The Significance of Wrest Point in Tasmania’s Tourism and Hospitality Industry.

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ABSTRACT
As a study in tourism and hospitality, Wrest Point provides an opportunity to explore one of the most unique hotels in the world. Since 1939, it has been an industry leader in terms of product innovation and corporate success. Given the vagaries of the industry, it is unusual for any hotel to retain its appeal with successive generations; to remain a city’s premier hotel for 70 years is a rarity indeed. The truly remarkable aspect of Wrest Point however, is its role in the economic and social development of its host community. Almost every aspect of today’s tourism and hospitality industry on which Tasmania is so dependant can be traced to Wrest Point. In the form of a longitudinal case study, this paper follows the evolution of Wrest Point from its infamy as the location of the Hobart gibbet, through the war years and Australia’s first casino, to its role as one of Tasmania’s most influential economic catalyst.
INTRODUCTION

It is not unusual for a significant portion of an area's tourism and hospitality industry to have resulted from the vision and enterprise of a particular individual; for example, Billy Butlin in the seaside towns of UK and Ireland, Andrew Bruce Small in Southern Queensland's Gold Coast, and Stanley Ho in Macau (Bygone Butlins, 2007; Gold Coast History, 2008; Longhurst, 2002; Stanley Ho, 2009; Seaside History, n.d.). It is rare however, for a region's tourism and hospitality sector to effectively owe its foundation and continued success to one establishment. This is particularly the case when that industry contributes $1.024 billion annually and accounts for 4.9 per cent of Gross State Product in its host economy (Centre for Economics & Policy, 2008). It is noteworthy therefore, that, whilst Wrest Point is remembered as Australia's first legal casino, its 70 year role in Tasmania's economic and social development has not been explored in depth in Australian tourism literature.

Given the critical position of tourism and hospitality in Tasmania, it is not surprising that the history and importance of the industry is well documented. It is also not surprising that Wrest Point features, in varying degrees and contexts, in most of that literature. Invariably, however, contemplation of Wrest Point is confined to the interval between 1968 and 1978 – the years during which the casino was conceived and established, and when the complex was the focal point of Australian entertainment (see, for example, Hall, 2007). Accordingly, the literature not only affords the impression that Wrest Point virtually 'came and went' within a decade, but it fails to account for its impact on the State before or after that period.

This paper therefore, has four aims. Firstly, it provides a brief summary of the site of Wrest Point since European settlement. Secondly, it seeks to record the biography of the Wrest Point hotel across three distinct periods of its development and operation. Thirdly, it seeks to link the evolution of the hotel with the changing economic and social environment of Tasmania. Fourthly, it endeavours to explore the extraordinary contribution which Wrest Point has made to the State's second most important industry. In so doing, the paper hopes to identify the factors which have made Wrest Point a Tasmanian icon since 1939.

FROM GALLOWS TO GRANDEUR

The modern history of the spit of land now known as Wrest Point commenced four years after the settlement of Hobart. In 1808, emancipated convict Thomas Chaffey received a grant of land which included a small promontory on the River Derwent. On that point he built a stringybark hut (Goc, 1997; Schaffer & McKay, 1992). Life for the Chaffeys must have been irksome. In about 1820, the Hobart Town gibbet was relocated to Chaffey's Point and the family had to endure corpses dangling in front of their home (Hudspeth, et
Further, the stench of a whaling station about 200 metres to the south permeated the air. In 1939, Thomas’ son, William, established an inn on the property which he named Traveller’s Rest (Talbot, n.d.).

In 1845, Thomas sold the point to hardware merchant and hotelier David Dunkley for £300. Dunkley built a substantial home on the point, and named the property St. Helena. Dunkley died in 1860, and St. Helena was administered by his estate until 1898 when property agent George Robertson purchased it for £2,200. Robertson built an impressive Federation home on the site (Crisp, 2009; Norman, 1988).

The Robertsons moved to Sydney in 1928, and the property was sold to Guy and Ina Lucas for £9,000. The Lucas’ demolished the Robertson house and replaced it with an impressive gabled mansion. Guy died prior to the completion of the home and, although she occupied it, Ina could not settle, and moved to London in 1934. Guy’s family home in England was Wrest Park; in honour of this, Ina re-named the property Wrest Point when Guy died (Bailey, 2008; Goc, 1997).

**WREST POINT RIVIERA HOTEL**

The Lucas mansion was sold to Arthur Drysdale for £12,500 ($25,000) in 1935. Drysdale was an entrepreneur whose business life commenced when, at the age of 13, he started buying and selling calves. At 17, he bought a butcher’s cart and travelled Tasmania’s channel district selling meat. Two years later, he purchased a run-down butchery in Dover, and built it into a prosperous business. He then opened a butchery in North Hobart, followed by another in the City. Realising the advantages of eliminating the ‘middle man’, Drysdale began to acquire farms to supply his shops. He also held Hobart’s Ford franchise between 1928 and 1933 (Ely & Beechey, 1996; The Mercury, 1971, 1973).

**Tourism and hospitality in Tasmania prior to World War II**

Prior to the cessation of transportation in 1853, Van Diemen’s Land was not particularly interested in tourism. Anxious to dispel the “hated stain” (Reynolds, 1969) of a society largely built on Britain’s outcasts, the colony set about to build respectability and replicate England’s architecture, institutions, gardens and recreational activities. In an effort to attract British capital and skilled workers, the government promoted the island as essentially ‘English’ (Crowley, 1954). In this period, the hospitality trade was limited to coaching inns along the main roads and taverns in urban areas; the exception being a handful of more ‘elegant’ gracious city hotels such The Imperial and Hadley’s Orient (1834, originally Webb’s) in Hobart and The Brisbane (1824, originally the Elphin Arms) and The Cornwall (1824) in Launceston (Alexander, 2005; Dennison, 2008; Evans, 2005; The Heritage Highway Region, 2009; Hyde & Smith, 2005). Similar to others in Australia
at the time, Tasmania’s hotels were built and operated according to British style and convention (Davidson & Spearritt, 2000).

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw an emerging recognition of Tasmania’s attributes. In Britain, the industrial revolution had engendered polluted cities, urban poverty and workers alienated from themselves, each other, and nature. People began to seek a return to unspoiled landscapes and low-density living (Ashton, 1997; Stearns, 2007). Those contemplating emigration were attracted to Tasmania’s agricultural potential, clean air, beautiful scenery, and mild climate, plus the added bonus of being ‘English’. Hence began decades of settlement in Tasmania by people from the British Isles.

At this time, roads were extending further into virgin regions, steamers were plying Bass Strait and the rail system was steadily linking settled areas. On the hospitality front, better quality hotels were being established in regional areas. Embryonic moves were made to establish Tasmania as a tourist destination, including the publication of tourist guidebooks (Thomas, 1869; Walch’s Tasmanian Guide Book, 1871), the staging of expositions, and the opening of tourist associations. In the years following the federation of Australia, tourism promotion became increasingly dynamic and economically focussed. In 1914, the Government established the Tasmanian Government Tourist and Information Bureau (TGTIB), an institution which remains to date as Tourism Tasmania (Davidson & Spearritt, 2000; Hutton & Connors, 1999; Walker, 2006).

The transplantation of English recreational activities in the Victorian era is evident in such bodies as the Midland Hunt Club and the Royal (Real) Tennis Club, both of which still operate. In similar vein, salmon were introduced in the anticipation of establishing stream fishing in Tasmania (Salmon Ponds and the Museum of Trout Fishing, 2009; Sheridan, 2005b). Supported by the government, and aided by the enhancement of waterways by hydro-electricity developments, Tasmania’s inland fishing was attracting thousands of anglers from around the world each year by the 1930s (As Time Goes By, 1993; Davidson & Spearritt, 2000).

Other sectors of the economy were also contributing to Tasmanian tourism. The seasonal nature of many industries attracted labourers from the mainland (who would generally spend some time ‘sightseeing’), and the Cradle Mountain track became popular with recreational trekkers from across Australia (As Time Goes By, 1993). Commencing in 1935, thousands of trees were planted between Hobart and Launceston in “a grand concept to beautify Tasmania’s rural landscape so visitors would see the island as a ‘veritable paradise’” (Sheridan, 2005a: 277).
In the depth of the global depression, a new government was elected in 1934 on an agenda of progress and reform. Premier Albert Ogilvie’s many economic and social initiatives included a determined drive to promote Tasmania’s tourism potential; marketing campaigns were commenced, the Tasmanian Government Tourist Bureau (TGTB) opened offices in Perth and Newcastle, shipping lines were persuaded to include Tasmania on their itinerary, the road to Mount Wellington’s pinnacle was constructed, and the ageing steamship Loongana was replaced with the Taroona on the Melbourne-Launceston route (Walker, 2008). With tourism receipts exceeding £200,000 for the year ended 30 June 1939, the Premier’s dream was becoming a reality (Walker, 2008).

Ogilvie’s vision for tourism was not dependent entirely upon government initiatives; he expected private enterprise to take its part. A month before he died on 10 June 1939, at a press conference in Launceston, Ogilvie stated that Tasmanians “had met great difficulties in the development of the industry, particularly in regard to shipping and hotel accommodation’, but intimated that all these difficulties were beginning to be overcome” (The Examiner, cited in Walker, 2008: 382).

Hotel accommodation for tourists was indeed a difficulty by the 1930s. The coaching inns had all but disappeared, the drinking taverns often had ‘rooms’ but were generally unsuitable for tourists, and boarding houses attracted mainly the budget conscious or abstemious visitor. The only real options were the city hotels. Although these had been progressively renovated, they were, nonetheless, a century old, and continued to trade on traditions of quiet quality and old-style comforts. Furthermore, they were ‘hemmed in’ by surrounding buildings, had inadequate garaging, and offered few recreational amenities beyond a billiard room. Obsolete in both character and facilities, they were a reflection of the ‘Englishness’ which had once typified Tasmanian tourism. The change which Ogilvie sought was crucial; the social and economic influences of the Empire were being supplanted by views and expectations born of the ‘Flapper’ era.

The last word in style and modernity
Whilst it was apparent that the progress of Tasmania’s tourism industry depended, in large measure, on the modernisation of the hospitality sector, the source and nature of that modernisation did not crystallise until Arthur Drysdale decided to build a hotel on the site of the Lucas mansion. Drysdale’s announcement that he would “build Australia’s finest hotel” (The Mercury, 1973) aligned perfectly with official policy and he received strong government support (Farmer, 2006; White, 2009). The complex he envisioned was in complete contrast to the conservative city hotels to which Tasmanians, indeed Australians, were accustomed. In fact, Wrest Point would be more than a hotel, it would be a resort designed to provide a total holiday experience.
When complete, Drysdale’s hotel was the ultimate in up-to-date luxury for Australia in 1939. Its P&O architectural style was intended to capture “... the feel of an imposing luxury liner berthed off the sparkling waters of the Derwent River” (Goc, 1997: 320). Standing in expansive gardens surrounded by Hobart harbour, the amenities included accommodation for 85 guests in single rooms, double rooms or suites, a ballroom featuring a huge ‘perfectly sprung’ Myrtle dance floor and panoramic windows on three sides, the main dining room, a private dining room in which guests could entertain friends or clients, three bars, an Olympic standard salt-water swimming pool, tennis courts, a private jetty, garaging facilities, and park-like gardens. The furniture was custom built, and services included dancing every evening except Sunday (featuring the hotel’s own orchestra), excursions on the hotel’s yacht, and fine cuisine (Advertising Brochure, n.d.; Crisp, 2009; Mercury, 1939; White, 2009). The Wrest Point Riviera Hotel opened to much fanfare on 5 December 1939.

The impact of Wrest Point Riviera Hotel
Although Drysdale knew his venture had risks, he had not bargained for war. During the hotel’s planning and construction stages, Nazi Germany was becoming an increasing menace to stability in Europe. By the time it opened, Australia was committed to the Allied cause. The State’s population began to dwindle as young men and women enlisted, and rationing caused shortages of most goods. Further, overseas travel was severely restricted, denying Wrest Point of the international guests it had hoped to attract.

Ever the master of vertical integration, Drysdale provedored the hotel from his Midlands properties. Unexpectedly, the ban on international travel worked in Wrest Point’s favour; mainland people, unable to journey overseas, came to Hobart now it had the country’s most modern luxury hotel. It was Japan however, which ultimately reversed the hotel’s fortunes. The war in the Pacific enabled Australian service personnel to take furlough at ‘home’ and, more importantly, Australia became host to the USA armed forces. Soldiers, sailors and airmen flocked to Hobart. Remembering those days, White (2009) noted: “The servicemen really liked Wrest Point, especially the Americans ... there was nowhere much else in Australia to go; a few nice hotels in Sydney and Melbourne, but that was about it”. Bidencope (2008) also recalled that “During the war, the Americans were here ... with all their money ...”.

Perhaps Wrest Point’s most enduring contribution to Tasmania was its cuisine. Until that time, restaurants served predictable, ‘British’ food. Wrest Point introduced new flavours, styles of food, and levels of service which would change Tasmanian diners’ expectations forever. Those who dined at Wrest Point in those days recall:
There were few places to go in Hobart, but 'The Point' was there for big celebrations. The food was always better, the service was always better and the band was always better. The waiters in black, with a white napkin hanging on their arm (Round, 2009).

... there were nice restaurants around. I grew up in Launceston, and Elvie Quigley [Proprietress, Brisbane Hotel] always kept a very good table. But there was little variation; really just meat and vegetables, hearty puddings, and so forth. At Wrest Point, the food was different; smaller serves, but lots of courses (Andrewartha, 2009).

The hotel manager was French, as was the chef. The food was superb, making Wrest Point the most exotic hotel in Australia. Arthur [Drysdale] bought lavishly when he could and he served French wine. ...we'd never had such food in Hobart as the things that this French chef produced. There were always seven courses for dinner, and you had just a little bit of each. You'd start with a few savouries with your drinks, then you'd have soup, the fish, then the entree followed by the main course, then dessert and another savoury (White, 2009).

We joked with Mr Drysdale that it was very poor service because we weren't getting our sweets until 11 o'clock ... in those days in Hobart, you went out, had your meal and went home. There were afternoon teas in the lounge ... silver service ... very up-market (Bidencope, 2008).

Wrest Point not only survived the war, it triumphed. In 6 years, it had established an enviable reputation - locally, nationally, and internationally — which would serve it very well for years to come. In the wider context, it had transformed the State's tourist and social landscape. Tasmania was now 'known', and its people had a broader view of the world and of themselves. In the years following the war, Wrest Point remained the hotel in Tasmania, its standing no doubt enhanced by its impressive guest list which included Noel Coward, Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh, Eileen Joyce, Rod Laver, Ken Rosewall, Don Bradman, Helen Keller and Robert Menzies. It was also the Hobart home for many Sydney-Hobart yachtsmen.
The winds of change
Wrest Point’s popularity continued after the war. As one patron noted “After years in my WRAF uniform, I wanted to get back into evening clothes and ballgowns, and ‘The Point’ was about the only place to wear them” (Round, 2009). In 1947, Drysdale sold the property to Australian National Hotels (ANH), a subsidiary of Federal Hotels (now the Federal Group). Initially, corporate ownership and management wrought little change but, as time progressed, it became evident that Wrest Point had to ‘move with the times’. The 1950s saw mass immigration, industrial expansion, a more prosperous middle-class, and a renewed focus on family; Wrest Point’s sophistication and prices did not fit this emerging demographic. In response, ANH opened a travel bureau in the foyer, included the hotel in ‘packaged’ itineraries, and built a new accommodation wing featuring self-contained ‘motel-style’ rooms (Crisp, 2009a; 2009b).

In 1956, Federal’s chairman R. R. (Ray) Markillie, raised the idea of opening a casino at Wrest Point with the Tasmanian Government. Premier Eric Reece believed that the political climate was not receptive to the notion, but did not dismiss it outright (Sutton, 1992). For various reasons, Markillie persisted. Firstly, Wrest Point had a reputation; its prestigious heritage aligned with the style and comfort expected in casinos. Secondly, the site lent itself to development; the beauty of the location was exceptional, and there was sufficient land for expansion. Thirdly, the 20 year old hotel was due for modernisation. Fourthly, the winter trade was slow. Of this, Haddad noted “Wrest Point was the same as every other tourism place in Tasmania – five months of reasonably good business, and seven months of practically no business” (Wrest Point – About Us, 2007).

In 1967, Federal again approached the Government. Aware of the sensitivity of issue, Reece was cautious but supportive. Federal’s submission, titled A Plan for the Establishment of a Casino at Wrest Point Riviera Hotel, presented arguments in support of the proposal, as well as detailing the operation and management of the casino, and its relationship with the government.

The timing of the proposal was a key element in its success. Australia’s economic reliance on the primary and secondary sectors was beginning to decline, and recognition of the potential value of service industries was emerging. This was particularly the case in Tasmania where hydro-industrialisation, which had been the mainstay of the State’s prosperity for decades (Davis, 1982), was losing momentum due to oversupply, high levels of debt, and environmental concerns (Jones, 1972; McKenry, 1972). With electoral stocks falling, and aware that continued reliance on the hydro-industrial economy was unsustainable, Reece suggested to Cabinet in February 1968 that “tourism, based on the development of an international hotel-casino, might be a way out of the
mire ... much to his surprise Cabinet accepted the proposal unanimously” (Sutton, 1992: 41).

The Australian Institute for Gambling Research (1999: 121) emphasises the importance of Federal’s timing in the Government’s willingness to host Australia’s first legal casino:

It was hoped that the casino development would solve two problems confronting Tasmania: address deteriorating economic conditions by strengthening tourism; and bolster state finances which were disadvantaged by a relatively low gambling tax structure.

Acceptance of private sector involvement in the major forms of Tasmanian gambling (horseracing and Tattersall’s lotteries), and limited options for economic development, provided a congenial environment for the radical commercial proposal that a Tasmanian casino would stimulate economic growth and employment.

Further impetus may have resulted from suggestions that a casino was being mooted for Queensland’s Gold Coast (The Examiner, 1968).

Once news of the plan became public, Tasmania became divided over the virtues and vices of casinos. With divisions along political, parochial and religious lines, Reece sent the matter to referendum, with the poll conducted on 14 December 1968. The ‘yes’ vote prevailed by a narrow margin.

**WREST POINT HOTEL-CASINO**

Construction officially commenced on the new complex in October 1970, and continued for two years. When complete, the hotel-casino incorporated a 21 storey tower with 197 bedrooms topped by a revolving restaurant, a gaming room catering for 300 people, a 350 seat theatre-restaurant designed to host international shows, a convention centre for up to 1,000 delegates, a 24 hour coffee shop, indoor pool, tennis courts, squash courts, numerous bars and a 600 vehicle car park. Including the tower and the original wings, the hotel’s accommodation capacity was 650 beds (Federal Hotels, 1973; Richardson, 1999).

Ludeke (2006) reports that $1,000,000 was allocated for the promotion of the casino and Tasmania. He reports that the campaign was “the biggest single sales promotion drive undertaken by an accommodation group in Australia to this point. Publicity was launched in Australia, New Zealand and overseas centres... (p. 148). The opening was scheduled for 10 February 1973, and the casino commenced operations the following day.

The community found itself in an interesting position. Geographically isolated and essentially conservative, Tasmania was now thrust into the spotlight as host to Australia’s most progressive and glamorous establishment. There was a sense of pride, but also one of hesitance and scepticism. 2,000 patrons visited on the first day, but
activities at the tables was like “amateur night at the local hotel” as people, unfamiliar with table gaming, “placed bets with one hand, while the other held a book of instructions” (Sunday Mail, 1973: 2). Former croupier, Honey Bacon recalled “People were very reluctant to have casino staff either renting their properties or living next to them ... on the other hand, there was a wonderful group of people who welcomed us (cited in Ludeke, 2006: 160).

Wrest Point Riviera Hotel had been host to many distinguished people in the 1940s and 1950s. History was now repeating itself; the casino attracted contemporary Australian and international luminaries, including Queen Elizabeth II, the Prince and Princess of Wales, Jerry Lewis, Peter Allen, Johnny Cash, Eartha Kitt, Shirley Bassey and Peter Ustinov. As the casino’s first manager reflected “In a way, it was surreal because Wrest point was a small island of sophistication in a city that was little more than a country town” (Hurley, cited in Ludeke, 2006: 161).

The Impact of Wrest Point Hotel-Casino
The advent of Wrest-Point Hotel-Casino provided an important stimulus for the Tasmanian tourism industry which was in need of greater numbers of interstate and overseas visitors (Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, 2005). “In the first year after its opening in 1973, visitor arrivals to the state rose by 40 per cent” (The Mercury, 2003:2). By 1978, Wrest Point had hosted more than 5 million visitors and over 100 conventions. In 1981 the Minister for Tourism argued that the ‘Hotel-Casino has been the driving force for expansion in the tourism industry...[that] had a more dramatic impact on the community than any other single thing in Tasmania.’ (Barnard, cited in Corporate Communications, 1981:6) “The repercussions on the Tasmanian economy were, and remain, far reaching. Increased tourism translated to increased employment across the board, not just in the hospitality industry but all industries providing goods and services” (Australian Jewish News, 1993:2). Tasmania had recaptured its competitive advantage over other Australian states (McMillen, 1988). It also attracted visitors all year round thereby reducing the traditional seasonality problems which plagued all facets of the State’s tourism and hospitality sector.

In terms of entertainment, Wrest-Point Hotel Casino became Australia’s premier venue for international performers. Among those who appeared in the showroom were Jerry Lewis, Tom Jones, Shirley Bassey, Leslie Uggams, Dame Vera Lynn, Neil Sedaka, Sir Cliff Richard, Shari Lewis, Sir Harry Secombe, Barry Humphries, Danny LaRue, Rolf Harris, and Billy Connolly.

The success of Wrest Point Hotel-Casino, plus the associated growth in the State’s hospitality industry, ushered in a new approach to hospitality education in Tasmania. The School of Hospitality had been established in 1963, and located within the Hobart
Technical College. In 1975, two years after the opening of the casino, it was re-located to a restaurant complex in Collins Street, Hobart because the School “was expanding at a phenomenal rate” (Hudspeth 1992: 20). Fittingly, the new complex for the School was located in Drysdale House, which was once the home of the founder of Wrest Point Riviera Hotel.

Being Australia’s first legal casino, Wrest Point played a pivotal role in the gaming industry at a national level because ‘Federal wrote casino rules that answered Australian concerns [about organised gambling]’ (Richardson 1999: 230); in time, these rules would be adopted by other Australian states. Thus Wrest Point continued Tasmania’s role as a leader in legal, private sector gaming¹ (South Australian Centre for Economics Studies - SACES, 2008).

Designed as a ‘total’ hospitality and entertainment complex, Wrest Point Hotel-Casino attracted people for a variety of reasons ... luxury accommodation, fine dining, international shows, business accommodation, gambling, and a base for wider touring. Accordingly, it is difficult to determine the specific contribution each aspect of the business has made to Tasmania’s economy. It seems doubtful however, that gaming, its most controversial dimension, has been the most significant. According to the SACES (2008), claims that the gambling industry contributes to economic growth or impacts negatively on traditional areas of spending cannot be substantiated. Further, it is uncertain whether gambling has any influence on trends in tourism to Tasmania as there is a lack of data on gambling related tourism. However, there is some evidence that money spent on gambling is a substitute for other local recreation and culture expenditure as there is an increased acceptance of gambling by the community (SACES, 2008).

And the winds of change blow again
During the years following the opening of the casino, Federal made further improvements to its property on the Derwent. The Conference Centre opened in 1984, and the Boardwalk followed in 1996. These were strategic moves designed to ensure the future of Wrest Point. Tasmania could not hold its monopoly on casinos forever and, in 1988 Australia’s second casino opened in Darwin. This had an immediate impact on Wrest Point; lack of economies of scale, Tasmania’s remote location, and a choice of gambling venues took their toll. As a consequence, the government reduced its share from casino revenues from 25% to 15% to produce additional income for Federal to invest in the modernisation of the Wrest Point operation and continue to attract tourists and their spending (McMillen, 1988).

¹ It was preceded by Tattersalls in 1897 and Tasmanian Lotteries in 1954.
Poker machines, originally excluded from Federal's Tasmanian properties by management choice and legislation, made their debut in 1997. The introduction of electronic gaming was important to the survival of Wrest Point in three ways. Firstly, having machines counteracted the loss of Tasmania's casino monopoly, noted above. Secondly, it catered to the changing tastes of the gambling public as technology replaced sophistication. Thirdly, the installation of machines in hotels and clubs did not pose a threat because all machines in the State are rented from Network Gaming, which is part of the Federal Group (Australian Institute for Gambling Research, 1999; Ludeke, 2006).

**WREST POINT TASMANIA**

Each phase of the hotel's evolution has been marked with a change of name. Wrest Point Riviera intimated the international accent which Drysdale imbued in 'Australia's finest hotel'. Wrest Point Hotel-Casino emphasised its incorporation of Australia's first legal casino. In the new millennium, the name Wrest Point Tasmania is indicative of its part in a wider hospitality and tourism experience offered by Federal.

As part of its Deed of Agreement with the Government, the Federal Group “is required to play an explicit role in terms of promoting and developing Tasmania as a tourism destination” (SACES, 2008: 144). Thus, in 2005, Federal adopted a new direction (eTravel Blackboard 2005b) and initiated a new marketing campaign using the Pure Tasmania brand. Pure Tasmania unites Federal’s accommodation properties (including Freycinet Lodge, Cradle Mountain Chateau, Strahan Village and the Henry Jones Art Hotel) as well as signature experiences such as West Coast Wilderness Railway and Gordon River Cruises (Tasmanian Convention Bureau, 2009). Emphasising all of the State’s attributes, Pure Tasmania is “a dynamic tourism brand that captures a world of unique Tasmanian experience” (Pure Tasmania, 2009: 1). The brand relies at least partly on the imagery presented by Tourism Tasmania ... a “refracted version of images developed in the nineteenth century: Tasmania’s scenic wonders (wilderness), fertility (food and wine) and English appeal (history)” (Walker, 2005: 365). Ultimately, Pure Tasmania seeks to attract new interstate and international audiences who are experience driven, discerning, and seeking unforgettable experiences (Pure Tasmania, 2009).

Pure Tasmania is now so well-recognised that it is sometimes misjudged as a Tourism Tasmania campaign (Downie 2006) or a government-sponsored brand. In 2008, the then tourism minister Paula Wriedt stated that it is often confused with the State’s brand, but that this would be fine as ‘we [Tasmanian government brand] can happily co-exist with the efforts that they [Federal] put into marketing’ (Tasmanian Government, 2008: 76).

The extent to which Pure Tasmania has contributed to the increase in numbers of tourists to Tasmania is unclear, as the global economic crisis or health related travel-
deterrents such as Swine Flu make it difficult to establish the already complex connection between marketing campaigns and tourism numbers. Notwithstanding, international tourism numbers to Tasmania are going against the Australian trend; between 2000 and 2008, "Tasmania has achieved the greatest level of international tourism growth across all States and Territories", with similar trends in interstate tourism between 2005 and 2007 (Tourism & Transport Forum 2009: 2).

At this point in time, Wrest Point has relinquished its primary role in Tasmania's tourism and hospitality industry; it now takes its place alongside other entities in a ‘suite’ of products. The absence of centrality does not equate to diminished importance, however. In 2009, just as in 1939, Wrest Point is one of Hobart’s premier hotels and its location still leaves its competitors wanting. In 2003, Premier Bacon observed that Wrest Point "attracts up to 30,000 people, many from interstate and overseas, through its doors each week" (The Mercury, 2003:2); that equates to about 15% of Hobart’s population.

As for the future, one can only conjecture that, given its propensity for re-invention, Wrest Point will continue to provide innovative approaches to hospitality and tourism. The potential is endless ... underwater suites such as those planned for hotels in Dubai and Fiji; facilities mounted on a pier reminiscent of British seaside attractions; a retired liner converted to a floating hotel adjacent to the Point. Or for clients who seek the luxury and glamour of yesteryear, the refurbishment of the Art Deco Riviera Hotel which remains virtually unchanged since Drysdale opened its doors as World War II began. Tasmania awaits the fourth iteration.

DISCUSSION

It could be argued that Wrest Point, like many other hotels, has passed through the different stages of Butler’s (1980) destination lifecycle model; namely exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation and rejuvenation. Unlike many other hotels however, it has repeated the cycle three times ... and a fourth is a real possibility.

More importantly, however, is its place in history. Without the Wrest Point Riviera Hotel and Wrest Point Hotel-Casino, the quality and diversity of the experiences afforded by Pure Tasmania would not exist. Wrest Point alone has provided the reputation and capital required to generate these exceptional properties. No other hotel in Australia has had such a profound impact on its industry or its host state; indeed, it is unlikely that Wrest Point has a parallel anywhere in the world.

Wrest Point’s prominence as a brand is incontrovertible. It is one of the best-known hotels in Australia, especially among those who remember when it incorporated the country’s only legal casino. The tower is the third most recognised building in Australia (after the Harbour Bridge and the Opera House). Its role in Tasmania’s emergence from
a pre-war colonial backwater to an international tourist destination is less well known, however. This paper has attempted to redress this, and afford 'The Point' its place within the context of Tasmania's past, present, and (probably) future.
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