

READING  
PENTRIDGE  
AGAINST  
TIME

*Looking at the walls of Pentridge, the material links connecting systems of constraint and detainment, with the spatial forms and operations of settler colonialism are visible. The basalt stones cut from the earth, carved and stacked on top of one another to form the arrangement of workshops, cells, panopticons and borders trace the lineage and legacies of colonial forms of imprisonment as connected to the invasion of Australia. They resemble an architectural typology founded on structures of dispossession and extraction, on the cadastral division of land into private property and systems of coercion and authority.*

*While the site contains a history of these structures, these dynamics are still interwoven with the everyday functions of the settler state and economies of this country. How can these continuums be read, which structures and systems of the colonial and carceral dynamic are still at play within this space?*

*Reading this site against time it reveals many stories.*

*The legacies of carving Indigenous lands into private property, of occupation and speculation. Of labour, extraction, destruction and reappropriation. Of authority and surveillance – and of a continuation of this process and minimization of the tangible effects it has produced.*



*Overhead, a crane lifts construction material into the sky, dwarfing the old walls of the gaol. "Victoria Towers" a sign reads, complete with an icon of the crown of England stamped above the name. "Luxury apartments now selling."*



THE  
**Rook**

PENTRIDGE

Premium 1, 2 & 3 bed  
apartments now selling.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION.  
MOVE IN 2021.

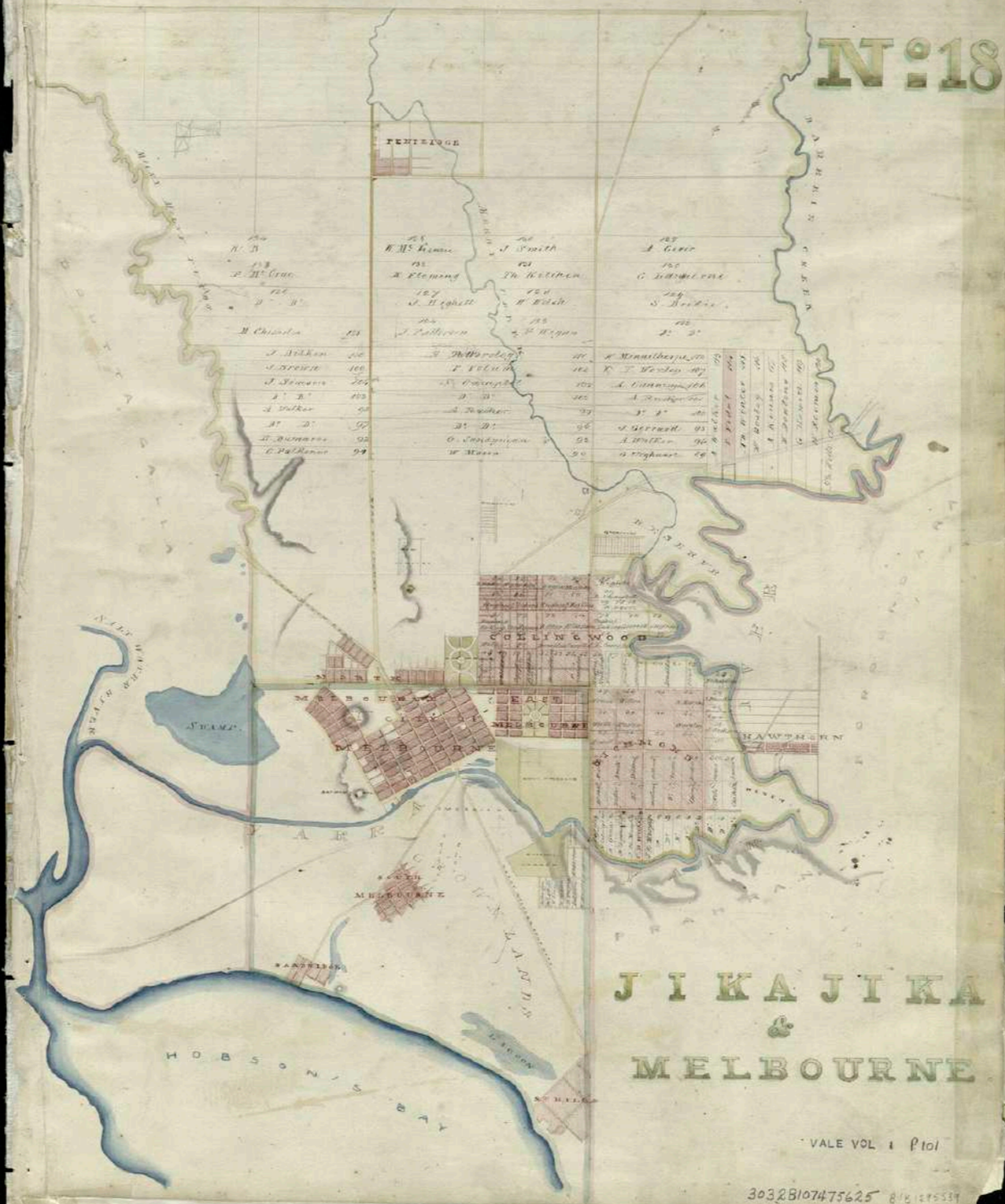
PENTRIDGE John Kravartsis DYNAMIC  
0413 581 228

[THEROOKPENTRIDGE.COM.AU](http://therookpentridge.com.au)



*The colonial system of extracting financial capital from land through the form of private property, is clearly and continually reproduced here. Wurundjeri land initially carved up with imaginary lines into private plots, turned into both capital for the crown and into spaces of detainment. The historical land booms and speculations tied to invasion have not ceased and can still be seen directing the forms and uses of this land, land that is still stolen, still unceded.*

N:18



JIKA JIKA & MELBOURNE

VALE VOL. I P101

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*The yard, a newly converted public space by the owners of the site, the property developer Shayher Group, is structured around timed grass, bluestone rocks acting as seats, concrete paths and small trees planted in rows. Orderly and manicured. A grid of light poles overlay the square.*



The "Piazza," Former Prison Yard  
Source: Aspect Studios

*Carved into the timber of the front gates reads a historical account of the space:*

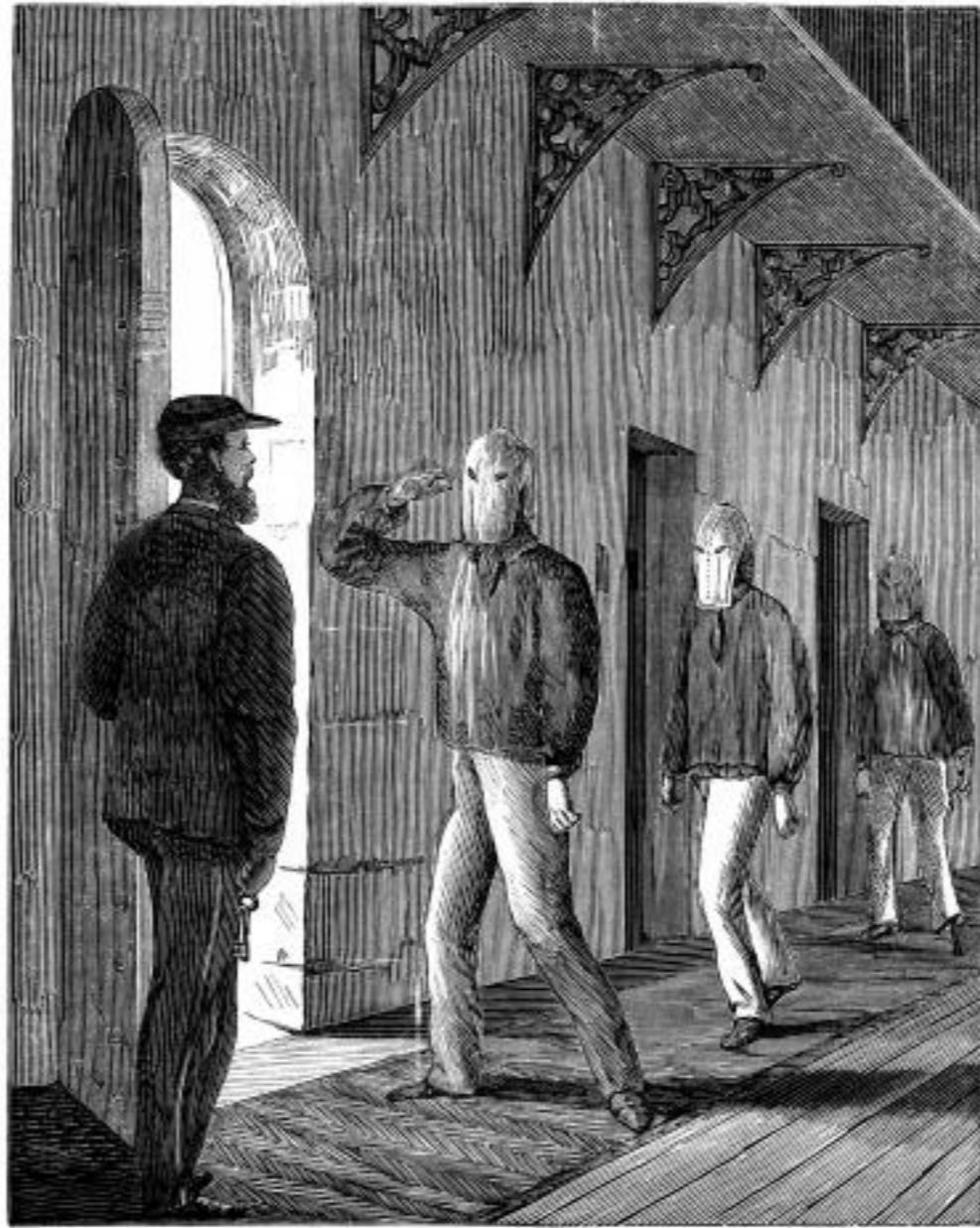
*We passed the portals of an immense iron gate...*

*Everything in the way of flowers, grass, and neatly-trimmed borders and hedges*

*Were looking their very best and impressed us at the first peep of the interior.*

*The cost of labour was no object there.*

*Anonymous, A visit to the Pentridge Stockade, 1866*



THE PENAL ESTABLISHMENT AT PENTRIDGE.—THE SILENT SYSTEM.—SEE PAGE 6.

*The system of colonial penalty is embedded with mechanisms to facilitate the extraction of labour. While this is acknowledged, the criticality of what this represents, or how this functioned, is not.*

*In 1851, when the site was opened as Pentridge Stockade, those imprisoned laboured in quarries surrounding the site, mining the bluestone which would soon form the walls in incarcerate future prisoners. Here, the process of labour highlights the role of the confinement of convicts in the construction of the settler colonial project, and the direct links between Indigenous dispossession, colonial carceral capitalism, and resource extraction.*



*Pentridge Stockade, the first established receptacle for convicts, 1849*  
Source: State Library Victoria

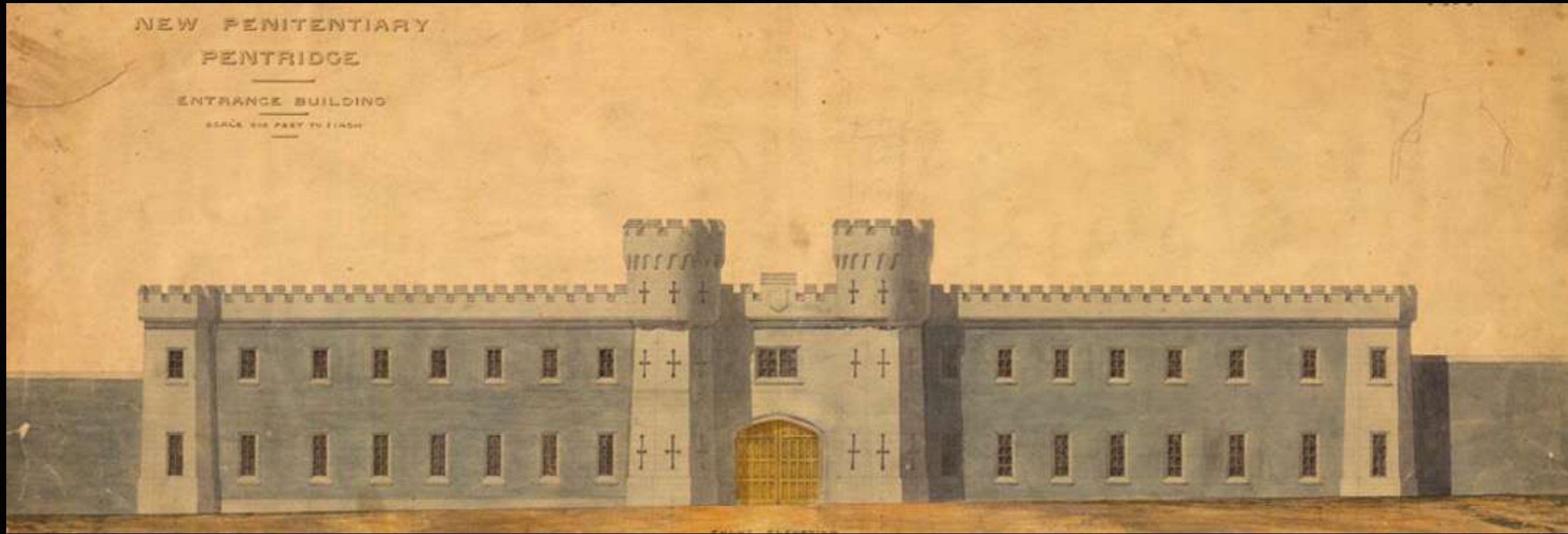


*Bluestone quarry Newlands Rd, Coburg, 1920s  
Source: Coburg Historical Society*

*This cementation of Pentridge into the bluestone structure it was, and is, known as suggests the directness of colonial violent transformation of Indigenous Land. The quarry, where the rough cut bluestones blocks comprising the walls and structures of the gaol were dug from, was located adjacently north of the site, along the banks of the Merri Creek.*

*This re-composition of the land is embedded with violence, both in the form of the negative space carved into the sides of the creek, and the resulting use of this material in construction and the positive space from this cavity in the earth. This logic - what settler-colonialism does to the ground to extract from it, and what it builds from this, and uses these material for - encapsulates this plurality of violence.*

NEW PENITENTIARY  
PENTRIDGE  
ENTRANCE BUILDING  
SCALE ONE PART TO FIFTY





*Aerial View of Pentridge Prison Site, showing the former quarry, 1960's  
Source: State Library Victoria*

*If labour here is a key factory to think about the operations of colonialism, we could ask whose labour keeps the lawns so trim today? Which dynamics are still in repetition?*

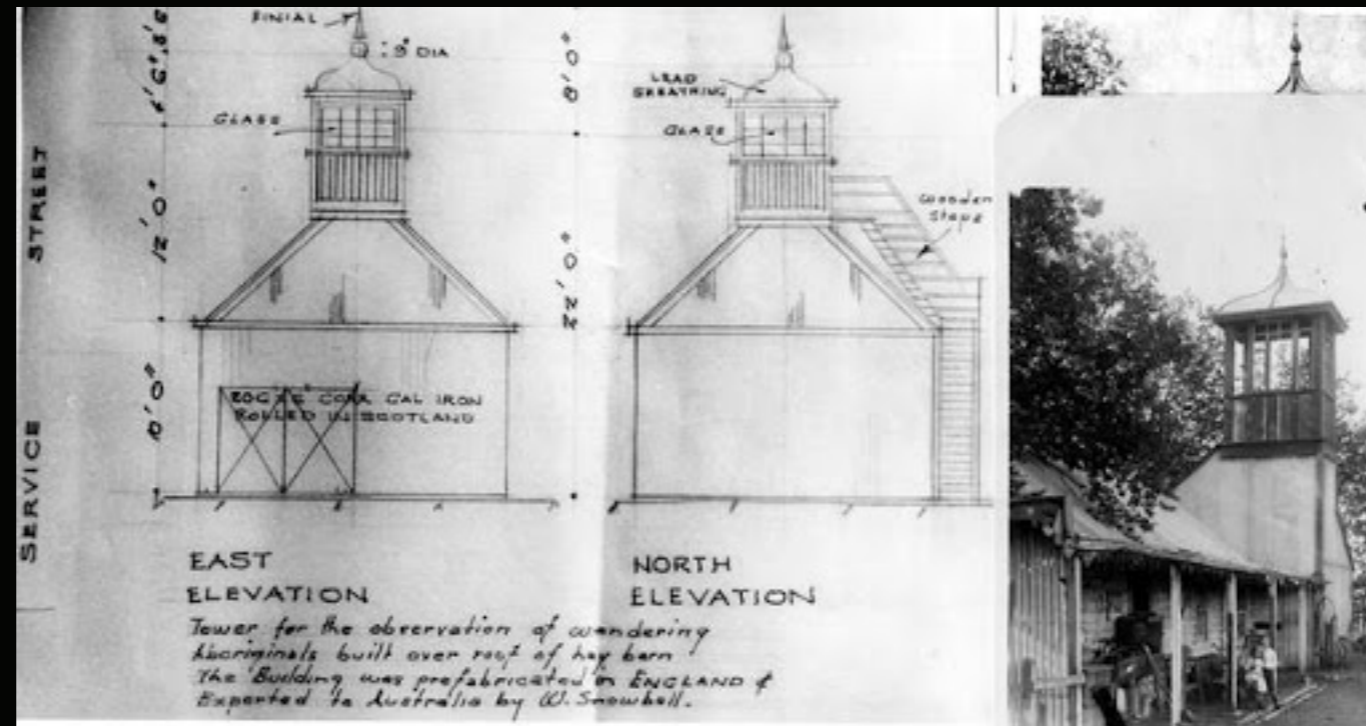


*Two security guards wearing black suits and ties with white shirts do laps of the yard. Later, I notice that attached to each light post are two security cameras. All the hallmarks of a privately owned public space. Ideologies of surveillance and control still present within the former prison.*



*It reminds me of the story of an adjacent property to what would become Pentridge, a local land owner, after conflicts with Indigenous people in the area, erected a tower onto of his barn, colloquially known as "Squatter's Lookout." Apparently for the "spying" on Indigenous people, the architecture of the structure is embedded with a distinct militaristic and violent quality.*

*Looking across the archaeology of the panopticon, now just a pattern of stones in a radical formation of the ground, who is being survived here today?*



*On a new development on the site, a shopping centre complex clad in white and orange panels, the side of the building is ornamented with black text, words such as “watchtower,” “cell,” “punishment,” “H Division,” “rock breaking yards,” “control” and “panopticon” mark the side of this new development, alongside diagrammatic plans and sections of the colonial prison. On the surface it appears as a crude and desperate attempt to make sense of this new architectural construction inhabiting the site. But the carelessness and informality that these terms can be used as decoration, reflects the dismissal, normalization and perceived inevitability of this violent colonial forms.*



**HM PRISON  
PENTRIDGE  
1851-1997**

WATCHTOWER

**A DIVISION  
PRISONERS**

*The redevelopment of Pentridge Prison reflects how deeply ingrained carceral culture is within modern Australian settler psyche. It resembles how this history is thought of and dealt with, not in exceptional sites, but the mundane and omnipresent realities of the colonial occupation and appropriation.*

*What does it mean to allow developers to own heritage through institutions of private property? Here, the carceral history is deployed and referenced with the intention of capitalizing upon it to sell apartments and increase investment.*

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JEAN  
LEE  
HANGED

1951

MAXIMUM  
SECURITY

1958

H DIVISION



*There seems to be a question tacitly demanded in the current trajectory of this site, which seems to be absent from ideas and structures behind its current development. It could be, how can the violence of this site be undone? Or rather, what would an accurate and honest treatment of this site be, whilst also fostering room for new futures and actions to be created in resistance to the histories, and continual functions, of carceral society?*