Sharing the waterways: Shark-proof swimming, penal detention and the early history of St Helena Island, Moreton Bay

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Abstract

This research examines the role that fear of sharks has played in the history of St Helena Island Moreton Bay, Queensland through analysis of historical records, newspapers, photographs and literature. The article begins with Aboriginal histories of St Helena Island, colonial settlement of the region and the building of a quarantine station. An exploration of the ways in which settlers' fear of sharks supported the detention of prisoners in the St Helena Island Penal Establishment follows. The research finds that the warders' shark-proof swimming enclosure on St Helena Island (1916) records a time when Queensland communities were first seeking to manage the recreational demands of swimmers in the context of a growing public fear of sharks.

Introduction

Focusing on the early history of St Helena Island, this research considers the role sharks have played in the settlement and occupation of Moreton Bay, Queensland. It is argued that the shark-proof swimming enclosure built at St Helena Penal Establishment in 1916 reflects the growth of swimming as a leisure activity within a specific cultural context of European settlers' fear of sharks. Sharing the waterways with sharks is an ongoing challenge for Queensland communities. The marine life-rich waters of Moreton Bay and the Brisbane River are a natural habitat to a diverse range of shark species. As the water-based recreational activities of South-East Queensland's population grow, so have the numbers of encounters between people and sharks. Heightened media attention and public concern around the increased (but still rare) incidence of unprovoked shark attacks have contributed to a disproportional perceived fear of fatal shark attacks in Australia, one that is not supported by the actual rates of fatal shark events recorded.[1]

The fear of sharks has been a 'terror' associated with living near the tropical waters of the state of Queensland since colonial settlement. This fear has justified

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Figure 1

Remains of shark-proof swimming enclosure, built 1916, St Helena Island, Moreton Bay, remains of original causeway bottom left, Port of Brisbane in background. Image: Cathy Keys, 21 February 2020.

ongoing strategies to protect humans from sharks, such as drum lines and shark nets that have been in place along popular Queensland beaches since 1962.[2] The fear of sharks was also used as leverage against people detained on St Helena Island in Moreton Bay. St Helena Island was used by the Queensland Government as a self-sustaining and highly secure penal establishment between 1867 and 1933, holding the state's long-sentence male prisoners. Escape from the island was partly deterred by the expanse of surrounding waters and the perceived fear that human-eating sharks inhabited these waters. Once a large institution, most penal buildings on St Helena Island have since been demolished. Archival digital scans done in 2016 have recorded for posterity the few restored timber structures and remaining masonry features on the island, including the rusting remains of a shark-proof swimming enclosure built in 1916.[3] It can still be seen today by recreational boaters and tourists arriving at the National Park jetty at the end of the original causeway at St Helena Island (Figure 1).

On 4 April 2017, the fear of sharks became a local issue for South-East Queensland residents when the national newspaper *The Australian*, ran the headline, 'Shark Attacks Kayaker in Moreton Bay, Off Brisbane', describing a 'terrified' man being rescued by water police near Mud Island, adjacent to St Helena Island, after the rear of his kayak was bitten off by a shark.[4] Since 2018, the reporting of fatal shark attacks in popular tourist spots of Northern Queensland has again sensationally dominated news cycles. While the incidents of shark attacks occurred in regions remote from the densely populated capital city of Brisbane, the media reports feed into an ongoing narrative that the threat of fatal attack by a shark is ever-present.

Shark barriers or shark-proof swimming enclosures designed to protect people from shark attacks are increasingly advocated nowadays as both marine conservation concerns and the effectiveness of existing shark-reduction strategies are debated.[5] St Helena Island's shark-proof swimming enclosure is a rare surviving example of the use of steel railway tracks to create the walls of the swimming enclosure. We will return to this swimming enclosure later. First, an examination of the social and cultural context for its construction will begin with settlement on the island, Queensland's early record of penal detention and punishment, and the role of sharks in this history.

Aboriginal histories of Noogoon

Located in Moreton Bay about 6 kilometres from the mouth of the Brisbane River, St Helena Island is 88 hectares in area and rises to 21 metres above sea level with closest landfall being Mud and Green Islands.[6] The island was known to the Quandamooka Aboriginal people as Noogoon.[7] The history of Noogoon was documented in 1984 by Gillian Alfredson, in an archaeology Honours thesis focusing on the Aboriginal use of the island as well as in two books on the penal establishment, one by Lauren Penny and one by Jarvis Finger.[8] The site, which has attracted tourists and school groups since the 1970s, was declared a Historic Area in September 1979; it is on the Queensland Heritage List and currently managed by Queensland National Parks.[9]

St Helena Island sits within the social and cultural environments of Quandamooka, which are the waters and lands of the Greater Moreton Bay region of South-East Queensland. Between 10,000 and 12,000 Aboriginal people lived in this region before 1800, resulting in one of the highest population densities in pre-contact Australia. Substantial social and ceremonial gatherings were a cyclic feature of Aboriginal social life in this region, supported by mutual reciprocity in terms of travel and movement between language groups in coastal and inland regions – movement underpinned by skills in swimming and boating. A stable social and political organisation existed among the distinct groups of Aboriginal people of the region, who recognised clans with independent spheres of authority, law and land rights.[10]

Dugong (*Dugong dugon*) flourished in the surrounding seagrasses, banks of oysters grew nearby, a low water table provided year-round freshwater and the fertile volcanic soil supported mangrove flats, a small area of grassland, a lagoon and a thick covering of subtropical vine forest.[11] Seasonal arrivals of colonies of large migratory fruit bats (*Pteropus policephalus*) were harvested for food.[12] Archaeological investigations have revealed that Aboriginal people visited Noogoon seasonally to exploit its resources for over 2,500 years.[13]

Reaching Noogoon by island-hopping significant distances, canoeing, swimming and walking across sand bars, these stays were of a short-term nature, with midden heaps providing an extraordinary visual and physical record of Aboriginal people's ongoing visitation and management of the island and its nearby terrestrial as well as marine resources. Quandamooka Aboriginal people held religious beliefs that involved close, often collaborative relationships with marine animals, including a close fishing relationship with dolphins.[14] These middens record a rich diet that included sharks, fish and flying foxes, as well as lizards, dugong and turtles.

Evidence was also found of mud crabs, oysters, mussels, whelk shells and land snails alongside bream, mullet, tarwhine, whiting, catfish, stonefish and the diminutive Weasel shark (*Rhizoprionodon taylori*).[15]

Noogoon and the waters around it were first mapped by Europeans in 1799 when British explorer Matthew Flinders anchored the sloop the *Norfolk* alongside the small heavily timbered island on the evening of the 19 July while performing a two-week survey of what is now known as Moreton Bay. Noting the mangrove forests and mudflats that surrounded Noogoon on his survey chart, Finders observed the island's height and 'dark and luxuriant' foliage relative to other nearby islands.[16] This survey marked the beginning of an increasing presence of Europeans in the region, with Quandamooka people's livelihoods, access to their traditional lands and wellbeing significantly impacted by the spread of colonial settlement beginning in the 1820s.[17]

Post-contact histories of Noogoon

The British colonial impetus to settle in Moreton Bay came from Royal Commissioner John Bigge (1819–22), who argued that additional isolated penal settlements were required on the tropical coastline of what is now Queensland to hold and deter secondary convict offenders.[18] John Oxley was sent to the region on several reconnaissance missions from 1823.[19] Following Oxley's surveys and the subsequent 'discovery' of the Brisbane River, a ship was sent from Sydney to found a convict penal settlement in Moreton Bay in 1824. A brief survey of Noogoon was made on 13 September 1824 to this end, but it revealed a lack of sufficient fresh water. Instead, the first penal settlement in Moreton Bay was located at Red Cliffe Point. Red Cliffe Point was abandoned in less than a year, and the penal settlement relocated to Brisbane Town, a new site on the banks of Brisbane River. Here convicts housed in barracks were organised into work gangs on major public works under civil law and policing. A small gaol room and some solitary cells were constructed in 1827.[20]

During the voyage to Brisbane Town, large ocean-going ships carrying supplies and passengers first had to navigate the very treacherous waters and sand bars between Moreton Island and Minjerriba (Stradbroke Island) into Moreton Bay. The job of piloting the increasing volume of ships was first performed by a retired Royal Navy Lieutenant, John Tosh from the 17th Regiment. Assisted by hand-picked convicts, a small military guard and local Aboriginal people, Tosh held this job from 1825 until 1830, when the pilot boat overturned and he was reportedly taken by sharks, becoming the first recorded fatality by a shark attack.[21]

A second and larger penal outstation on Stradbroke Island was built at Goompi (Green Point or Dunwich) to store goods before carting on smaller boats into Brisbane Town or loading onto larger vessels for the return trip to Sydney.[22] Aboriginal people lived and worked in these colonial outstations, employed in piloting, and in the fishing and dugong industries.[23] Aboriginal people's proficiency as swimmers was recognised and they were regularly involved in saving drowning shipwrecked Europeans.[24] However, as had been the case in Australian frontier towns since European colonisation, conflict between Aboriginal people and settlers revealed vast differences in legal understandings about land use.

From the 1820s, early convict punishment and the rule of law in Queensland involved the infliction of physical pain and was enforced by the state in a paternalistic and personal way, but convicts enjoyed some freedoms of association and limited free time. At this time, public executions and floggings were enacted, reinforcing the deterrent value placed on punishment. Libby Connors has argued that in relation to the Aboriginal population of Queensland, official punishment was extreme and intended to make an example of the individual to deter the broader Aboriginal community.[25] However, it took the colonists time to work out what was the most effective type of punishment. In March 1828, an Aboriginal man called Eulope, but known to colonists as 'Napoleon', was caught stealing an axe at Dunwich on Stradbroke Island. He was named Napoleon due to his leadership and supposed physical resemblance to the famous French leader, Napoleon Bonaparte, who was exiled after a defeat in 1815 to a remote British-held island in the South Atlantic Ocean called St Helena, where he died a prisoner.[26]

Thinking detention on an 'isolated' island in the middle of Moreton Bay the best way to punish the 'black Napoleon', Commandant Logan exiled Eulope on Noogoon. However, Eulope spent less than three days on Noogoon making a bark canoe before paddling and navigating the significant distance across the bay to his family on Stradbroke Island.[27] Following this legendary act of defiance, by 1848 the island was known to European settlers as St Helena.[28]

The number of convicts in Brisbane peaked in 1831. In Sydney and England, flogging was replaced officially as a form of deterrent and punishment by confinement in solitary cells from the 1820s.[29] However, Brisbane Town, especially under Captain Logan, was renowned for its culture of cruelty and excessive public flogging, a practice that continued through to the late 1840s. Logan justified his reliance on the lash on the lack of a gaol.[30] By 1839, most convicts had been withdrawn from the settlement and the Moreton Bay penal colony was made available to free settlers in 1842.[31] European arrivals observed sharks in the waters of the bay, with British explorers on *HMS Rattlesnake* visiting Moreton Bay in 1847 noting that, 'Sharks are numerous close to the beach but were generally small and harmless; one of the natives, however, had lost his foot at the ankle joint from the bite of one.'[32] On land, a period of intense frontier conflict spread outwards from Brisbane Town during the 1840s, with surviving Aboriginal people's lifestyles disrupted by European arrivals, often in violent death.[33]

The numbers of people imprisoned for breaking the law soon began to outstrip the space in the existing colonial gaols. In 1847, another gaol was provided by retrofitting the old Female Factory (1837) in Queens Street. As the population of Brisbane grew rapidly during the 1850s, with 14,000 people settled through the Port of Moreton Bay between 1848 and 1859, the wards of the old Female Factory gaol were soon overcrowded and insecure, despite the practice of sending longer-term inmates to Sydney and extensions to the gaol were made in 1853 after a mass breakout attempt.[34] However, by 1857 the visiting surgeon was concerned that overcrowding, tropical heat and lack of ventilation would lead to an outbreak of gaol fever. Designs were drawn up for a new gaol in 1857 by the Clerk of Works and architect Charles Tiffin. After Queensland separated from New South Wales in December 1859, the first public building in the new state was Petrie Terrace gaol, which was constructed in 1860.[35]

Calls to improve public hygiene in the tropical heat also saw the increasing popularity of public bathing. The first swimming enclosures were built in Queensland during the 1840s, with Brisbane's first public baths built on the banks of the river in 1856. Initially used for bathing and later recreational swimming, floating and fixed baths, in-ground pools and beachside swimming enclosures supported the growing popularity of recreational and competitive swimming among male settlers from the 1860s. It would not be until early1903 that the first Ladies Swimming Club was formed in Brisbane and nearly a year later when women were able to access segregated seaside swimming session at Sandgate baths.[36]

A boom of migration from Europe into Queensland and increasing incursion of settlers into Aboriginal lands during the late nineteenth century saw a rise in frontier conflicts and arrests, which meant that Petrie Terrace gaol was soon full and the British practice of locking prisoners into unseaworthy ships was required. By 1864, male prisoners were secured in a hulk moored at the mouth of the Brisbane River.[37] At this time in Moreton Bay, the highly profitable commercial slaughter of dugong depended on the tracking, hunting and seafaring prowess of Quandamooka Aboriginal people.[38] From the mid-1850s, St Helena Island was a base for dugong processing, with the netting process attracting sharks: 'During the boiling session, numbers of sharks lurked about the nets, and while feeding upon the entrapped Dugong, frequently became entangled in the nets themselves.'[39]

For migrants settling in Queensland, sharks were one of many new threats associated with living in the tropics. By-products of dugong processing at St Helena and Amity Point likely increased sharks' activity in these areas. Booming immigrant populations also meant more bathers and human waste in the Brisbane River. Reports of fatal shark attacks began to filter into the mainstream press during the 1860s, increasing European awareness and fear of sharks like the Tiger Shark in the region (Figure 2).

In December 1862, under the heading, 'A Melancholy Occurrence. – Caution to bathers', it was reported in the *Courier* newspaper that an Aboriginal boy had been taken in the Brisbane River on the bank opposite the racecourse trying to retrieve an injured bird:

> A black boy ... jumped in after it; when about thirty yards from it he saw a large shark. He immediately turned round and dived for the shore, but the shark still pursued him. He dived three times, but upon his rising the third time the shark was seen to turn upon his belly and seize the boy, who gave one scream and disappeared ... it may act as a warning to many who now bathe in the river.[40]

In 1889, the *Brisbane Courier* reported an event that occurred twenty-six years earlier when two sharks killed a new settler to Moreton Bay in April 1863. It described how a party of fifteen immigrants had been separated from their clipper, *The Queen of the Colonies*, after burying a Mrs Barnsfield on Moreton Island who had died within sight of land. Shipwrecked near what is now known as Caloundra and without provisions, the castaways unsuccessfully tried to relaunch their boat. During this attempt, 'Mr Barnsfield ... was seized and devoured by two sharks before their eyes'.[41]

Boats were the main form of transport, with migrants arriving in Moreton Bay after long sea voyages from Europe and the Pacific Islands. Crowded conditions on these vessels meant many arrivals were sickly. Some, like Mrs Barnsfield, died in

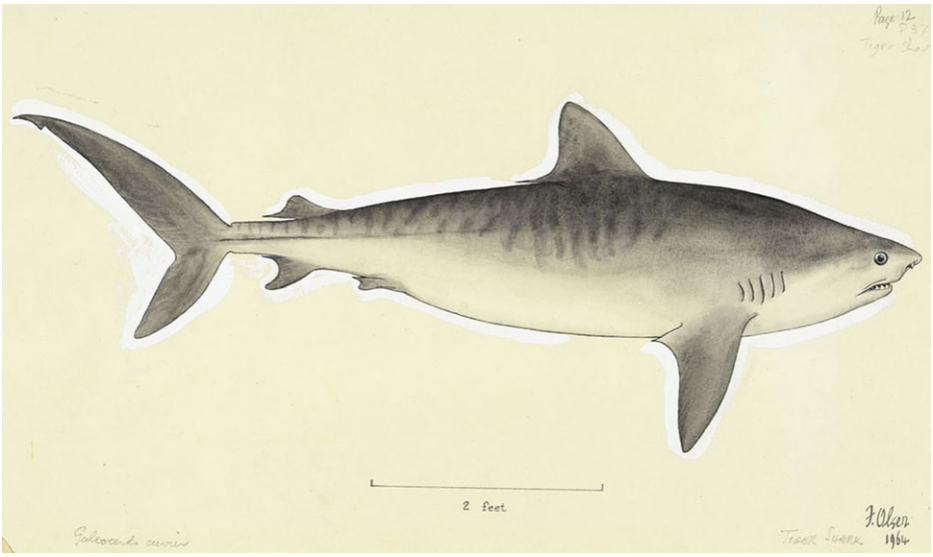

Figure 2

Tiger Shark, Galeocerdo cuvieri. Black and white drawing, Frank Olsen 1965. Queensland State Archives, Item ID 792189, Series ID: 4519. http://www.archivessearch.qld.gov.au/Search/ItemSearchResults.aspx?SeriesId=4519&SeriesTitle=Paintings+and+Drawings+by+Frank+Olsen.

transit while others brought contagious diseases.[42] The colonial response was to set up quarantine stations, detaining migrants on islands that were removed from the main settlement and where medical doctors checked their health. Dunwich on Stradbroke Island initially served this role, but a significant typhoid outbreak in 1850 meant another location was required.[43] St Helena Island was used for quarantining arrivals from 1862 and by 1865 plans were made to build some timber structures on the island. Surveyor H.C. Rawnsley located a lagoon and collected water samples from the 'Native Wells', while Colonial Architect Charles Tiffin designed a simple set of timber-framed and timber-clad buildings.[44] Thirty prisoners from the hulk *Proserpine* began clearing the island of trees and building Tiffin's design after rowing back and forth each day in a whaleboat from their hulk.[45] Two prisoners managed to escape in the process of construction, and as prisoner numbers continued to grow in Queensland, it was decided to convert the quarantine station into a prison. Tiffin worked on the redesign, enclosing structures in a stockade, before prisoners were moved from the hulk and held permanently on the island from 1866.

Securing the perimeter

On 14 May 1867, St Helena Island was proclaimed a penal settlement. The first few years were dedicated to building two cell blocks, a kitchen, bakehouse, hospital, underground water tanks, boathouse, storehouse, jetty and Superintendents home and stables (Figure 3). Beach rock was mined and used to construct buildings and the western causeway, which served as the point of entry to the island.

Figure 3
Building Ruin from Penal Establishment, St Helena Island, Moreton Bay. Image: Cathy Keys, 21 February 2020.

A fear of human-eating sharks complemented the security of the penal establishment, reflecting a longer colonial practice of using sharks to control captive populations. For example, Marcus Rediker's research on the role of sharks in the Atlantic slave trade reveals that colonial agents leveraged a fear of human eating sharks 'as an integral part of a system of terror' to create social discipline among both sailors and slaves.[46] A similar system of terror was employed on St Helena Island. The idea that escapees from the island who were able to avoid drowning and swim the significant distances to land would eventually have to take their chances against circling sharks was perpetrated by officials and linked to the rare reporting of fatal shark attacks appearing in the media. This press coverage was infrequent but sensational, with reporting on the fatal shark attack on Alexey Drury, a twelve-year-old boy swimming in the Brisbane River at Petrie Bight in 1880, including a blow-by-blow account of the efforts of his younger

Figure 4

On the beach at Torquay at the swimming enclosure, ca 1932, Murray's Studios, State Library of Queensland, http://hdl.handle.net/10462/deriv/17079.

brother and three other young friends to get him away from the shark and back to shore for medical help.[47] Lacoon, an eighteen-year-old South Sea Islander washed overboard near Bribie Island in 1886, was reported in *The Brisbane Courier* to have been 'dragged under by a shark'.[48] C. Gregory, a recreational sailor boating in Moreton Bay in late 1890, disappeared after he and three companions were forced to swim to shore after a squall sunk their boat, 'and it is supposed that he was seized by a shark, as several were seen in the vicinity'.[49] John Thompson, a boy bathing in the Brisbane River in 1901, 'was seized by a shark, and had his thigh torn away. He bled to death.'[50] These attacks were not confined to Moreton Bay and the Brisbane River. William Bartlett 'was attacked by a large shark, which tore his right leg in a shocking manner' as he swam in the Logan River in 1903[51] and George Grant, a crew member from a steamship, 'appeared to have been seized by a shark' while retrieving his hat, 'which had blown overboard' at Brisbane in 1904.[52] Despite these fatalities, the tropical conditions made swimming increasingly attractive.

Seaside destinations and sea bathing were linked to tourism and ideas about health and wellbeing with the growing settlement of Redcliffe advertised as a 'sanatorium for the sick'.[53] Shark-proof swimming enclosures (kiosks and dressing rooms) were an architectural feature of many popular Queensland beaches from the 1880s and 1890s. In Moreton Bay, at places like Sandgate and Redcliffe, permanent swimming enclosures were built with timber-like fences alongside piers, jetties and promenades.[54] Sited in the highly transitory tidal wave zone and experiencing corrosive marine conditions, their timber walls were prone to decay and destruction. Over time, these swimming areas were replaced and enlarged, and their physical walls replaced with timber pylons and shark-proof fencing (see Figure 4).[55] Shark-proof swimming enclosures using this netting technique continue to be built and maintained at public beaches in Queensland, such as one at Amity Point on

Northern Stradbroke Island near where the last fatal shark attack in Moreton Bay occurred in 2006.[56]

Returning to St Helena, by the 1900s the penal establishment held over 300 prisoners. Those with privileges were permitted to swim in the sea once week 'at their own risk'.[57] Guards supervised their activities day and night to ensure no one escaped. Stories circulated that sharks were fed deliberately to encourage their presence around the island to prevent escapes.[58] Jarvis Finger found no evidence to suggest sharks were fed on the island as a deterrent or any documented proof that escaped prisoners were taken by sharks. However, he argued that a fear of shark attacks was promoted by authorities and the press from the earliest days of the maximum-security penal establishment. For example, an early escape attempt was accompanied by the report that 'the men had gone into the water about two feet when they found the sharks so numerous that they had to refrain' and an 1869 report stated:

> A very efficient police around the island, in the shape of sharks, which render it next to impossible for anyone to escape the island to the mainland by swimming. Several prisoners have attempted to escape that way but, when they saw the immense number of sharks that were swimming about, they were glad to return, with haste, to the island.

Finger also found this idea still being promoted in 1914, with a report stating that 'If the escapee had only thought of the sharks, he would not have made the attempt to escape, and the marvel is that he was not eaten.'[59]

Kitikir – Burketown Peter

Although St Helena Island held some of the state's worst felons, it was considered a model prison – the isolation, high levels of security and discipline and good management resulted in its self-sufficiency and profitability. The island operated as a prison for 65 years, with the last prisoner leaving the island in 1932. Escapes were few, with some reports highlighting the threat of sharks: 'One of the escaping inmates was reportedly taken by sharks, an Aboriginal man known to his community on Mornington Island as Kitikir, but to the Queensland press as "Burketown Peter"'.[60] Transported down to St Helena and imprisoned for the murder of a missionary, the press surrounding Kitikir's escape was sensational, first reporting his swimming escape:

> Still at Large. The whereabouts of the [A]boriginal Burketown Peter, who disappeared from the St Helena Prison on Sunday, has not yet been discovered ... It is not improbable that the blackfellow, accustomed to the Gulf country and familiar with phases of life, is an accomplished swimmer, and that he has attempted to reach either Mud or Green Island, though the result of the police search would seem to disfavor this theory. These waters are reputed to be infested with sharks, but the blacks of the Far North are not unfamiliar with the task of fighting such an enemy, from which they are also less liable to attack than white men.[61]

Newspaper reports at the time suggested his death was from drowning and shark attack:

> Burketown Peter, a full-blooded [A]boriginal, escaped from his cell in January 1921, and put to sea in a raft of planks. He was seen and pursued. Diving from the raft, he did not return to the surface and was probably taken by sharks.[62]

However, his cause of death remains uncertain, with later reports suggest that Kitikir had been shot while escaping, with the 'son of a former warder on the island, cryptically, perhaps knowingly, stating: "I think he might have been despatched by other means".'[63]

Shark-proof swimming enclosure

St Helena Island housed prisoners and a community of prison wardens. It was during the reign of St Helena Island Penal Establishment's fifth Superintendent, John Alexander MacDonald, that a shark-proof swimming enclosure and dressing shed for off-duty wardens was constructed alongside the wharf in 1916.[64] Unlike the large public swimming enclosures built of timber piles found along the Queensland coastline, the shark-proof swimming enclosure at St Helena Penal Establishment was made with fixed walls constructed from railway lines driven vertically into the sand with spaces between each pile to allow the flow of seawater. It was approximately 40 x 20 feet (12.1 x 6.1 metres) in size and was built during a period when a range of recreational facilities were being built on the island for warders, including a cricket pitch and tennis court.[65] It was used only for the recreational swimming of off-duty prison warders.[66] While providing a recreational swimming place for warders, the enclosure visually reinforced to prisoners and visitors the administration's narrative that the waters around St Helena were full of human-eating sharks.

The swimming enclosure was accompanied by a timber dressing shed and, despite the tragic death of a warder who broke his neck diving into the pool at low tide at night in December 1917, it was very popular with off-duty warders.[67] For years after the penal establishment closed, this swimming enclosure was central to thwarted development plans seeking to create a health resort or tourist destination in Moreton Bay.[68] It is still visible at the end of the ruins of the original causeway beside the National Park arrival jetty. Sharks are also still observed around St Helena Island, with National Parks Rangers witnessing large numbers from time to time – especially off the northern tip where they avoid swimming.[69] St Helena's shark-proof swimming enclosure is a rare and valuable heritage asset, for despite being linked to memories of coastal holidays and evidenced in family and state photographic collections, there is little in the public record about the history, design and construction of fixed shark-proof swimming enclosures in Queensland (Figure 5).

This research has shown that in terms of sharing the sub-tropical waters of Moreton Bay with local sharks, quite different cultural approaches existed. As skilled swimmers, the Quandamooka people coexisted with sharks, swimming among them and catching and eating small species. In contrast, new colonial arrivals were unfamiliar with sharks, fearing their attack. From the earliest days of European settlement, an inability of migrants to swim and a fear of sharks were leveraged to detain migrants to Moreton Bay on St Helena Island, briefly as a quarantine station and later as a penal establishment. European settlement activities likely increased shark numbers at densely populated sites and increased the chances of human–shark interaction. Rare cases of fatal shark attack were publicly shared,

Figure 5
Shark-proof swimming enclosure, St Helena Island, Moreton Bay. Image: Cathy Keys, 21 February 2020.

and sensational reporting paralleled the growth of public bathing facilities that used physical barriers to separate sharks from human swimmers. In 1916, at a time when recreational swimming was growing, a shark-proof swimming enclosure was built on St Helena to support the leisure activities of warders and visually reinforce a fear of sharks among detained prisoners. As beachside communities of Australia used shark nets and fencing to manage people's increased interactions and fear of sharks, St Helena Island's shark-proof swimming enclosure provides a rare surviving example of a permanent physical barrier in the tidal zone to contain swimmers. The swimming enclosure at St Helena is significant because it evidences an earlier period in our history when communities sought to balance a desire to swim with a fear of sharks.

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