid' and one pound of 'acetate of soda'.²⁹ These two substances, more correctly named pyroligneous acid and acetate of soda, were used to develop and fix cadmium collodion images.³⁰ By August 1873, at the latest, Boyd was capable of undertaking a large-scale photographic project. Significantly, all these items were government, not personal, requisitions, so if Boyd was photographing convicts, it was presumably in an official capacity, although curiously no mention of this project was made in Boyd's official correspondence. But clearly, those in authority knew about the project. On 9 January 1874, Colonial Secretary B. Travers Solly wrote to Boyd asking for:

half a dozen copies of the photographs of the two 'Greigsons' [sic] who absconded yesterday from the gang employed in the Domain. It will be a good plan to send up photographs of all prisoners transferred to Hobart Town and I would esteem it a favour if you will do so at your early convenience.³¹

So presumably, by January 1874 Boyd had already taken at least some photographs of convicts and had sufficient skill and facilities to make multiple copies of them. Indeed, he may have taken quite a number of photographs, since Travers Solly asked for more than just those of the two escapees. In March 1874 Boyd advised Solly that he was forwarding photographs of 'Alfred Harrington and James Kilpatrick, suspected of an intention to abscond'.³² We have several

²⁹ Receipt of goods conveyed from Hobart to Port Arthur per Schooner *Harriet*, 1873-74, 18 January 1823, 11 February 1833, 12 April 1873, 12 August 1873 and 28 August 1873, AOT: CSD7/46/890; Colonial Secretary's Office, Index to General Correspondence, 1 January 1869 - 21 December 1874, AOT: CSD7/1/60 file 1470.

³⁰ J. Towler, *The Silver Sunbeam*, New York, 1864, p. 133

³¹ This refers to two young native-born men, John (aged 21 in June 1873) and Francis (aged 17) Gregson. On 21 October 1871 they had been sentenced in Launceston to five and six years respectively for housebreaking and robbery. Solly to Boyd, 9 January 1874, AOT: CSD7/1/60 file 1470.

³² Boyd to Solly, 17 March 1874, AOT: CSD7/1/60 file 1470.

extant copies of the photographs of the Gregson boys, but sadly none of Kilpatrick and Harrington.

There are some additional arguments weighing in Boyd's favour. We know that he was at Port Arthur throughout this period, but cannot show that Nevin had visited Port Arthur before May 1874, at which time the production of the images was well underway, if not complete. Nevin's name does not appear on the 1873 lists of visitors and functionaries arriving at the settlement on the government schooner, the *Harriet*, or on the extant ledger recording hopeful visitors' applications in 1873-74.³³ On 8 May 1874 a name that may be 'Nevin' or 'Niven' appears on the *Harriet*'s passenger list.³⁴ He does not appear to have left Port Arthur before records of these lists cease, on 30 December 1874. By that time, however, many of the men who sat for their photographs had left Port Arthur. Indeed, although the records are incomplete, we can ascertain that by May 1874 just under half of the men featured on the cdvs at Port Arthur were no longer at that station.

We know that Boyd was a keen amateur photographer. Shortly before his departure on 10 March 1874 he personally sent 'a bottle of negative varnish' (used to preserve negatives) to a Mr Hinsby (presumably Henry Hinsby, a Hobart Chemist). Boyd's household effects, shipped from Port Arthur in April 1874, included 'a photographic stand' and 'a photographic tent', so we know he had his own equipment.³⁵ Few surviving images from his apparently prolific output have so far been positively identified. The TMAG holds a photograph of the Isle of the Dead attributed to Boyd and the Mitchell Library holds a photograph, inscribed 'Port Arthur under occupation/enlargement from a stereoscopic view by AH Boyd Esq'.³⁶ Two similar images also exist; one shows a scene slightly to the left of the Mitchell's image and taken from a very

³³ Permissions to visit Tasman's Peninsula and Port Arthur, AOT: CSD7/22/1198.

³⁴ Wharfinger's Account Book, waybills for MH Schooner *Harriet*, 8 May 1874, Tasmanian Papers 320 CY4529, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 2 April 1874.

³⁶ 'Settlement of Port Arthur (penal settlement) Past and Present', PXD 511/f10, Mitchell Library, Sydney; TMAG, Q1647 and Q12929 (two copies of the same image).

similar vantage point;³⁷ the other shows the same scene but from a slightly lower vantage point.³⁸ These were apparently taken on the same day and at the same time. Smoke billows from the same chimneys and three figures appear on the Hospital veranda in each image. These may plausibly be attributed to Commandant Boyd, and attest to his competency as a photographer.³⁹

* * *

The Port Arthur cdvs do not conform to the forensic style already adopted in other colonial prison systems. In Victoria in the 1880s a photograph of the face, full frontal, and the profile, was attached to a convict's record.⁴⁰ Nor do they satisfy the requirements of phrenologists, who claimed to be able to determine character, personality traits, and criminality on the basis of the shape of the head. Initially the subject of scientific interest in the 1830s, by the 1860s and 1870s phrenology had become a wildly popular pursuit, although it had by then lost favour with scientists.⁴¹ Nevertheless, it is not impossible that some colonial officials thought that the photographs might contribute to an understanding of criminality. Some do seem to conform to the early format for phrenological analysis, which preferred the three-quarter view so that the ear, considered diagnostically important, could be clearly in view. The photographs are, however, taken from too far away to allow any close reading of cranial features. In many of these images, the subject is turned so that the ear is not visible or is only partly visible, clearly preventing a phrenological reading.

³⁷ 'Port Arthur during occupation, AD1860, Beattie Hobart', AOT: NS 1013/1830.

³⁸ TMAG Q1647 and Q12929; also held by the Archives Office of Tasmania, AOT: NS 30/4153/1.

³⁹ Interestingly, the two latter images are captioned 'Port Arthur during occupation, AD1860, Beattie, Hobart'. The photographer, J. W. Beattie, bought glass plates produced by others and made many prints from them, so a number of images currently attributed to Beattie may also be Boyd's. This is the subject of on-going inquiry.

⁴⁰ Public Records Office of Victoria, 'Forgotten Faces: Chinese and the Law', <www.prov.vic.gov.au/forgottenfaces> (29 November 2009).

⁴¹ J. van Whye, 'The History of Phrenology', adapted for The Victorian Web from his article 'Phrenology and the Origins of Victorian Scientific Naturalism', *British Journal for the History of Science*, Vol. 39, Pt. 3, No. 42, <www.victorianweb.org/science/phrenology/phrenologyov> (9 December 2008)

The Port Arthur photographs owe more to the earlier tradition of the sentimental Victorian painted portrait than to any kind of forensic scrutiny. The artist and early daguerreotypist, Thomas Bock, minutely described the ideal photographic portrait pose.⁴²

The sitter ought not in any case to be lighted by the direct rays of the sun. When the sky is pure, the model must be shaded under a curtain . . . stretched above the head and from the side whence the sun shines . . . If the portrait is only the Bust, the sitter will be placed upon a chair with the Face turned a little to one side, so that the drawing (daguerreotype) may be in the position which painters designate by the term 'three-quarters'.

Whoever took these images followed those instructions closely. Each man is bathed in a soft, even light with no shadows. The pose is exactly as described, marking this body of work as clearly different in style and thus in intent from forensic photography.

The backs of every cdv held in public ownership have been examined to confirm the oft-repeated claim that large numbers of them bear Nevin's studio stamp. In fact it can be found on only three cdvs, one of James Mullins and two copies of William Smith. Neither man was at Port Arthur in 1873-4.⁴³ Unlike every other man reliably located in the series, William Smith is bearded and long-haired, and is not wearing prison uniform; he apparently wears his own clothes, a dark jacket and white shirt, with a dark and light checked short fringed scarf tied as a cravat. James Mullins is in convict uniform but is also wearing a cap, unlike any other image in the Port Arthur series. The format of the inscriptions is also different from the rest of the series. The inscription on both is recorded in portrait format, 'William Smith/Gilmore (3)' and 'James Mullins/Neptune (2)'. Running up the side at right angles to the inscription on the QVMAG image of Smith, and in a different hand, is his arrival date, '20/8/43'.

⁴² C. Long, 'Thomas Bock the Photographer', in D. Dunbar (ed.), *Thomas Bock, Convict Engraver, Society Portraitist*, Launceston, 1991, p. 67.

⁴³ Smith was at Hobart Gaol until September 1873, and free until 1874 when he was returned to gaol to serve twelve months for theft. AOT: CON33/1/39, p. 204. Mullins' record cannot be located, but his name does not appear on any lists of men present at the settlement in 1873-74.

The Mitchell Library image only has Smith's name and ship. Neither bears the familiar 'Taken at Port Arthur in 1874'. Both images are taken close-up and almost full frontal, in contrast to the more distant and turned pose of those clearly associated with Port Arthur. The peculiarities of these images are, however, accounted for if they were taken at Hobart Gaol in the 1880s, as discussed below.

Since the status of the men on the cdvs has not previously been interrogated, it might have been assumed that they represented all those remaining at Port Arthur pending closure. But in fact, when the list of individuals in this series is compared with the returns listing all men on the settlement in 1873-74, we find that the vast majority are classified as 'Men under sentence' or 'Effectives'. Only nine men are listed as 'Invalids', one is a pauper and none are identified as lunatics.⁴⁴ Of these invalids, all but three were admitted to the Hobart Gaol, where most were to serve out the rest of their sentences.⁴⁵ The destination of the others has not been discovered. Given that the 'Effectives' dominate this series, we must assume that the photographs have something to do with their status. All of the men who were photographed appear on the lists of those transferred to the Hobart Gaol between 1873 and 1877, sent to satisfy the demand for 'able bodied men to keep up the strength of the gangs' on public works and the skilled men needed for the Hobart Gaol workshop.⁴⁶ Both the Gaol workshops, and the variety of public works sites outside the Gaol, were insecure.⁴⁷ It is clear from the correspondence surrounding the relocation of the Port Arthur men that they were the cause of a great deal of anxiety on the part of those charged with their management. Many entries refer to the

⁴⁴ Annual Return of Prisoners, AOT: HAJ 27/1874/79.

⁴⁵ Registers of Prisoners received into and discharged from Gaol, AOT SC 243/2; Daybook of Admissions and Discharges with statistical returns of the daily state of the prison, AOT: GD 36/1; Record of the General Employment of Individual Prisoners, AOT: GD 76/1/3.

⁴⁶ Superintendent of Hobart Gaol to Colonial Secretary's Office, 2 December 1871, AOT: CSD 8/1, Vol. 27, p. 50; Superintendent of Hobart Gaol to Colonial Secretary's Office, 7 July 1873, 21 July 1873, 21 July 1873, 30 July 1873, AOT: CSD 7.

⁴⁷ Minutes of hearings by justices of the peace against prisoners for offences committed in the gaol, 26 January 1874, 19 July 1876, 30 August 1877, 29 March 1878, 28 February 1879, AOT: GO 108/1.

need for more secure accommodation for these 'criminals of the worst description' and 'desperate men', more than half of whom 'were unfit for any but separate treatment'. There were also requests for more constables and a higher level of supervision, and a plea that warders be armed.

James Smith, Under Gaoler at Hobart Gaol, claimed that the 'men sent up here from Port Arthur abscond so as to be sent down again; for they would rather do two years down there than one year up here'.⁴⁸ In light of such anxiety, these images were probably made for the benefit of future gaolers, to supplement the written physical descriptions on the prisoners' records, in order to counter absconding. As discussed above, concerns about absconding were not ill-founded. The mad, the weak and the sick were also sent to Hobart, to the invalid depot at the Cascades and to the New Norfolk Lunatic Asylum. Institutional security at these places and the poor physical condition of the inmates may have rendered them less likely to abscond, less of a threat if they did manage to abscond. If the hypothesis advanced above holds, that would explain why only three or four of this group were photographed.

A small group of portraits, including those of Smith and Mullins, has regularly been attributed to the Port Arthur series. On closer inspection, however, they are very different. Some bear inscriptions related to their crimes and sentences that place them firmly outside the Port Arthur period. Others are so different in style and content that they cannot be seen as part of the large and internally consistent series of Port Arthur convict cdvs. In these photographs, the subject was often photographed in a full frontal pose, showing only the face, or sometimes the face and the top line of the shoulders. Port Arthur men were, according to regulations, dressed uniformly, not allowed personal possessions and are invariably shown as neatly groomed with no facial hair. Many of these anomalous men wear non-standard clothing; some are in rags, others in civilian clothes. Some sport long hair, beards and moustaches; one even has a pipe. Such poses and content are, however, characteristic of later police photographs. Six are attached to police records of the 1880s,

⁴⁸ Report to the House of Assembly 1874-5, Vols. 27-29, pp. 4-8, AOT: T9.

supporting the hypothesis that they are in fact later police photographs, probably taken at Hobart Gaol.

According to the *Hobart Gaol General Rules* (undated but c.1880), 'All prisoners upon being received will be dressed in prison clothing'.⁴⁹ The Port Arthur men presumably only had prison clothing to wear anyway, but this may mean that any photograph of a man not dressed in prison clothing was not taken on admission. Additionally, prisoners were to have their hair close-cropped until the final three months of their sentence, and those serving a sentence of less than three months were exempted.⁵⁰ So any photograph showing a man with luxuriant facial or head hair is likely to show a man either within three months of discharge from Hobart Gaol, or serving only a short sentence at that institution, rather than a man at Port Arthur. Thomas Nevin did, incidentally, have a connection to the Hobart Gaol. His younger brother Jack Nevin worked there and may well have arranged to have his brother employed to take photographs of men on admission and/or discharge.

* * *

While we may never know who took these images, Boyd seems the most likely candidate. He was an enthusiastic but competent amateur, with a studio and fully-equipped darkroom to hand. He was active as a photographer at just the right period, when in Britain and in New South Wales photography was being introduced to manage convicted men in prison. He had privileged access to his subjects, and the support of the Colonial Secretary and the government, which supplied him with large quantities of photographic materials. And there is no evidence for the presence of any other photographer on site at this time. There is no compelling body of evidence in support of a rival claim.

⁴⁹ *Hobart Gaol General Rules*, Rule 61, p. 6 (no date or accession no.).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Rules 65, 66, and 67, p. 6.