

Warrnambool Echo
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Discovery of the Mahogany Ship **[By Anticipatus]**

Part 2

The director now walked apart lost in profound meditation. The importance of his position and responsibility appeared to weigh heavily upon him. What, if after all, he should fail? That irreverent and unbelieving member of committee whom he had already rebuked for his unseemly levity would indeed turn the laugh against him. Fail! How could he fail? Had he not the divining rod which would infallibly guide him to the exact spot? The only chance of failur *[sic]* would lie in the dreaded possibility of there being no wreck at all, in fact nothing to discover. What then? Suppose that it were an absolute fact that there was not, nor ever had been, a Spanish mahogany ship cast away on these sands! How was he to prove this? This perplexing question gradually assumed the following form: - "I am here to find a certain object. If that object is here I will find it. If there is no object here to find, it will be proved by my not finding it. No one can find it if it is not here."

Having arrived at these logical conclusions, the director straightened himself up, and, returning to the camp, set his men to work. But before doing so he thought it would be as well to address them, giving them a slight outline of the plan of the intended operations. He said "From information received, I am led to believe that the object of our search lies concealed somewhere close at hand. We will therefore strike an imaginary line from the highest peak of Tower Hill which we see behind us, to the south pole. We will then lay down another line extending from Warrnambool on the east to Port Fairy, on the west this line will form the base of a triangle, which will be completed by simply drawing a line from each extreme point of the base line, meeting or vanishing at the south pole. We have now an isosceles triangle, divided into two right angles by the straight line extending from Tower Hill to the south pole; and somewhere within these two right angles we shall, with the aid of the divining rod, discover the object of our search"

A peg was driven into the sand at the point where the straight line intersected the high water line, but here a difficulty arose. Given a straight line from the Post office at Warrnambool and also from Port Fairy, both meeting at the south pole, at what particular part of the beach would they intersect high water mark. As this was a matter that required a profound mathematical calculation, the director decided to postpone its consideration to a future date. In the meantime he would feel the ground immediately around him.

He now called for the divining rod. This instrument had evidently been constructed with an eye to the duties it was expected to perform. Exactly in the centre of the rod was a brass pin projecting three inches in each side, and so well had the balance been preserved that on taking it up between the thumb and the fingers of both hands, and holding it loosely, the rod immediately assumed a horizontal position. It was 4 p.m. when, the director commenced to go carefully over the ground. At 5 p.m. he had examined five square feet of sand hummock without any result. The position of this piece of sand was carefully marked to prevent going over it again. At

6 p.m. about 20 square feet had been marked off, and it was time to suspend operations till next day.

During the evening the director (who had with admirable forethought provided a slate and pencil) went into a calculation. He had in two hours thoroughly examined about 20 square feet of ground. The base line of operations from Warrnambool to Port Fairy would be, as the crow flies, about 17 miles long, and the distance from this line to high water mark, an average width of two miles. There would therefore be an area of 34 square miles. There are 27,878,400 square feet in one square mile, and it had taken two hours to go over 20 feet; how long would it take to search the whole of the 34 miles? Great Scott, the world would not last long enough to do it in.

This appalling reflection had for a time a crushing effect upon the director; but only for a time. How did he know but the very next attempt would not be successful. At all events it was too soon to get disheartened. He would try again to-morrow. Besides, there was no use in going over every bit of the ground as he had done. If he should get any where near to the wreck the rod would indicate it, and he could tell by the angle the rod assumed whereabouts it lay.

Accordingly, the next morning the director started again, full of hope. Presently he entered a small valley between two sand hills. The rod made a slight move, pointing towards a certain spot. As he moved the rod gradually took a more perpendicular direction, and at last became perfectly upright. *Eureka!* He had found it.

The dream of his life was realised. What to him now were all the doubts and sneers of the world? Even that irreverent committeeman would now admit that he had been wrong. What a triumph for him. Here a few feet under him laid perhaps an untold treasure. But he would waste no more time. He would be back in Warrnambool that night to carry the joyful news. The first thing to do was to put one of those boring rods down. This was done. It went down easily five feet, then seven, and at the eight foot mark it stopped. It had struck something hard. The wreck lay there buried eight feet below the surface, unless indeed the rod had gone down one of the hatchways, or it might be one of the old Spanish vessels that were only decked out each end, leaving an open space amidship. In this case the top sides would only be a foot or two below the surface.

They commenced by carefully removing the sand in a circle of about 5 feet from the boring rod, when a timber head was revealed. Success was now certain. This was either the stem or stern post, or it might be one of the side ribs. To make sure, the sand was cleared away a foot or two further on, when another timber head was brought to light. In a short time the outline of a small vessel was clearly defined on the surface.

The director now determined to carry the important news into Warrnambool, and to take with him a piece of the timber to have the much-vexed question as to whether it was mahogany settled. He accordingly mounted his bicycle, and reached Warrnambool about four o'clock that afternoon.

And here is a remarkable instance of history repeating itself. When the first news of the Spanish Armada was brought, Admiral Drake was engaged in playing a game of bowls at Plymouth. So when the first news of the discovery of a Spanish vessel on

our coast arrived, our mayor and town councillors were amusing themselves at that ancient and time-honoured game. Like Drake and his other heroes, they decided on finishing their game before attending to the messenger. The game being over they turned their attention to the director. The piece of wood he brought was examined and passed from hand to hand with various opinions. Some thought it was mahogany, others that it was uncommonly like some kind of gum or other native wood. At length it was agreed to submit the specimen to the curator of the museum, he being considered (and very justly) an authority on such matters. He placed it under a powerful microscope, and then compared it with the mahogany case of a very ancient piano in the museum. He then said that, owing to the chemical changes the wood had undergone, he was unable to give a decided opinion. There were indications of its having been mahogany once, but now it certainly looked more like some species of Tasmanian timber. The countenance of the director fell at this opinion, for coming from whence it did, there was no question of its value; but still the wreck had been discovered, and after all whether it was mahogany or not was not of vital importance. He was instructed to return to the scene of operations next day, and when the sand had been all removed from the old hulk, the committee would go out and decide as to the best means of removing it to the museum grounds. In the meantime the curator was instructed to make preparations to receive the ancient relic.

Before the director left for Warrnambool he had given instructions to have the sand cleared away from the inside of the vessel. This he did to save time. When he returned he was surprised to see the men sitting idly on the timber head, all apparently gazing at one object. He noticed that there was an air of dejectedness about them which in the face of such a brilliant discovery was inexplicable. "What's the matter, he shouted, why are you not working." They all solemnly pointed towards the stern. He climbed on to one of the timber heads and, looking at the object pointed at by the men, gave one wild despairing yell and fell flat on the sand.

This is what he saw:- Encircled on a stern post was a battered rusty tin plate with the letters partly obliterated—YOU.G & [letters unreadable in original article]—W'Bool 1859.

There was great disappointment in Warrnambool at the unexpected termination of the enterprise. Of course the irreverent individual already spoken of said it was just what he expected. But perhaps the most disappointed man was the curator. He had marked out the spot where the old ship was to be erected. He had thought about having the cabin filled up and living in it, but now all his hopes were now blighted. At all events for a time he still believes in the existence of the mahogany ship, and hopes at that some future date the object of his fondest hopes will yet be discovered.

Appendix

The curator has lost all faith in the divining rod. Upon it being returned to him by the director, he thought it seemed heavier at the point than it usually was. Upon a close examination, he found that it was hollow, and that close to the cross handle was a small reservoir which opened by a spring concealed in the handle. Upon holding the rod point upwards, he was surprised to see a small quantity of quick-silver run out. The whole secret was out now, the quick-silver had been confined in

the reservoir, the director had accidentally touched the spring and released it, and naturally the end of the rod soon became the heaviest and pointed to the ground.

When the director had sufficiently recovered he started for Coolgardie. Let us hope he will there discover something of more value than an old lighter.

Discovery of the Mahogany ship, Written for the Echo 1896 By Geo Lance.