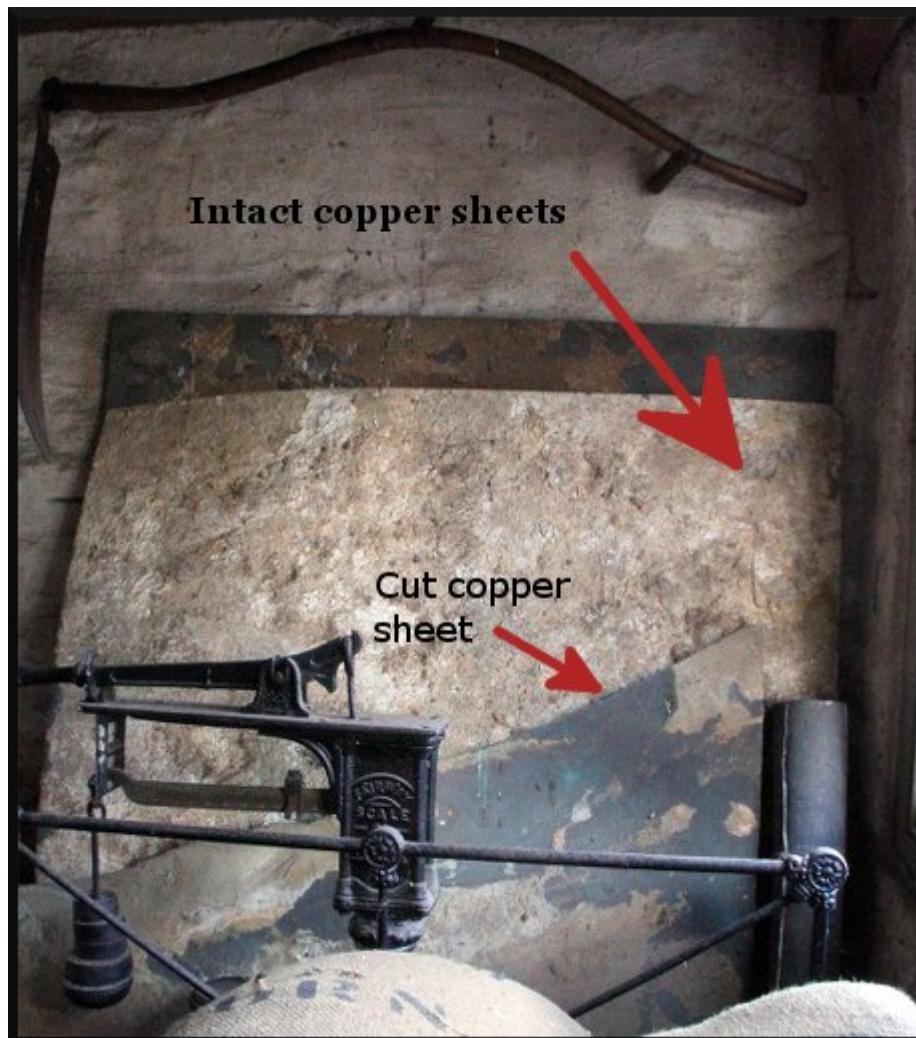


Heritage Vic to take no action against Flagstaff Hill

Description



Some of the copper sheets stored at Flagstaff Hill in the Bond Store, including the one showing a severe cut from right to left.

ANALYSIS – Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A5CECD;"] H[/dropcap]eritage Victoria has finished a three-week investigation into missing and damaged artefacts at Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village in Warrnambool and found it has no case to answer.

Instead, any responsibility for the missing artefacts and damage to relics from the wreck of the *Loch Ard* (1878), has been sheeted home to former management of the village.

As [first reported in Bluestone Magazine](#), Heritage Victoria launched a formal investigation into the cutting of copper sheets from the *Loch Ard*, with a 10x10cm piece taken from one, while another had a large slice removed, allegedly for use as a sculpture or trophy.

Such damage to relics is an offence under the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act.

In addition, Heritage Victoria was investigating how the museum had lost track of at least 129 items from its collection, including the brass ship's bell from the wreck of the *Newfield* (1892) that was once displayed in the Great Circle Gallery, and [more than 200 lead ingots from the *Loch Ard*.](#)

A spokesperson for Heritage Victoria today issued a two-sentence statement to *Bluestone Magazine*, saying the investigation was finished and there would be no further action, as “most” of the issues had happened more than a decade ago.

Here is the statement in full:

“Heritage Victoria has completed its investigation into suggestions of problems with the management of the collection at Flagstaff Hill Maritime Museum and determined that no action is required.

“Heritage Victoria noted that professional systems highlighting collection management and an internal audit process had been instigated under the present management and that most of the issues raised had occurred more than a decade ago under previous management.”

No other information was available and is unlikely to be available in the future, as Heritage Victoria does not reveal the details of its investigations.

GRANT FOR LOCH ARD RELICS

The Federal Government has recognised the tourist potential of Flagstaff Hill by providing a \$7000 grant for conservation of a quantity of Loch Ard relics.

In addition the Government



The arrival of the Loch Ard ingots and copper sheets was worthy of front page news in 1984.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A5CECD;"] S[/dropcap]o what happened to the copper sheets and who cut them?

And where is the missing *Newfield* bell, among other items?

Even after this investigation we are none the wiser and, from the sound of it, probably never will be.

The outcome of the investigation is not a surprise, however, in light of comments by Warrnambool City Council chief executive officer **Bruce Anson** to the February 2 council meeting.

At that time, and in response to questions from **Cr Brian Kelson** who first raised concerns about the missing artefacts, Mr Anson said “we are confident that our discussions with Heritage Victoria will not find any significant issues at all.”

“We have an ongoing and very positive relationship with Heritage Victoria,” he said.

When asked directly by Cr Kelson who cut the copper sheets, Mr Anson said one had been pierced by a nail, while on loan, and another had a corroded edge from lying in water.

The nailed sheet was in fact a drill hole, added to a sheet now on display at the Port Campbell Tourist Information Centre, so that it could be secured to the wall where it was formerly housed (the people responsible apologised to Flagstaff Hill in 1993 for their mistake.)

Mr Anson made no mention of the sheet that has had a large slice removed, or the sheet with a missing 10x10cm piece, but did say some of the cuts were “hearsay”.

Perhaps more will be ultimately revealed by the council, with **Mayor Michael Neoh** telling the same

meeting that he would be happy for Director City Growth **Bill Millard** to do a full and formal report back to the council on these issues.

Let's hope so, because as it stands we still don't know what happened to precious artefacts that were given to our city by the Federal Government for safe keeping.

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Date Created

2015/02/19

Author

carol