

MEET ROBERT YOUNG

“His melancholy fate doth plainly prove/the frail uncertainty of human life” - from Robert Young’s grave stone

Two convicts risked their lives to save Private Robert Young from drowning. Were they his friends, or were they hoping for a reward?

Twenty year old Robert Young was serving at Port Arthur with the King’s Own Light Infantry in 1840. His job was to provide security whenever convicts were at work or moving from place to place. One night in March he accompanied a whaleboat with four convict crew and a coxswain, taking the doctor across to Point Puer to see a sick boy.

Private Young stood in the bow of the boat dressed in his military greatcoat and armed with his musket . Although he had complained of the cold and of feeling unwell, he remained with the boat while the doctor went ashore, refusing to come and warm himself by the fire when invited to do so by the coxswain.

By the time the boat returned to the main settlement it was very dark. The doctor alighted on the jetty, followed by Private Young. Suddenly there was a loud scream and a splash. Perhaps missing his footing in the dark, Robert Young had fallen into the freezing waters of Mason Cove.

One of the convict crew immediately jumped in and swam under the jetty to try to save him but there was no sign of young Robert. Another man stripped off his clothes and leaped in. Ten minutes of frantic searching passed in until his lifeless body was finally found, retrieved with a boat hook and taken to the hospital, where he was pronounced dead. Later another man dived in and retrieved his musket from the bottom of the harbour.



We know far less about the ordinary soldiers of Port Arthur than of the convicts they guarded.

Ordinary soldiers are usually invisible to history; we know far less about them than we do about the convicts whom they guarded. And we would never have heard of this young man either, if an ornate gravestone had not been erected for him on the Isle of the Dead by his grieving friends.

Port Arthur is conserved as a testament to all who lived and worked here – a place everyone should visit.

AMAZING STORIES, EPIC HISTORY