

JUST RUSTY NAILS?

The former FITZ ROY IRON WORKS AT MITTAGONG:

A COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

The discovery of significant foundations of the first iron works in the colony at Mittagong has changed the course of Australia's industrial and archaeological history.

By Leah Day

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COMMUNITY ASPECTS

INITIAL NEGOTIATIONS

- **Local council officer and heritage advisor rejected evidence provided by Tim McCartney and me of potential archaeological relics on site.**
- **Local historical society advised land owner that the works were never down there.**
- **Did not refer land owner to us, despite knowing we were researching site.**
- **Our evidence was shown to land owner who dealt with Woolworths.**
- **Discussions held regarding how artifacts would be handled, if any, found during construction phase.**

COMMUNITY OPINION

- **Conflicting views within the community generally on possible relics on site.**
- **Some people adamant “only rusty nails would be found on site” and did not want anything found.**
- **Strong negative emotional opinions of evidence.**

- **Many within community robustly opposed project for fear of negative impact development may have on town.**
- **Most citizens supported Woolworths coming to area but did not understand location and heritage issues.**
- **Interim Heritage Order created a great deal of hostility from local council and community.**

PARTICIPATION

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION.

- **Copeland Developments and Woolworths approached us to provide primary source information and a summary report for a preliminary archaeological assessment.**
- **This assessment was undertaken by Godden Mackay Logan in January 2005.**
- **A comprehensive Contextual History Report was prepared to provide basis of extensive archaeological investigation undertaken in October/November 2005.**

ACCESS TO SITE.

- **With permission, we visited the site on numerous occasions and were included in discussions and decision making by the archaeologists on the findings and potential areas to be investigated.**

- **This was a learning experience, as well as a thought-provoking exercise because it encouraged us to research more primary source information particularly, at State Records, to assist in the examination of the site.**
- **Nigel Smith, of Woolworths, has allowed us continued access to the site during the construction phase and this has been of tremendous benefit.**

DID IT WORK WELL?

OPEN DAY

- **Despite short notice and challenging weather about 200 people participated in the Open Day.**
- **People disappointed they could not attend.**
- **What the Open Day did reveal was the tremendous interest and thirst for knowledge on the archaeological relics and the history of the site that the public has.**

RELIQS OF MOVEABLE NATURE

- **The cupolas and engine house were destroyed.**
- **These items were not within the retained relic site.**
- **When destroyed, it was evident that perhaps with more careful handling the cupolas, in particular, might have been lifted from the site in recoverable pieces.**

- **If relocated, the cupolas could still tell a story – and indicate the importance of the only cupolas (to my knowledge) that were still standing in Australia.**
- **The destination of these artifacts caused a great deal of concern within the local council and community when they were sent to the Resource Recovery Centre (the tip).**
- **The stone from the engine house and portions of the cupolas are now to be used in the interpretative stage of the development.**
- **Should any relics be left over, these will be utilised in a feature in Mittagong.**
- **Does the Heritage Office require notification before demolition and advice regarding the proposed destination for any relics before the signing off on a construction site?**
- **Yes, overall, it did work well, considering the many varying issues that presented, on an unlisted, unknown site that proved to be a national treasure.**

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

COMMUNITY INTEREST

- **The local community is very interested in the protection of the relics during construction.**

- **Community pleased that the majority of the relics are being preserved.**
- **With the full support of Woolworths we have kept the public informed through the local newspaper which is most receptive to information.**

HERITAGE DISPLAY

- **Local council conducted an industrial heritage display as part of the National Trust Heritage Festival in April.**
- **In conjunction with Woolworths we presented a photographic display, brochure for school children, and small relics.**
- **Exhibition created interest and was well supported.**

WORKING WITH OTHERS.

- **It has been a privilege to be involved in the project and to actually witness the discovery of the relics of Australia's first iron works.**
- **We are happy to work collaboratively with Woolworths to continue to be the historical consultants on the project.**
- **This association is welcomed by the community at large, because local historians are involved in the retention of the historical development and interpretation of the site within their town.**

- In this instance, it is of note, that the citizens of Mittagong and district are very proud of the town's history and appreciate being kept informed of developments on the site.

WOOLWORTHS COMMITMENT

CORRECT INTERPRETATION OF SITE

- The commitment by Woolworths Limited to preserve the relics and to place high importance on the correct interpretation of the site is to be commended.
- This will be the only shopping centre in Australia that will house the relics of Australia's first iron works.
- The relics will be located in a user friendly atmosphere and should attract many visitors and discussion.
- The involvement by Woolworths in the archaeological and historical aspects has worked extremely well within the local community.

BOOK ON IRON WORKS

RESEARCH PROJECT

- The research and writing of the proposed book that we are compiling on the history of the iron works has been delayed due to our involvement in the relic site.

POSITIVE OUTCOME

- This has been a positive outcome, because the archaeological site created unplanned research that had not been previously envisaged.
- We feel that a more comprehensive, richer and diverse history of the iron works and the town of Mittagong will now be published, that will be of benefit to the community.

SECOND IRON WORKS SITE

- Photographs depict the second iron works site and signage that was previously believed to be the only site of the Fitz Roy Iron Works site in Mittagong.
- The historical research, archaeological dig and the commitment by Woolworths to retain the relics of the first site has created a new chapter in the industrial history of Australia.

CONCLUSION

CHANGED OPINION

- The council and some citizens originally were skeptical of any relics being found.
- This perception altered after the finding of the relics and there is now a commitment to preserve them.

PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

- **As members of the community, the most important aspect of the project has been the personal involvement in the progress of the archaeological site.**
- **We have been involved in the project for over eighteen months. This has meant liaising with many people including; those with conflicting political interests, which has broadened our perspective of the role of community heritage.**
- **We believe the experience gained, and the excitement of the discovery of the relics, has been the highlight of our careers as historians.**

Leah Day Mittagong 5 May 2006.