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H. Brook
Flinders University

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Abstract
The phrase 'dark tourism' was coined by Lennon and Foley (2000) to describe a relatively new kind of sight-seeing; one that attends sites of death, disaster and despair. This essay intertwines personal memoir and scholarly critique to reflect on prisons as places for dark tourism, and imprisonment more generally. Its fundamental contention is that as tourist attractions, former prisons have complex histories that resist easy digestion. More than 20 years ago, the author was a regular visitor to a now defunct South Australian gaol, and recently revisited the place in its current incarnation as a tourist attraction. This experience informs her argument that stories told in and by prison museums are both easily trivialised and dangerously partial. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are respectfully advised that this essay includes some discussion of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and mentions the names and circumstances of several Aboriginal men's deaths (as they were reported in the RCIACID).

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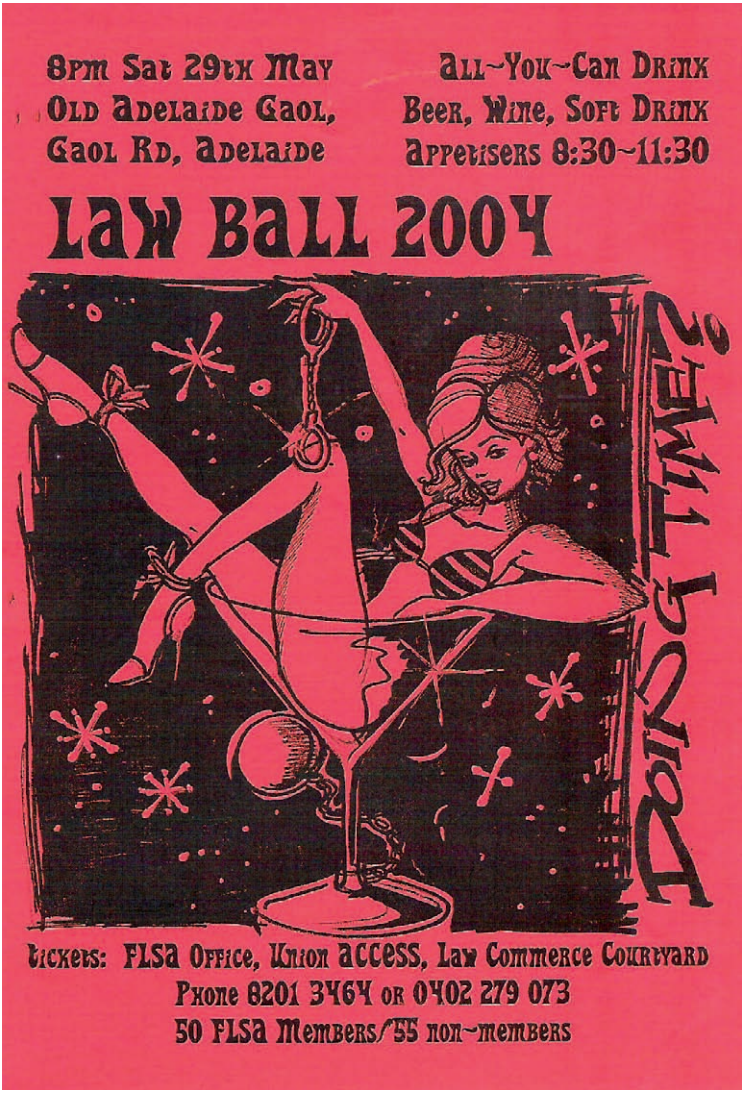

Law Students Society Ball Poster

Dark Tourism

Heather Brook

On a typically windy, wintry afternoon in Adelaide several years ago, I had just finished lecturing a large first-year class on the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and its aftermath. It's a hard topic: hard to talk about; hard to listen to. How much harder to live through, most can only imagine. My neck and throat were aching. Walking between the law and social sciences buildings, a red poster caught my eye. With its retro-styled drawing of a bikini-girl lounging in a ball-and-chained martini glass, the poster was advertising the Law Students Society's annual Law Ball. To be held, it announced, at the 'Old Adelaide Gaol'.[1]

The old Adelaide Gaol is on the north-western edge of the city square of Adelaide. It has the look that all old prisons have: dirty and miserable brown stones, prickly yellow weeds, rusting bars and spikes. It's been a museum and function centre for some years now. Its longer history as a prison stretches from the 1840s to 1988. Most of my first-year students were born the year this gaol closed. It's history, it happened when they were babies, or even before they were born. Maybe that's what history is. My father once told me that as a boy he'd fed carrots to the pie-cart horse outside the railway station on North Terrace. (For a fraction of a second I could see my white-haired father in short pants and scabby knees, saw steam from a horse's nostrils and not cars' exhaust. But only for a second.) I wonder if students at the Law Ball — future prosecutors and defenders — will get glimpses

of anything other than high heels and cocktail suits? What kind of historical imaginary will the Adelaide Gaol function centre offer them?

Fronting up to the 'lobby' of the Adelaide Gaol museum, I join a queue to pay my admission and rent audio equipment. A tour guide is jollying a small group ahead of me. Her voice is sing-song, a reading-aloud voice. She addresses the tour group as if they are children, easily excited and easily bored. 'Yes,' she says, 'people do say there are ghosts in the prison. And no wonder, really, when the bodies of those hanged here still lie within the prison walls.' Her eyes widen knowingly as she speaks. Ahead of me, a smiling young woman shivers and folds her arms. 'Spooky' sells. They offer 'prison experience' bed and breakfast, here, too. For $75 per person you can stay overnight in one of several refurbished cells. 'Do your time the easy way in an authentic prison cell with all bedding, a guided tour of the gaol and a luscious, hearty breakfast included in your sentence,' the promotional material says. The night-time ghost tours are popular, too. In fact, a number of people claim to have researched certain 'paranormal' aspects of the gaol.[2] I wonder how the living relatives of people who died here feel about that 'research'; I wonder how they feel about these 'ghost tours'.[3]

This is, perhaps, what people call 'dark tourism.' Dark tourism is a relatively new kind of sight-seeing, reflecting and feeding on representations of death and disaster. It's supposed to be culturally informed: we see *Schindler's List*, we visit the Auschwitz memorial. We watch the news, we add 'Ground Zero' to our New York itinerary. The men who wrote the book on it say that dark tourism is socially anxious, prompting 'How could this have happened?' kinds of questions.[4] But I don't think people are asking those questions here. The Adelaide Gaol is no more a place of reflection on punishment than a sideshow ghost train is a site for contemplating railway disasters.[5] Dark tourism needs connections to mass memories of grief. Gaol museums like this one have those connections, but they're culturally invisible. They're disintegrated in the same way that prisoners are — physically and symbolically.

Surveillance might be the disciplinary technology of our time, but working prisons are ordinarily out of sight (Pratt 2003).[6] The Adelaide

Gaol has been emptied of prisoners, now, of course. Visitors to the gaol observing its antiquated facilities might tell themselves that (for better or worse) we do things differently now. But over on the north-eastern outskirts of the city, 400-odd prisoners live in Yatala Labour Prison. Yatala is as old as the Adelaide Gaol museum; it could lay claim to at least as many ghosts. The only people touring Yatala, however, do so as guests of the Department of Correctional Services. For everyone else, prison is by definition a place removed, a non-place. (It is a fiction, of course: prisons and prisoners are as much a part of any society as universities and shops.)

In 1983, I'd lined up outside the Adelaide Gaol most Sunday afternoons. Even though the prison is right beside railway tracks, it was hard to get to by train. At the nearest station, trains didn't stop — not on weekends, anyway. My brother joked that I should hijack a train, pull up near the watchtower. I'd toot the horn and he'd pole-vault over the wall into the carriage, and we'd choof down the tracks to make our escape back to my rented flat in Seacliff. Even then, when I was 18 and he was 21, he babied me. He'd pretend that gaol was nothing more than a minor inconvenience, part and parcel of a misadventurous life. Just once, I got a glimpse of something else. I'd filled out my visiting slip, been searched and admitted. I sat down at the table I'd been assigned and waited. Prisoner after prisoner came into the hall and joined their visitors, but there was no sign of my brother. After about half an hour, I asked what was going on. 'We're just getting him,' said the custodial officer. After another 20 minutes had elapsed, I asked again.

'Yeah, funny, but we can't find him,' said the custodial officer. (Was he smirking?) When only ten or fifteen minutes of visiting time remained, they brought him to my table. Neither of us said much that day.

Back then, when you visited the gaol, there was nowhere to wait. We lined up outside, and if it rained, we got wet. Once, standing in line, a Custodial Officer approached me. He knew my name, said we went to school together. He told me he was 'looking after' my brother. I remembered him. At school he had yellow pimples and a collection

of Monty Python records. We weren't friends, even then. But I would never have guessed that he could contemplate becoming a screw.[7] I was astonished; that we could start from the same place, and arrive at the same place, via such dramatically different paths, occupying such radically different roles. I couldn't believe he would just walk up to me and start talking like that, as if we were drinking at the same hotel, barracking for the same team. I was appalled. In the line on either side of me, I could feel people stiffening. My face burned.

'Don't talk to me,' I said. 'I don't want to talk to you.'

'Why not?'

I glared past him, saying nothing. He shrugged and sauntered towards the gate, his keys jingling like a tambourine. In the line, people tried surreptitiously to look at me, checking me out, the chick who knows the screw. I looked at my feet, fuming.

Apart from nodded acknowledgments or the odd comment on the weather, I never really talked to anyone else in the line. It wasn't the place for meeting people or making friends. Our brothers, sons, boyfriends and husbands might be sharing cells but *our* lives were outside. We could come and go as we pleased. For some prisoners it is easier to do the time without visits — without weekly reminders of what it means to lose the opportunity to prepare food together, cook for someone, watch TV, go to the footy, or just joke around together.[8] My brother was always pleased to see me. He usually wanted to hear about how Glenelg was travelling in the South Australian football league, and he liked to talk about books — Ken Kesey, John Irving, Jack Kerouac. He liked strong narratives about lonely characters who found beauty in sadness. I had more prurient interests and tended to go for books that were shocking in their time. But I'd go to the library and borrow whatever he was reading so that I could talk to him about it, and those books I read with my brother are stories I remember still. If I'd known anything about food and recipes he'd probably have enjoyed hearing about that, too. But in those days cooking up meant something different, and besides, we hardly ate.

Now, the Adelaide Gaol museum is a hotch-potch of styles. In one

area, the gaol's partial history as a women's prison is professionally laid out in placards, posters and displays. (Someone must have secured good funding to afford those production values.) The ugly and inadequate medical block, on the other hand, looks pretty much as if someone just forgot to lock the door. Maybe it's deliberate: maybe the clunky timeline and incongruent displays are meant to reflect the heterogeneity of the prison population. It doesn't ring true, though. Historically, as now, prisons are filled with similarly damaged people. The occasional tall poppy[9] comes through, but mostly it's people who are already familiar with crime and capture; people whose relatives or friends have been sent to gaol. People without the necessary resources to live decently are subject to increased surveillance and state intervention in their affairs — all too often represented as 'help' for which the recipient ought to be grateful, despite not having caused the circumstances of their lives. Money problems, drug problems, mental health problems. They braid together like a rope.

The Adelaide Gaol's prize exhibit is its dead. Between the inner and perimeter stone walls are a number of graves. Some are marked by the condemned prisoners' initials and the date of their execution.[10] The bodies of Joseph Stagg, Ngartu, Wera Maldera, Tom Donelly, Pilti Miltinda, Tankaworlya, and Warretya lie here. Of the 65 prisoners sentenced to death in South Australia, nearly a third were Aboriginal men. At first they were hanged publicly, on a scaffold outside the gaol. Then a gallows was built inside the walls, and decent people were no longer privy to the kind of botched job that saw Michael Magee slide rather than drop, suffocating slowly on the rope while the hangman pulled his legs.[11] I avert my eyes from these men's graves. The displays and audio guide say nothing about Aboriginality, nothing about racism, nothing about the shameful and enduring history of deaths in custody. As I walk past the graves of these people, I try to tread softly.

Every year I tell my students that the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was formed in 1987, when a number of particularly distressing deaths drew public attention to the routinely high number of Aboriginal men and women dying in police lockups

and prison. Grief attaching to the apparent suicides of young Aboriginal men like Mark Quayle, Shane Atkinson and Edward West, who were 22, 23 and 18 (respectively) when they died, was palpable. Disquiet over such unnecessary deaths, along with reasonable suspicions concerning correctional cover-ups and police brutality accumulated, and public pressure to sort things out mounted. The Commission's inquiries uncovered a range of appalling practices, prompting hundreds of final recommendations.[12] However, one of the Commission's key conclusions was that Indigenous prisoners were no more likely to die in custody than non-Indigenous prisoners. This finding disappointed those promoting their own archaically kitsch version of the 'Noble Savage' thesis, in which (proper, 'tribal') Aborigines die in gaol as an almost mystical consequence of their spiritual imprisonment, and not because the conditions of their lives are unendurable. The Commission reported that Aboriginality, as such, was not the problem. (Has it ever been?) The problem was that Indigenous people were being incarcerated at disproportionately high levels.[13] Indigenous prisoners may have been no more likely to die in custody than any other prisoners, but were far more likely — 29 times more likely — to be arrested and imprisoned than other Australians. The life circumstances of people going to prison, combined with the brutalising experience of incarceration itself, means that many prisoners die untimely deaths. Prisoners — like the poor in general — often have existing, inadequately-managed health problems.[14] The murder and suicide of young men in prison represent the most untimely and horribly unnecessary deaths in custody, but every single death investigated by the Commission is a tale of relentlessly dark tragedy. Hypoglycaemic comas mistaken for drunkenness; epilepsy compounded by alcoholism; protests so desperate as to risk self-immolation.

One of the deaths prompting the establishment of the Royal Commission occurred in the Adelaide Gaol. The late Mrs Alice Dixon's son Kingsley died there in July 1987.[15] He was 19, nearly 20, when he died. He was found hanging from a torn sheet knotted to the bars of his cell window. Earlier in the day, he'd been caught with a little bit of yarndi,[16] and his chances of being transferred to the prison

farm at Cadell had literally gone up in smoke. The Royal Commission determined that he'd probably taken his own life, maybe accidentally. He wasn't really suicidal, they said, just angry. Kingsley's cell was on the upper level of the 'New Building,' built in 1879. My brother had lived in the same wing. Who knows, maybe they'd lived in the same cell, separated by a few years, months even. In B-wing it was two-to-a-cell, no plumbing. The decision to close the gaol had been made much earlier, in the mid-1960s.[17] From the gaol management's perspective, there was no point in improving or fixing facilities marked for demolition. Before it closed, the gaol housed twice as many prisoners as it should have. The only modernisation was the high-tech security and surveillance system. The cells still don't have plumbing. But when guests pay to stay overnight now, they're not expected to use a bucket, as the previous occupants did (nobody wants *that* much authenticity in their tourism experience).

When I look at one of the walls whose graffiti has been preserved, I look for my brother's hand. In his letters, his writing was always heavy and dense. I liked to run my fingers across the embossed underside of the page, feel the tickle of play-braille under my fingertips. Here, on the wall of a cell, would his words cut similarly deep? When I read his letters now, I'm transported. I remember everything — his turn of phrase, his loping walk, the tragic, heroic, comedy of his life. I'm sure that I'll recognise his words and writing, but the messages here don't match. I look for his addled humour, his wry discursive smile. A germ of panic opens in my chest. I feel as if I'm looking into a sea of half-familiar faces, I'm lost, I can't find him, he's not here. I can't even recognise my own brother. Grief and fear of forgetting stick to each other like a bolus in my throat.

In the 'New Building', children are zooming in and out of cells, making their own cops and robbers stories come alive. Me, I can't cross the threshold. I tell myself that I ought to step into a cell; I remind myself that it's safe. But all I'm aware of is that this is not my place. This is a place marked by the profound historical absence of people like me, people whose brothers (or sons, fathers, husbands, friends) loved

and missed them.[18] I don't believe that ghosts haunt the Adelaide Gaol. But I can see that grief, despair, and misery coat these cells over and over, peeling away like thin institutional paint.

There was no Royal Commission inquiry into my brother's death. He was not an Indigenous man, and he didn't die here; he didn't die in prison. On the day in 1987 he was due to front court to face what he knew would be a second long stretch, he enacted a different sort of sentence and took his own life. Doing a jolly swagman, he said.[19]

Prisons are death camps by stealth.[20] At the entrance to Auschwitz, the undisputed centre of dark tourism, visitors are reminded to behave with decorum. In the Czech Republic, visitors to Lidice are greeted with a multi-lingual sign that says 'You are entering a place of exceptional horror and tragedy. Please show your respect for those who suffered and died here [by] behaving in a manner suitable to the dignity of their memory.' At Auschwitz, groups of schoolchildren nonetheless tuck into their sandwiches as they sit on the ruins of a Nazi crematorium.[21] The Adelaide Gaol is not Auschwitz. But it, too, is a place of horror and tragedy. It's also a function centre. I look at the Law Students' poster again. How can a group of law students celebrate passing their exams in this place where so many lawyers' clients despaired and died? When the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody recommended the establishment and support of Indigenous tourism, this doubly 'dark' tourism is surely not what it had in mind.

Notes

For inspiring this essay, thanks to Debbie Kilroy. For their helpful comments and for reading earlier drafts, I thank the guest editors of this special issue, along with Rod Butlin, Jacqueline Z. Wilson and Lester Irabinna Rigney. For revisiting the Adelaide Gaol with me, thanks to Tania Innocenti and Rod Butlin. This essay is for my steadfast sister Wendy, who was there with me even though she does not appear in these lines; and our brother Martin, who was there in ways we know nothing about.

1 Sometime since, the gaol museum has dropped the 'Old' from its name.

2 See the pamphlet by Trevor Porter (2004), available from the Adelaide Gaol's souvenir shop.

3 For one response, see Morgan (2007).

4 See Lennon and Foley (2000:11) on the nature of 'dark tourism' in general; but see also Strange and Kempa, whose view is that '[t]o describe prison history tourism as "good" is too good, and "dark" too stark' (Strange and Kempa 2003: 401). For an especially pertinent and thoughtful treatment of prison museums as dark tourism, see Wilson (2008).

5 Or maybe it is, but such reflections tend not to empathise with prisoners. The identification, such as it is, tends towards the gaolers (see Wilson 2008: 178).

6 Pratt (2003) explores the interplay of prison surveillance and invisibility.

7 'Screw' is a slang term for prison officer.

8 For the same reason, some prisoners elect to serve out the whole of their head sentence rather than subject themselves to the surveillance and semi-freedom of conditional parole.

9 A 'tall poppy' is a celebrated or successful person whose achievements or accoutrements are resented by 'ordinary' people.

10 Forty-five people were buried here after being hanged, but only 34 graves are marked. None of the graves of executed Aboriginal men is marked. The last person hanged, Glen Sabre Valance, was executed in the year I was born.

11 For details on this and other South Australian executions, see Scheiffers (2002).

12 For more on this, see Cunneen (1997), and a range of resources available from the Australian Institute of Criminology website at <http://www.aic.gov.au/research/dic/publications.html>.

13 For a critical assessment of the implementation of the RCIADIC's findings and recommendations, particularly in relation to reducing rates of Indigenous incarceration, see Cunneen and McDonald (1997).

14 At the Adelaide Gaol museum, a placard in the medical block lists some of the illnesses and injuries sustained by prisoners—including flyblown wounds and self-mutilation in the form of amputated fingers, toes, and self-inflicted blindness—under the heading 'Ouch!!!'.

15 All details taken from the RCIADIC Report of the Inquiry into the Death of Kingsley Richard Dixon (1989).

16 'Yarndi' is a local (Indigenous) word for cannabis.

17 The decision to close the gaol was made, initially, in the 1960s, but was subject to contestation and some controversy. See Scheiffers (2002) on the options canvassed and the concomitant rationales proffered.

18 For some time, of course, women were part of the Adelaide Gaol prison population, too. (In Adelaide, women are still an 'anomalous' element of the prison population, and are in some circumstances held at Yatala Labour Prison, even though Yatala is ostensibly a men's prison. Men are sometimes held at the Adelaide Women's Prison, too.)

19 His reference was to the widely loved Australian national song, 'Waltzing Matilda'. It is a ballad about a 'jolly swagman' (or rural itinerant) who steals a sheep to eat. When threatened with capture by troopers, the swagman drowns himself, crying 'You'll never catch me alive!' as he leaps into a billabong (waterhole). The enduring popularity of the song, along with other instances and relics of Australia's strange convict-colonial history, is a source of widespread interest but little serious research. For more on Australian fascination with convicts, lawlessness and larrikinism, see Wilson (2008).

20 In his exploration of prisons as cultural commodities, Paul Wright (2000:19) makes a similar point.

21 I have not visited these places. I rely on the accounts offered in Lennon and Foley (2000: 54, 61).

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