

LADY BAY LIGHTHOUSE PRECINCT

150 Years Keeping The Warrnambool Harbour Safe

Located within Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village is a maritime precinct overlooking the continually dangerous Lady Bay . It contains the still active lighthouses that have attempted to keep the Warrnambool harbour safe from the roaring southern oceans. Flagstaff Hill's Lady Bay Lighthouse Complex is of historical, scientific (technological) and architectural significance to the State of Victoria by providing an excellent example of the kind of navigational aids constructed in the early years of regional expansion in Victoria. The lights remain today a maritime navigation aid. The growing trade through the opening of the western Victoria district created the need for coastal ports. Port Fairy and Portland had established in the early 1840's and a steady trade began to flow.

The settlers of the new town of Warrnambool were attracted by early reports of the potential of Lady Bay to become a trading port. Trade began through a range of slowly improving piers and jetties. The dangers of the port some became more apparent and calls for improved safety through the installation of lights started and were finally listened to by the newly separate colony of Victoria .

The Lady Bay Lighthouse Complex was originally built in 1858-9 of basalt quarried on the Salt Water (Maribynong) River, Melbourne . The upper tower, chartroom, cottage and privy were originally located on Middle Island near the outlet of the Merri River , with a lower light located on a timber tower on the beach. It soon became apparent that the middle island location was not satisfactory with the light obscured by heavy seas. In 1871 the lights and all associated buildings, along with the privy, were moved to their current location on Flagstaff Hill as leading lights for the entry to the treacherous and shallow Warrnambool Harbour . The lower light was placed on a bluestone obelisk that had been erected there as a navigation marker in 1854. A flagstaff had been erected on the hill as early as 1853 very soon after the settlement of the Warrnambool district.

The Lady Bay Lighthouse Complex historical significance is further enhanced for its intact battery and guns, a strong reminder of Victoria 's wealth and determination to protect itself from the perceived threat of invasion in the 1880s.

Flagstaff Hill was also the centre for the Warrnambool Garrison, built in response to the perceived threat of foreign forces looking to expand their own empires by taking this remote part of the mighty British Empire. The remaining guns are scientifically (technologically) significant as physical reminders of a time when these weapons represented advanced design in artillery. A recent study has found two of the guns to be of "world significance" and further work is being undertaken to enhance the way we tell our guests of this significance. The Lady Bay Lighthouse Complex is of architectural significance as a fine example of Public Works Department architecture of the 1850s and 1880s. The modest but dignified and sturdy lighthouse structures are indicative of the importance of lighthouses to the communities that relied upon them to facilitate safe passage for shipping, at a time when such transport was crucial to relatively isolated towns like Warrnambool.

The battery of two 80 pounder rifled, muzzle loading guns was added in 1887 as part of a general upgrade to the defences of Victoria which saw Port Phillip Bay transformed into a fortress and the nearby ports of Belfast (Port Fairy) and Portland receive a similar armament to Warrnambool. The fortifications and guns were in a derelict condition until they were restored after the complex was integrated into the Flagstaff Hill Maritime Museum in the 1970s.

The Warrnambool Garrison guns are fired by re-enactment groups on major event days at Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village

The two lights underwent upgrades in 2009 to ensure their current role in marking the safe channel into our now recreational port is continued.