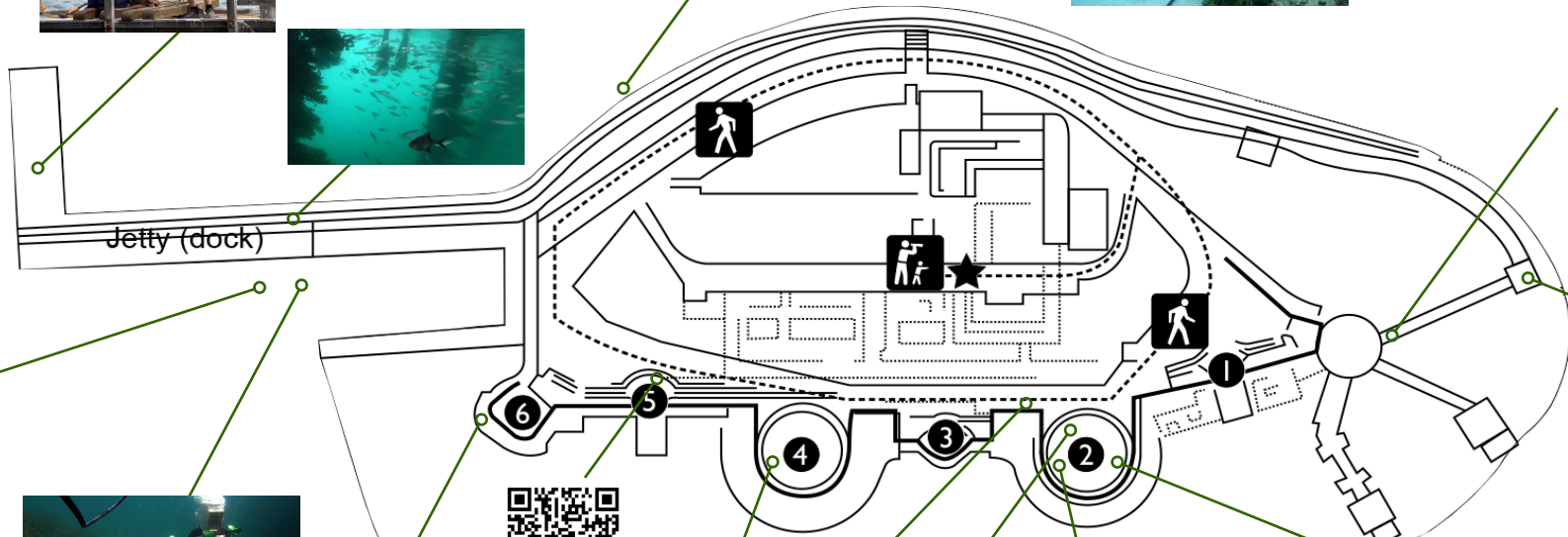
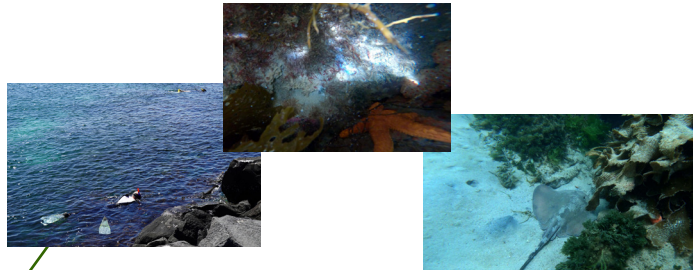


NewsLetter from the Island #1

Creative Occupation - South Channel Fort Island 2020

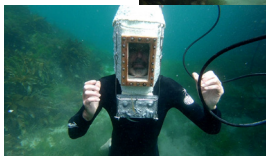
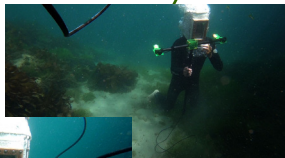
workers on the Island...



(3) Soundbite
15 sec:
SCFPenguins2020



(1) Soundbite
15 sec:
SCFHydra-
Phone2020



Michael tests the white
"Life Support" / gallery
helmet



(4) Soundbite
15 sec:
SCFOndi2020



(5) Soundbite
15 sec:
SCFKeith2020



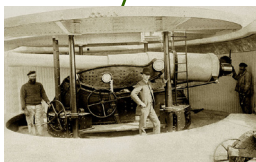
meeting Neal...



(2) Soundbite
15 sec:
SCFLaine2020



'emplacing' a photo
of the removed gun
at the original lo-
cation (photo from
Queenscliff fort)



archival photo: State
Library Victoria H24719



Laine points out
details and di-
rects documenting

Soundbites list (1-5):

<https://soundcloud.com/creative-occupation/sets/newsletter-from-the-island>

Map drawing from Parks Victoria-
Park Notes.

No 1-6 on map: gun emplacements

Hello friends,

NewsLetter from the Island is a flexible outlet of Creative Occupation 2020. Welcome to the #1 - launch issue!

Familiarity with the Island has been formed during Creative Occupation 2018-2019. After encountering a place/ space for the first time - new developments of experience can unfold (revisiting, bringing someone else, keeping in touch, etc). And so the ideas of 'GUIDING' / INVITING / VISITING frame Creative Occupation in the year 2020. This NewsLetter is set to note and whisper about what is happening on the Island during those visits.

-Marita Batna, Curator of Creative Occupation

Activities and communications of Creative Occupation are contributing to artistic research relating to curatorial practice.

We acknowledge the traditional owners of land and waters the Fort/ Island is built upon. We pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging.

05-02-20



Collages: MM

Feb

05-02-20
MM, LH, MB



Michael Morgan

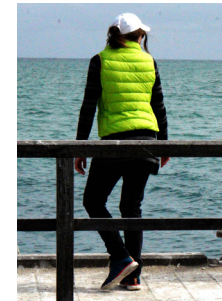
Mar

22-02-20
MM, MB



Andrea (Ondi) Crino

23-02-20
MM, OC, MB



Laine Hogarty

04-03-20
MB, KQ, MM



Keith Quinton



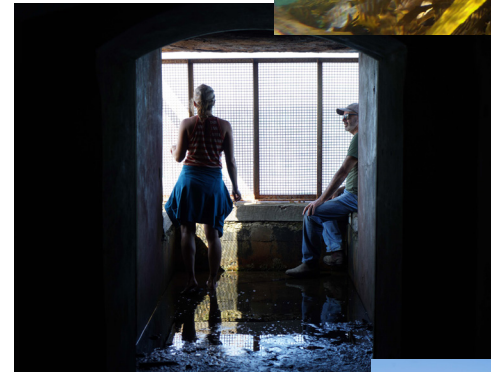
Marita Batna

people

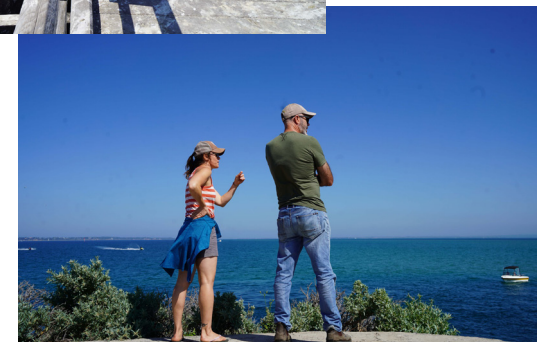
22-02-20



23-02-20



04-03-20



05-02-20
Meetings

An energetic group of three (MM, LH, MB) set off for a journey to find out what's new on the Island (many months have passed since we last saw her)..

...Work is being carried out on the Island. Workers using tools echoes across the space. The Island receives a new layer for the pier - fresh ladders and fenders ! (...we exchange a friendly chat with the crew of Elstone Diving Services on arrival...).

With the absence of noise from the gulls, the Island is quiet, taking time for herself - the birds have left their nesting home, now scavenging on the shores in the distance...

Michael invites Laine into the water to explore the world under the pier and around the rocks, before we proceed to the favourite sites in the ruins...

....The Island surprises us with more of friendly encounters...

A lady and a man approach on the track - Michael and the man recognize each other: sharing times from their youth they enjoy the chat of old friends.

(Neal of Chimney Rock Dive Charters and his passenger are our unintended meeting on the Island).

They've brought a boat full of busy divers.

Allocated nicknames to snorkelers:

<i>"Urchin"</i>	-	<i>Michael</i>
<i>"Sweep"</i>	-	<i>Laine</i>
<i>"Tern"</i>	-	<i>Ondi</i>
<i>"Stingray"</i>	-	<i>Marita</i>

22-02-20

Conversation

A steady procession of visitors along the track: a group of strangers assembles in the tunnel foyer looking down at penguins who are caught between the walls, calling to each other.

-Screeching & warbling communication between the trapped and the free echoes and reverberates up and down the dark spaces.

A desperate call for help or reassurance? Fragility entombed within walls of compression and aggregate.

Surrounded by the slithering tides -

"Share my space," the Island says.

MM, MB

23-02-20

Knowing space

Rain has sprung life on our Island. We make a journey with Ondi, a research biologist and friend of Michael's, to share and reflect on this peculiarly unique space.

Things form in distinctive systems on islands. It's a matter of the ways to 'float in the air' and survive - a bird would fly, drop a seed, an animal float... Here, we see insects, butterflies, foliage...

Both Island residents (penguins) and visiting boaters are out on this warm Sunday. ...In a strange connection, enabled by the Island, we are encountering each other, on a stage of various behaviours - human, animal, plant.

How does a space alter your behaviour?

Artists/ scientists have to process how 'others' approach it differently to us here (or elsewhere)...

"All aboard," says the Island - welcoming the weekend boaters. We blend in, into the flow. It's a little safe shelter in Torpedo bay. Sharing is smooth and peaceful - you use it and make room for the next person...

Learning about the behaviour of birds - similarities of Tern markings is inspiring. Particular birds are indistinguishable, male from female, meaning that they share parenting commitments 50/50. This knowledge is resonating with the idea of reflective image. ---

PAIRING OF BIRDS - MIRROR IMAGE - DUALITY.

A good artist and a good scientist are bound to a creative process: connecting principles/ideas and making something new.

They (Ondi and Michael) enter the water to circle around the rocks exploring subaquatic life beneath a bright sky. We talk about these magnificent alien worlds as we head home gliding across the surface of the water.

We note the words from Ondi:

Knowing the space, it's powerful.

MB, MM

04-03-20

Vividness`

Our guest Keith, historian and classic storyteller, creates a vivid image of life and lives around the Island with encyclopaedic knowledge of details and dates; he breathes energy into a space which otherwise would seem grey and lifeless. It's been three years since we first talked of the Island with Keith, and a little over a year since we met amongst the ambience of work in the gallery...

<<

From within a cavity of the cement architecture, the hydraulic cylinder would lift a quick firing gun: it would take out a small boat. But, there was never any to fire at... And, with less than 200 people in the artillery, how could they man all of the forts in the bay? To the Island, they would come at Easter. Travelling by train from North Melbourne army reservists dispersed by boat out to the forts for the Easter exercises.

It started around 1882 and went through to about 1896. After that they would go to Fort Nepean, Fort Queenscliff, but not here. By Federation, they got rid of the idea of mines. (That's really what SCF was for, to guard the mines laid in the South Channel).

>>>

With our thermos of sweet coffee, the photos are pulled out to 'locate' the emplacements of the 'disappearing' (breech-loading) guns. The most significant picture from the early fort shows two workers either side of the gun, and an administrator in front - hand on hip, leg bent in a confidently relaxed pose, arm stretched out leaning against the pillar. Details of their faces are almost graspable. We are trying to pinpoint the pictured gun mount. (Is it the rusted one behind the mesh, or the one now moved to Fort Queenscliff?)

<<

We are revisiting 'the myth of the Island' with our guest's insights... The significance of 'man-made' is that there was nothing above the sea, it was completely underwater. When the bluestone annulus was originally built, it was proposed with an armoured iron shield around, covered with dredged-up sand to be a muzzle-loading fortress.

But, breech-loading guns were produced with much greater range. The explosive shells got introduced. In further building, the fort had to reflect these advancements. Sand was to absorb any shell firing like a soft armour. Piles were driven in all around, close enough together to stop a boat from landing. They put grass and low salt bush-type plants to hold the surface. A photo shows a dark sculpted body of a fortress. Camouflage? That's a common belief often recited, but there was no point... You know that it's there, it was shown on most maps, and there is nothing 'natural' about it. This is the 'invasion' of nature taking over the place when it was abandoned...

>>>

B.A. Pickersgill, in the gun photograph, was a public servant. They employed day labour, who lived on boats and did the work on the Island. It was a government contract (other Port Phillip forts were sublet to contractors). Unfortunately... we don't really know what original plans were drawn for the Island as a whole. They are missing from the State and National Archives. The detail drawing we are looking at (one of three that survive) is from Public Works Department. It is one of Blackbourn's plans, Keith has just finished writing his biography.

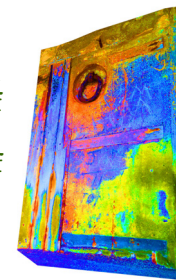
This emplacement drawing is dated 1887 and is the earliest to have survived. The other two date to 1892.

<<

John Blackbourn, Civil Engineer, was a superb draftsman and watercolourist of plans. These plans could be abstract paintings from the 'Futurist' and 'Constructivist' artists in early 20th Century Russia. The line work and textures are stunning. Keith's book about Blackbourn was going to be called 'The Art of Fortification' before Blackbourn's descendants contacted him to write a biography. The art book manuscript remains on his 'desktop' unpublished - maybe sometime.

>>>

Blackbourn was born in Dover near the Western Heights - growing up between the army and harbour, watching the working of



significant railway and military engineers. Trained in London as a civil engineer, he headed for America and ended up building a railroad at Cairo, Illinois, on a junction of the Mississippi River. He was then employed at Fort Point, the fortress next to San Francisco Golden Gate Bridge (it's an 1850's brick casemate fortress), and immediately after he departed was accused of being a British spy. He happened to be a passenger on the first steam mail ship voyage from the West Coast of the USA to New Zealand and Australia. In Melbourne, he designed a bridge across the Yarra River at Kew for the Public Works Department. When they needed an assistant engineer for Scratchley in 1882 they knew Blackburn had worked on forts and when Scratchley left for England in 1884 he was placed in charge of the whole thing.

(Scratchley went to New Guinea as High Commissioner where he contracted malaria and died at sea near Cooktown on the way back). SCF wasn't built until 1887; so although it is thought to be his work, Scratchley has been dead for two years and didn't do it.

<<<

Our attention is drawn to materials assembled in the walls, (particularly distinct bluestone lintel blocks built into the concrete) - figuring out some of clues, working from images like detectives. Aha! The original timber lining of the gun emplacement recognizable in photo - it's mostly absent, but a section, looking smooth (even recent) and attached by a few bright green brass screws is still there. The other parts torn out. Was it weather proofing? Sound proofing? The existing plan includes a side note of specifications - listing choices of materials, - as Keith verifies, it's Castlemaine 'slate' flagstone for the various lintels, niches, etc., and Kauri 'pine' 1 1/2 inch lining boards with V-shaped joints are the facings in the gun emplacements. The reason why still quite uncertain...?

>>>

A group of travellers, led by a local, emerge from the tunnels. 'Military' seemed to be the word that could be picked up to find places for showing their guests around: themed sightseeing complemented by a grey humid day...

The leader of the group reminisced of days gone by picnicking on the Island's sandy spaces near a big gun. Maybe the sand has been washed away? They used to bring divers to the Island (not so often now): even though there are strong currents nearby, the Island area is beautiful and sheltered.

<<<

We proceed into the searchlight tunnels. Iron rails would allow searchlights to be wheeled in and out. There are remnants of a door frame - the door would close and keep the interior dry. Keith reasons that the steel mesh now enclosing the end of each tunnel would have been originally metal shutters to shield it from the weather. Most of the time they would be shut, as people were rarely out here (perhaps three or four times a year). It was in mothballs most of the time; no functional use at all unless a war was on. Because it was difficult to supply, you would want to have people here as little as you can - as long as they could work the guns, the rest didn't matter. The roof of rusting iron beams over the circular tunnel entrance to the searchlight have been added later. Before, it was another gun emplacement - identifiable by more of those remaining sections of timber lining.

>>>

SCF is heavily gunned for such a small site, all the emplacement sites are directed towards South Channel (none on the northern side). At the battery observation post, we identify other forts around the shoreline. Keith sums up - money was always the problem, when you had a war-scare everyone rushed to do something, when it dissipated they gave up. So things were half done, or done late, or whatever.

<<<

The Island states: 'I feel my age'.

It is so different from our old photograph of a sculpted shape...

>>>

As northerlies criss-cross our path through the swells, we indulge in the story of a nearby wreck in the South Channel. *HMAS Goorangai* was a minesweeper cut in half after a collision with the passenger ship *Duntroon* in 1940, all hands aboard lost to the sea. That story is enthralling: a vision emerged later about acoustic recordings of wrecks in locations...

MB, MM, stories and facts by KQ