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Name: Tasman Light Station
Status: Permanently Registered
Tier: State
 State

THR ID Number: 5623
Municipality: Tasman Council
Boundary: CPR10729

Location Addresses

, TASMAN ISLAND 7001 TAS
 Tasman Island, Tasman 7182 TAS

Title References

43737/1
 50514/1

Property Id

7713986
 7713978



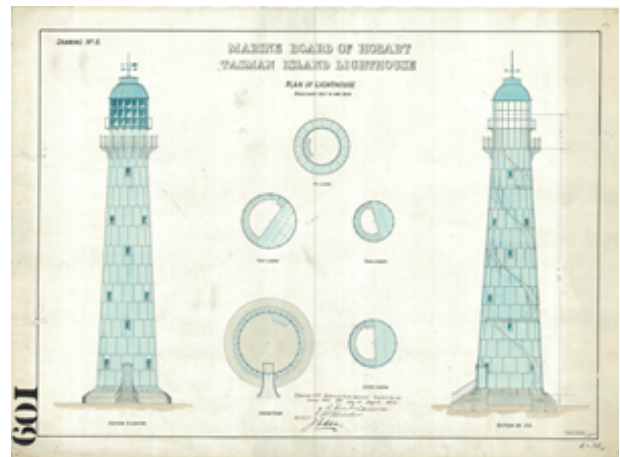
Tasman Light Station, 1910
 TAHO



Light Station from the air, 2017
 Tasmania Parks & Wildlife Service



Landing site, 1974
 Private collection



Plans for Light Station, 1904
 National Archives of Australia

Statement of Significance: (non-statutory summary)

The Tasman Island Light Station is of historic cultural significance for its association with the development of navigational aids along the east coast of Tasmania and the economic development of the region . It demonstrates the remote and self-contained nature of many light stations and the difficulties and isolation experienced by light house keepers and their families in maintaining these essential navigational aids.

The Tasman Island Lighthouse is significant as one of the last lighthouses to be constructed before the Commonwealth assumed responsibility for coastal lights in 1915 and is the highest operating lighthouse and most isolated light station in Australia. Its location in a dramatic and remote landscape, and lack of subsequent development, creates a strong aesthetic appeal. Its exposed location illustrates the hardships that would have been experienced by former lighthouse keepers.

The Tasman Island Station is a relatively intact early twentieth century complex of lighthouse , staff accommodation, service buildings and haulage system. Its high degree of integrity contributes to its significance. It was the last manned light station to be constructed in Tasmania.

Why is it significant?:

The Heritage Council may enter a place in the Heritage Register if it meets one or more of the following criteria from the Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995:

a) The place is important to the course or pattern of Tasmania's history.

Tasman Light Station is significant for its association with the development of navigational aids along the east coast of Tasmania and the economic development of the region . It is the last manned light station built in Tasmania and heralds the transition towards automated light stations. The Tasman Island Lighthouse is significant as one of the last lighthouses to be constructed before the Commonwealth assumed responsibility for coastal lights in 1915.

b) The place possesses uncommon or rare aspects of Tasmania's history.

Tasman Light House is the only example of this type of prefabricated cast iron light station tower construction in Tasmania.

c) The place has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Tasmania's history.

Tasman Light Station including the remains of the haulage way , flying fox and timber buildings and the surrounds of extant buildings, including the lighthouse have the ability to yield information which will contribute to our understanding of life and work on a remote light house station in the twentieth century.

d) The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of place in Tasmania's history.

Tasman Light Station is of historic heritage significance because it represents the principal characteristics of an early twentieth century Federation-era cast iron lighthouse and associated keepers quarters from the same era. The Light station, as one of the most isolated light stations in Australia , demonstrates the remote and self-contained nature of such infrastructure and the difficulties and isolation experienced by light keepers and their families .

e) The place is important in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement.

No Data Recorded

f) The place has a strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social or spiritual reasons.

The lighthouse is a prominent landmark for mariners marking the final turning point for the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race.

g) The place has a special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Tasmania's history.

No Data Recorded

h) The place is important in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

The Light Station, with its cast iron tower, brick residences, remains of the flying fox and haulage system, has an unusually high level of intactness. This intactness, combined with the dramatic nature of the island's topography and lack of subsequent development creates a strong aesthetic appeal.

Heritage approval is required for work that will result in changes to the nature or appearance of the fabric of a Heritage place, both internal and external.

Please refer to the Heritage Council's Works Guidelines (www.heritage.tas.gov.au) for information about the level of approval required and appropriate outcomes.

Heritage Advisors are also available to answer questions and provide guidance on enquiries@heritage.tas.gov.au or Tel 1300850332

This data sheet is intended to provide sufficient information and justification for listing the place on the Heritage Register. Under the legislation, only one of the criteria needs to be met. The data sheet is not intended to be a comprehensive inventory of the heritage values of the place, there may be other heritage values of interest to the Heritage Council not currently acknowledged.

Setting:

Tasman Island is located 500m south of the Tasman Peninsula, close to Cape Pillar, in south eastern Tasmania. It lies approximately 48 kilometres south-east of Hobart and 17km south-east of Port Arthur.

The island is approximately 1.6 km long, 1 km wide and about 120 hectares in area and is roughly oval in shape with a rugged shoreline of steep coastal dolerite cliffs and boulder-strewn slopes. The cliffs rise to a gently level plateau at about 270m altitude. The Tasman Island cliffs are unique in world geography, as the land mass below water level has the same drop as the height above. The island is part of the Tasman National Park.

Description:

The Tasman Island Light Station consists of the cast iron tower, three keepers' quarters, a fuel store, remnants of the haulage way, winch house, timber landing, flying fox, and several other minor building remnants. All the standing structures on the island date from 1905.

The lighthouse is 29 metres high and sits prominently on the highest point of the island 276 metres above sea level making it the highest operating lighthouse in Australia. It is a pre-fabricated construction of curved cast-iron plates, bolted together and positioned on a concrete base seven metres in diameter.

In 1976 the upper portion of the lantern room, including lens, pedestal and clockwork rotation mechanism, was removed. A new lantern was installed on top of the old lantern base and the light was converted to wind-electric operation. In 1991 it was converted to solar-electric. Quarters No.1, the Superintendent's Quarters, has seven rooms and is the most northerly of the standing houses, and is also known as 'The Bottom House'. Quarters No.2 is one of two identical Assistant Keepers' Quarters, also known as 'The Middle House'. Quarters No.3 is the second of the Assistant Keepers' Quarters, the southernmost house, also known as 'The Top House'. Both these cottages have six rooms. The Oil Store is a small brick storage building, the southernmost standing structure on the island.

The houses and the Oil Store are solidly constructed with red brick cavity walls. The hardwood-framed roofs were originally clad with corrugated iron, but this was later replaced with corrugated asbestos cement sheeting. Distinctive arched window and door openings, glazed verandahs and decorative gable, central to the main façade, still define the external appearance of the houses, although sections of the verandahs have fallen into disrepair and some of the brickwork arches have been replaced with concrete lintels.

Internally, all three houses have hardwood floors and plastered walls with wide, decorative Victorian architraves and skirtings. Originally the houses had arched mantelpieces, four-panel doors and Baltic Pine ceilings. The latter remain in place, covered with false ceilings of hardwood, but the doors have been replaced, probably in the early 1960s, with plywood-faced flush doors.

The Oil Store is approximately 40 square metres in area and rectangular in plan, with a simple hipped corrugated iron roof and concrete floors. It echoes the style of the houses, with red brick walls and arched door and window heads.

All four buildings underwent 'modernisation' c.1960 including the laying of linoleum throughout the living quarters.

There are remnants of a flying fox from Anchor Rock to the timber landing, and of the cable haulage system that runs from the landing up to top of the island. These are located on the north-east corner of the Island and are included in this listing. Several of the original building timber buildings collapsed after Tasman Island was 'demaned' in 1977, notably the Relief Keeper's Quarters which was the first building erected on Tasman Island in 1904 and used as the Clerk of Works Office. Any other original timber buildings had long since been replaced by later structures such as

the Winch House (c.1929), Stables and Generator Shed (c.1955), all of which are now collapsed.

Items that are not of historic heritage significance include the array of solar panels mounted on the ground near the tower base and the concrete slab that serves as a helipad located approximately 100 metres west of the lighthouse.

History:

A meeting of the Consolidated Marine Board in August 1885 discussed the possibility of a lighthouse in the vicinity of Cape Pillar. Representations had been made to the Government as to the necessity for a lighthouse on Cape Pillar by the masters of the Union Steam Co.'s vessels. After discounting the Cape itself and nearby Hippolyte Rocks, a site inspection was made to Tasman Island but the cost of construction was considered to be prohibitive. It was also noted that the expense of maintaining a lighthouse on Tasman Island would be about double that of other locations which would be borne by the Consolidated Marine Board (*Mercury* 4 July 1885:3). The difficulty of establishing telegraphic communication to Tasman Island was also seen as an impediment.

'The necessity of such a light either on Cape Pillar or Tasman's Island has been felt absolutely essential for many years by seafaring people, and those commercially engaged in the mercantile marine; but it was not until the Russian war scare of last year that any practical proposals emanated from the Government in respect to its erection' (*Tasmanian News*, 22 September 1886:2).

In November 1886 the Consolidated Marine Board put out a tender for 'clearing a line of trees, and erecting a cairn, 20ft high, on the top of Tasman's Island' (*Mercury*, 25 November, 1886:1). By 1886 the Consolidated Marine Board of Tasmania were suggesting that plans and specifications should be prepared for the Tasman Island Light.

However by April 1887 the Marine Board passed a motion, 'That the resolution for the erection of a light on Tasman's Island be rescinded'. Their justification was that as the site for the lighthouse was so high it would frequently be obscured by clouds and several of the Union steam Navigation Company's captains gave their opinion that the light was not necessary and the need on the south-west coast was considered greater (*Daily Telegraph*, 29 April 1887:3). The Tasman Island lighthouse was deferred in favour of building Maatsuyker lighthouse which was constructed in 1891.

However, by 1897 there was again agitation for a lighthouse on Tasman Island as the number of steamers trading from Hobart to New Zealand and mainland cities grew. By the early 1900s the Derwent River had become a busy thoroughfare with ships reporting several close encounters with land and delays because the fog around the Cape Pillar area often made navigation too dangerous.

The Hobart Marine Board was asked in 1902 by the State Government for the particulars of the building and light that would be required for Tasman Island, 'The Treasurer wrote referring to the light on Tasman Island, and he pointed out that, as it was probable the Federal Government would take over all lighthouses, it would be better to leave the proposal of erecting a light on Tasman Island to be dealt with by that Government. He also asked to be furnished with particulars, to be forwarded to the Federal Government. The matter was referred to the lighthouse board' [Southern Marine Board] (*Examiner*, 25 June 1902:6).

The Consolidated Marine Board recommended to the Tasmanian Government, in 1903, the urgent necessity for a light at Cape Pillar. The Premier agreed that the state government would pay the interest on the cost of construction of the light until the lighthouses were taken over by the Federal Government (*Mercury*, 1 July 1903:3).

In early 1904 the Hobart Marine Board visited Tasman Island for the purpose of selecting a site for the new light house in the vicinity of Cape Pillar. The lighthouse committee recommended, based on the reports of the lighthouse inspector, the board's architects, and the Harbourmaster that the lighthouse be erected on the south-eastern part of Tasman Island (*Mercury*, 3 February 1904:2).

The Marine Board's engineer, Mr JR Meech, told the members of the Consolidated Board that: 'due to the extreme difficulties of getting building materials to the Island, the lighthouse tower would have to be made of iron, and taken to the island in segments, and then put together. He noted the extreme isolation of the island and was convinced that 'a twelve months' sojourn on it would qualify the average man for admission to the ward of a lunatic asylum' (*Daily Telegraph*, 4 July 1903:3).

The Marine Board architects, Huckson and Hutchison, forwarded the plans and specifications for the Tasman Island light station to the Hobart Marine Board in June 1904. They are also responsible for designing a number of other prominent Tasmanian lighthouses including Table Cape (THR#5626), Low Head (THR#1480), and Mersey Bluff (THR#1382). As per Mr Meech's instructions, it was to be a cast iron tower on cement foundations and fitted with an incandescent light, 'There will be a superintendent's house, and two houses for assistants, the number of rooms in the

former being seven, and in the latter six. The rooms will be large and airy, some of them being 16ft. by 13ft. Particular attention has been given to sanitary requirements. The houses are to be built of brick and roofed with iron. Owing to the difficulty of landing at the island, and the steepness of the climb to the top, provision has been made for the erection of a crane for taking off goods from boats, and for passengers also, and for a tram hauled by an oil engine, to take stores and people to the top, whence they will be conveyed across the island to the lighthouse by a tram hauled by a horse, the distance being three-quarters of a mile' (*Examiner*, 9 September 1904:7).

The Board called for tenders and the Master Warden was instructed to order the tower and lens from Messrs. Chance Bros in Birmingham, England. The tender of Henrickson and Knutson was accepted for the erection of the light house for £10,487 10s over an 18 month period (*Mercury*, 3 August 1904:4). Mr F Reynolds was appointed as Clerk of Works at Tasman Island to oversee the erection of the lighthouse.

Work commenced in October 1904 on a haulage line and landing stage together with the installation of a steam crane with a 60-foot radius, originally used for the construction of Hobart's new GPO. Building materials arrived at Tasman Island via steamer from Hobart, then transferred to a small punt which would approach the cliffs on the island's north-eastern corner, where there was a wooden ledge constructed in the cliff face some 30 metres above the water. The crane would then lift the load from punt to ledge where it was loaded onto trolleys and winched up the haulage track. The tramway was operated by an oil engine with a steel cable, one truck descending while the other ascended. At the top goods were loaded onto a horse drawn tramway for the final stretch up to the lighthouse.

In 1911, Commander CRW Brewis RN, on a visit to Tasman Island as part of a tour of inspection of Australian lighthouses prior to Commonwealth takeover, reported that the 'the steam crane was old when erected and now admittedly dangerous' (*Preliminary Report on the Lighting of the Coast of Tasmania and the Islands of Bass Strait*, 1913). However it was another 26 years before the crane was dismantled in February 1927 and laid on the bank adjacent to the landing where it remained until severe storms in June 2016 when huge seas washed the steam crane into the sea.

A replacement crane was installed in March 1927. However, this collapsed only an hour after completion, killing one worker & severely injuring another. The steamer *Cartela* took the injured man to hospital. The body of the dead man was never recovered. A temporary landing was erected and was subsequently replaced by a flying fox in 1929. Its cable was strung between the cliff-face landing ledge and a nearby rock in the sea known as Anchor Rock. A wicker basket was suspended from the cable and it could be dropped into a small boat, loaded up and then hoisted up onto the landing stage. Everything, including people and livestock, was then pulled up the cliffs, initially by a horse-drawn whim which was subsequently mechanised.

The original point of access to the island was known as the Zigzag, named for the access path down the cliffs on the north-west of the island. A hand operated crane was erected here in October 1904. Lighthouse Inspector Captain Joe Creese reported that it had washed away in 1907 and was not replaced. The Zigzag continued to be used for small boats landing the mail, urgent supplies and medical assistance.

By October 1905 Messrs Henrickson and Knutson had completed their contract on Tasman Island to the satisfaction of the Hobart Marine Board. The cottages were built, the oil store was complete, the fencing up and tower all fixed awaiting the light, the landing stage, haulage tram completed and working well (*Mercury*, 11 October 1905:2). Combustion stoves provided an oven, hot water and heating for each cottage. Sheds for wood and coal were joined under the same roof as the cottage for protection from the weather. Verandahs are fully enclosed with glass to provide protection from the wind. The robustly decorative design and tradesman-like construction of these brick buildings demonstrates an understanding of the extreme weather conditions to which they would be subjected, but also a commitment to producing architecture that went well beyond utilitarian necessity (Rigozzi 2008).

In 1910 there was a proposal to run an aerial telephone line to Tasman Island from Oakwood, near Port Arthur, via Cape Pillar (*Mercury*, 9 March 1910:7; NAA P234). Extensive calculations were made regarding the feasibility of having a wire crossing Tasman Passage but this never eventuated.

Telegraphic communication with Tasman Island was proposed and a representative from Marconi's wireless telegraphy explored the options. The Postmaster General approved a wireless telegraphy experiment between Hobart (the Mount Nelson Signal Station), Tasman Island and a steamer on the Derwent in February 1906 (*Mercury*, 6 February 1906:4). While the experiment was a success the cost was considered prohibitive and it would be another 30 years before telegraphy came to Tasman Island.

Mr George Johnston was appointed as the first Superintendent, and it was noted that 'the Marine Board have purchased the horse that was landed on the island. That the horse will never see the mainland again. That Tasman's Island is not one of the easiest places in the world to land upon. That all the lighthouse keepers' wives were landed in a basket hoisted by a powerful crane' (*Tasmanian News*, 27 December 1905:1).

The Chance Brothers 1st Order Fresnel light and lens, consisting of 36 segments, were shipped out from England. The lens, its heavy cast iron pedestal and tower panels all had to be hauled up onto the rugged 250-metre high island, taking up to eight hours for each load. The light was specially tilted to allow for its high elevation. It sat in a mercury trough and float with a clockwork mechanism to drive the rotating apparatus and used vapourised kerosene. There was a six-wick Trinity burner as back up.

The light was first lit on 2 April 1906 and problems were encountered soon after. The lamp mantle was prone to fracturing from the degree of swaying at the top of the tower due to the winds and its high elevation. On the night of 20 March 1907, the log reads: 'The tower vibrated to such an extent that it shook the mantles to pieces; had to substitute the wick-burner at 2am' (Stanley 1991:147).

Due to the isolated nature of Tasman Island, and the difficulties of landing supplies, the Keepers and their families had to be largely self-sufficient. They kept good gardens for vegetables, and yarded, shore and slaughtered sheep. Grassland was maintained for grazing sheep and cattle and draught horses utilised for pulling carts along the tram-way. Meat was supplemented at mutton-birding time and goats were kept by some families for an alternative milk supply in addition to their quota of sheep and cattle. There are reports from early lightkeepers of ploughing up extensive mutton bird colonies in front of two houses on the island for the purposes of making vegetable gardens (Harris, 1984:13). There was little wildlife other than mutton birds and seals on the island and the thick forest was rapidly denuded for firewood, after which coal had to be imported. Work was often dangerous for those maintaining facilities on the island. Fencing was vital to protect children and livestock from falling off the sea cliffs or into sinkholes.

Because of the isolation, most women left the island to give birth. However, in 1920 Nurse Cleary attended the birth on the island of a daughter, Eileen, to Head Keeper Leslie Johnston and his wife, Stella. Marie Gatenby kept a diary of her experiences of living on Tasman Island from 1967 to 1968. Excerpts from her diary are included in Rachel Chesmer's book *Keepers of the light, a family's life on Tasman Island* which gives a child's perspective of life on the island. The book also includes quotes from Carol Jackson, who spent her childhood on Tasman Island and other lightstations where her father, Jack Jackson, was keeper; and John Cook who had two stints on Tasman Island as lighthouse keeper from 1969-71 and 1977.

During the war years the job of light keeping was considered a reserved occupation and keepers were not permitted to enlist. Naval personnel were stationed on the island during the Second World War to take charge of radio transmissions and signals. They lived in the Relief Keepers quarters and were instructed to co-operate with the keepers at all times and maintain, via gardening, their surrounds.

Signal flags provided a tenuous link with the outside world before pigeons were introduced. In 1909, the Commonwealth Defence department provided a grant so that Maatsuyker and Tasman Island could have a flock of trained pigeons ready to send out in case of enemy ships being spotted on the horizon. While this method of communication worked for Maatsuyker, it was less successful on Tasman Island as it is said that the pigeons were too well fed and reluctant to leave the island and the predatory birds that nested around Cape Pillar regularly preyed on any pigeons released (Stanley 1991:147). Wireless communication was established in the 1930s between Hobart, Tasman, Maatsuyker and Bruny Islands.

In 1976, the Tasman Island lighthouse was modified to become fully automated and was powered by wind generators backed up by diesel generators. This automation saw the replacement of the original lantern room to accommodate the new apparatus. The original 1906 lens, pedestal and clockwork rotation were removed and sent to the Australian National Maritime Museum. The Friends of Tasman Island Wildcare group located remnants of the original lantern room and are in the process of restoration. The Lightkeepers and their families were withdrawn in 1977. Wind generation was replaced by solar power in 1991.

The current light uses a single lamp. There are a total of 6 lamps on a lamp changer so that when one filament breaks the lamp changer automatically spins to the next lamp. It is operated by a battery charged by an array of solar panels (pers. comm., O'Grady). The flying fox arrangement from Anchor Rock to the top of the landing stage and the haulage to the top of the cliff has since fallen into disrepair and the landing stage was severely damaged in storms in June 2016.

In 1987 the Commonwealth sold Tasman Island to the Tasmanian Government, retaining a lease over the lighthouse. Tasman Island became part of the Tasman National Park when it was proclaimed in 1999 and is managed by the Parks and Wildlife Service Tasmania (PWS). The Lighthouse itself is leased and managed by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA). The infrastructure on the island, with the exception of the lighthouse itself, has remained largely unused since the lighthouse became automated (Rigozzi 2008). Maintenance is carried out by the volunteer Wildcare group *Friends of Tasman Island*, established in 2005, in partnership with the PWS. A bronze plaque at the base of the lighthouse commemorates lighthouse keepers and their families and their contribution to maritime safety in the Tasman Island region from 1906 to 1976.

The Tasman Light Station was listed on the Tasmanian Heritage Register in 1997, along with the other Tasmanian light stations. It was placed on the Commonwealth Register of the National Estate in 1980. The lighthouse itself is included in the Commonwealth Heritage List as it is managed by AMSA, a Commonwealth body.

Historic collections (not part of Heritage Register entry)

The original First Order lens and pedestal, manufactured by Chance Bros. is on display in the Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney.

Tasman Island light station records held by the Australian Archives Office and the State Library of Tasmania include :

Log books (1906 – 1967): these were maintained by the lightkeepers and detail meteorological information; tasks performed; and occurrences. They provide a day by day record of events on the island and record the names of lighthouse personnel and their periods of service.

Returns (1919 – 1962): after the establishment of the Commonwealth lighthouse service in 1915, lightkeepers were required to send monthly, quarterly or annual returns to the service's regional headquarters in Hobart. Tasman Island returns included sighting of ships; meteorological observations; lists of stores and equipment; tasks performed by the keepers and their staff and a monthly record of fog experienced on Tasman Island.

Pigeon messages, sent by pigeon from Tasman lighthouse to Hobart between 1922 and 1924, are the property of the Commonwealth Lighthouse Service and are housed in the Maritime Museum of Tasmania (D_2010-137).

Comparative analysis

There are currently ten light stations listed on the Heritage Register however Tasman Island is one of only two lighthouses constructed of iron in Tasmania. The other being the Currie Harbour Lighthouse (THR#3614) which consists of a prefabricated iron lattice tower with external bracing.

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