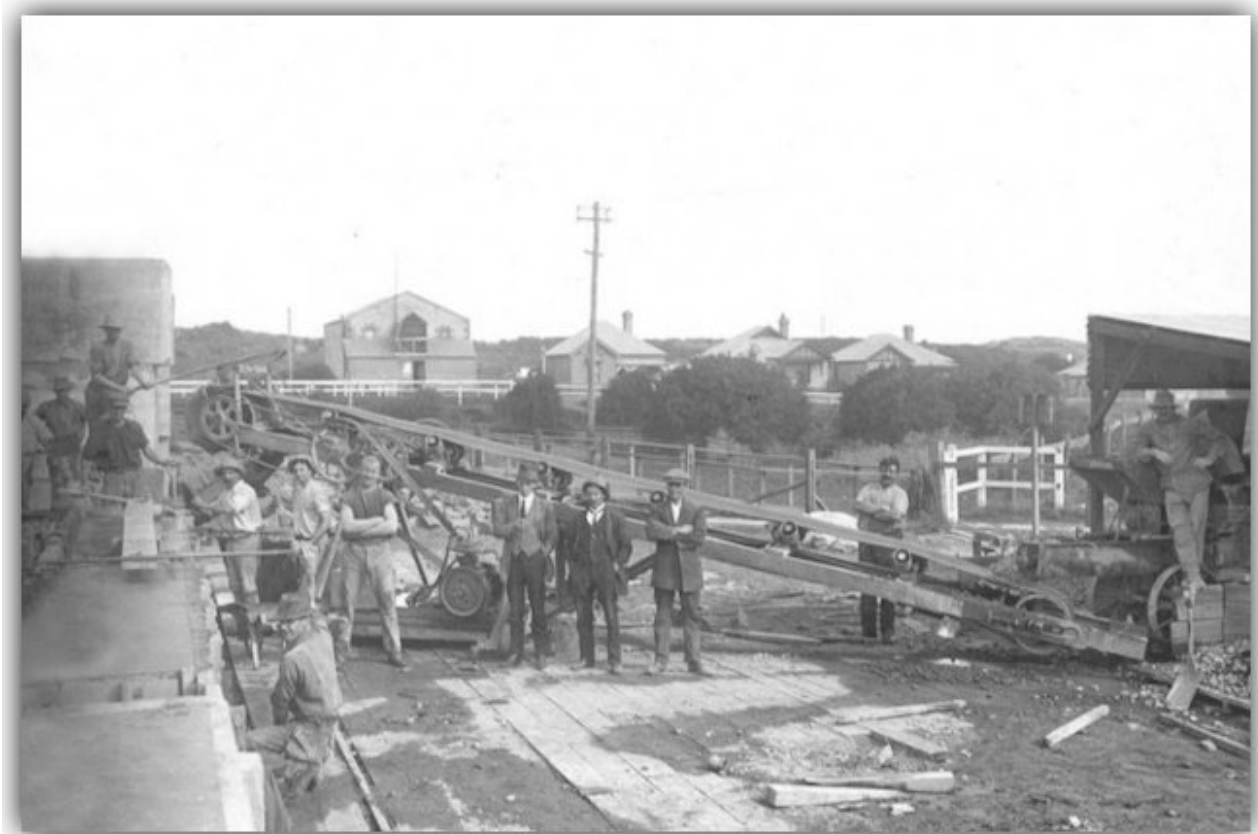


Demolishing more of our precious history is a bridge too far



The Stanley St bridge can be seen in the backdrop of this photo taken in 1890, showing workers at a railway reserve unloading huge concrete blocks that would be used to build the breakwater. Image: Warrnambool Historical Society.

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

Will one of Warrnambool's oldest original bridges survive the wrecking ball? Oh, I hope so.

The Warrnambool City Council will soon decide what to do about the failing Stanley St bridge/Edward's Bridge that crosses the Merri River near the pastel monstrosity formerly known as the Lady Bay Hotel, and which has been in service for 130 years.

Demolition is an option, such is the Warrnambool way.

Just three years ago – in 2017 – the council spent *tens of thousands of dollars* fixing this very bridge and strengthening the piles that hold it up.

Apart from the piles, the bridge was in “generally good condition” the WCC’s then-infrastructure manager said in a media release.

Even better, the end result of spending these tens of thousands of dollars on repairs was that “the historic bridge will be serviceable for decades to come”.

Decades? Not quite.

Here we are, just three years later, and Stanley St bridge is not only in need of major repairs – another \$80,000 will be spent straight away – but is under threat of demolition.

How can this be?

And has the council demanded a refund for the works that failed to extend the life of the bridge for five years, let alone decades to come?

I asked the council spokesman these questions on 20 May and also for a figure on how much the 2017 bridge works cost: there has been no response.

Oddly, these 2017 works didn’t rate a mention in the report to the council meeting on 4 May when councillors talked about how much money they would need to borrow to either knock the old bridge down, repair it, or keep it and build a brand new bridge alongside.

Nobody put up their hand and said, hang on, didn’t we just spend a bucketload of public money a couple of years ago to fix this bridge?

Like the Merri River in flood, so much public money just swishes through and is never seen or heard of again.



The original Hopkins River bridge was built in 1895 and was completely replaced in 2000. It is now in need of major repairs to prevent a catastrophic failure. Image: State Library Victoria.

The same could be said for the Hopkins River bridge which is also in need of major repairs, despite being *completely replaced* just 20 years ago.

It will soon have \$460,000 spent on it to prevent “catastrophic failure” caused by defective concrete and other work that, obviously, couldn’t handle the harsh conditions.

Here’s part of the shopping list for Pontings, according to the tender:

Concrete patch repairs to pre-stressed beams;

Concrete patch repairs to pier headstocks and pier piles;

Crack injection to pier piles;

Silane treatment to pre-stressed beams;

Silane treatment to pier headstocks;

Silane treatment to pier headstocks; and

Protective paint system for pedestrian walkway galvanised beams & plates/cleats.

Cripes, that is some list.

The Stanley St bridge will cost around \$2.6m to replace, or \$1.2m to repair, with the council to cover half the cost and the remainder from a grant.

Perhaps if we had got it right the first time, we wouldn't be facing the loss of another piece of our precious history.

My hope is the new bridge, if it must be built, runs alongside the old...and we push for a decent warranty.

Any other option should not be an option at all.