For thousands of years Aboriginal people lived in the area around putalina / Oyster Cove. A quarry site near putalina is a continuing reminder of the strong ancestral connections to this area.

In the 1840s, a convict probation station was established in the putalina area for the convicts who worked around the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, south of Hobart. This closed in 1846 when its buildings became too dilapidated. At that time, 47 Aboriginal people were living at the Government settlement called Wybalenna on Flinders Island. Wybalenna was closed by Governor Denison in October 1847, and the Tasmanian Aboriginal people were removed to putalina.

Life at putalina

For several people, such as Trukanini and Myyungge, also known as Davy Bruny, son of Wurati, putalina was close to their Nununi home country which is also known as Bruny Island. Life at putalina was harsh, as conditions in the valley were often wet and cold and the buildings were in great need of repair. Weekly food supplies came by boat from Hobart and were often foul and inedible. Pastoralists on the surrounding farms regularly complained to the Government about the presence of Aboriginal people at the Station, and particularly their dogs. Aboriginal people at the Station were also seen as a curiosity and boats travelled from Hobart carrying passengers who were keen to observe Aboriginal people from a distance.

Aboriginal people lived at the ex-probation station, and sometimes away in the bush. Occasionally they visited the public house in nearby North West Bay. They also hunted, performed ceremonies and continued making traditional cultural items.

By 1858, only ten women and five men survived. Two of these men were Terminope (Augustus) and Walter Arthur, who joined whaling ships that were based out of Hobart. They were sometimes gone from putalina for months at a time. Arthur even employed a white labourer to tend to his vegetable garden.

Other survivors included Dray who, with two other women in 1860, travelled for several weeks to visit...
their home country at Port Davey on the south coast to see if any of their people were still there. The local Church of England clergyman, Rev. Edward Freeman, also visited once a month to conduct prayer book services, but most Aboriginal people left for the bush during these visits.

One woman, Fanny Cochrane, gained permission from Parliament to marry William Smith. They were married in Hobart in October 1854. For a few months they lived in other parts of Tasmania including running a boarding house in Liverpool Street Hobart before they moved to Nicholls Rivulet, about nine kilometres west of putalina. Fanny received a land grant and a pension in lieu of her station rations.

Fanny regularly hosted people from the station including her mother, Tanganutara, and her brother, Adam. Two other Aboriginal women, Pengenoburric (Bessy Clark) and Mary Ann, later married local white men but they were not permitted to leave the putalina station.

The station effectively closed in 1862. From this time, Trukanini lived with the Station Superintendent and Mrs. Dandridge in Hobart until she died in 1876. The surgeon, William Crowther, infamously raided the graves at putalina and removed skeletal remains of many Aboriginal people.

For most of the next 100 years, parts of the former station area was proclaimed as a Historic Site. Despite strong opposition, the Aboriginal community reoccupied the site on 16 January 1984.

In May 1985, ancestral remains from the Crowther Collection were returned to the Aboriginal community. Further successful campaigns resulted in the return of the remains of other ancestors, most of which were cremated at putalina. A building was later erected for a caretaker of putalina, and a larger hut was named in honour of Aboriginal community Elder, Morgan Mansell. Each year since occupying the putalina site, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation has held an annual music and cultural festival.

In 1995, the State Government formally handed the title of Oyster Cove to the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania. The site continues to be managed by the Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation. Today, the putalina festival attracts hundreds of people each January to enjoy local and interstate musicians, cultural activities and interactions with extended family and community.

J.W. Beattie, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-140385483

Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania
Natural and Cultural Heritage Division
Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment
GPO Box 44 Hobart TAS 7001

Telephone: 1300 487 045 email: aboriginal@heritage.tas.gov.au
www.aboriginalheritage.tas.gov.au

This publication may be of assistance to you but the State of Tasmania and its employees do not accept responsibility for the accuracy, completeness, or relevance to the user’s purposes of the information and therefore, disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from relying on any information in this publication.