

COMMEMORATING PORT'S INDUSTRIAL MARITIME HERITAGE

Background

In the 19th century Port Melbourne's civic leaders dreamed of transforming Port's beachfront into "the Glasgow of the south" with a massive shipbuilding industry.

In the 20th century some civic leaders dreamed of transforming Port Melbourne's beachfront into a cross between Venice and Surfers Paradise with a massive high rise commercial and residential development laced by canals.

The Glasgow dream never came to pass and the remnants of our nascent shipbuilding industry are buried beneath Lagoon Oval. Port residents won a great victory when they defeated the 20th century developer plans and the site is now the Beacon Cove community.

While local threats remain – particularly the prospect of a high-rise development alongside the Port Melbourne railway station – the beachfront development since the end of these dreams has generally enhanced the area, expanded the population, increased the available open space and created an attractive and popular beachfront promenade which also serves as a linear park.

While there are threats, there are also opportunities created by the re-development of Princes Pier and upgrades to Station Pier.

These threats and opportunities are arising within the context of significant interest in Port Melbourne's history, traditions and its heritage sites.

The Port Melbourne Historical Society is active and successful. There are a range of popular heritage walks throughout Port. The Port Phillip Council has an impressive local history collection and supports heritage protection. The recent commemoration of the death of Allan Whittaker, and the wounding of three of his comrades, during the 1928 dock strike was an impressive reminder that there are still people alive touched by the events of 1928 and that memories of those days are still being passed down through the generations of locals. The MUA and historians are considering ways to permanently commemorate these events. The growing success of the local Anzac Day commemoration is another example of both how community commemoration is valued and the important role the beachfront has in our lives and links with any Whittaker commemoration as Allan Whittaker was shot at Gallipoli but survived, then was shot again at Port Melbourne and died.

This discussion paper has been prepared by a group of local residents who want to ensure that commemoration of Port Melbourne's distinctive maritime and trade union heritage is an important focus during consideration of these threats, opportunities, our heritage infrastructure, and our built and social environment.

It does not seek to replace the work of other community groups, the MUA, the City of Port Phillip and the Victorian Government.

Rather it seeks to provide context for their considerations and promote discussion of a range of options about which community consultation can take place.

Objectives

The group's objectives are to:

- Ensure the historic, current and future role of trade unionism in Port Melbourne and Australia is remembered, celebrated and promoted to future generations.
- Commemorate Allan Whittaker, and his comrades, and the 1928 Dock Strike in tangible ways.
- Develop a commemorative plan which is fully integrated into the other development plans currently being considered.
- Ensure our maritime and industrial history is integrated into heritage policy and practice in the community.
- Celebrate the diversity of Port Melbourne culture and the historic and demographic factors which have created it.

Options

The group has developed a list of possible options, some of which have previously been suggested by others, to achieve these objectives. The list of options is neither prescriptive nor exclusive and we welcome input and suggestions from others.

Commemorative and informational options:

- Create, as part of the Princes Pier re-development, a maritime history museum, which focuses on Port's waterfront and maritime union heritage, in the Princes Pier gatehouse.
- Use of the re-furbished former Station Pier pier crane as the central focus for a linear beachfront sculpture park.
- Commission a statue to commemorate Whittaker and the 1928 Dock Strike.
- Re-name Princes Pier Whittaker Pier or call the new gatehouse centre the Whittaker centre.
- Create a maritime history self-guided walking tour, marked by commemorative and informational plaques, through Port Melbourne. This could be integrated with the Port of Melbourne's proposed maritime heritage walks.
- Develop, as part of the Council local history collection, an online maritime union heritage kit for use in local schools and for the information of the community.
- Publish a commemorative booklet on the maritime and industrial history of Port Melbourne.
- Convene a panel of historians to produce an authoritative report on the 1928 shootings.

- Create a special collection within the local history collection of books and materials about Port's maritime and industrial history.

Consultation

The group believes that there are many opportunities for the community, community groups, Council and Government to discuss these options, suggest more, and develop a plan which integrates with the other development options being considered at present.

We present this paper as a first step in such a discussion. As a second step we propose that a local committee representative of the broadest possible cross-section of community groups, the community, Council and local parliamentary representatives be created to discuss and report on options.

We believe that this approach may help the local community consider options that further enhance Port's position as a special place.

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