

Warrnambool Standard
June 12 1890

Letter

To the Editor of the Warrnambool Standard

SIR, - There appears good evidence that the wreck occupied the same position with reference to the beach and sea level from about the year 1770 till she was last seen by Mr. M.C. Donnelly of Smeaton, in the summer of 1880. Mr Bennett's ship was as he himself says destroyed in 1869 or 70 - he is therefore not speaking of the wreck at present in question.

The conventional position of a wrecked ship is undoubtedly in the water; but it is the unusual position of this ship, which is not in the water at all, nor anywhere near it, the timber of which she is built and her evident antiquity, which have for fifty or sixty years past attracted the attention of so large a number of persons, many of them seamen and others of no ordinary intelligence. The "Vagabond" in a paper in the *Argus* of the 10th November, 1884, says:- "It is built of Spanish mahogany, and greybeards have recently related to me how, in their youth, they played round this wreck; how they cut pieces of the rare hardwood out of it; and endeavoured to dig down into the keel for the coins which tradition states were always embedded in the timbers of Portuguese or Spanish ships".

There is no question of doubloons or that kind of thing, but I will tell Mr. Bennett why the Mayor and others amongst us have interested themselves, and finally interested the Government.

Some years ago, the Governments of Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia, with a view to obtaining more definite information on the subject of the earliest discoverers of Australia, clubbed together, and at considerable expense, got certain very rare maps in the possession of the British Museum reproduced. Copies of these fac similes [*sic*] can be seen in the Public Libraries of the respective capitals. They, it appears, however, do not make things so plain as could be wished. It seems therefore that a proper examination of the ship on our common may do something to throw a little light on the subject, should an examination be found practicable, which, of course, remains to be seen. To assist in the work will do no discredit to our reputation for intelligence, but, as I think, it will be very much the other way. Again, should it turn out as it may that the first contact of Australia with civilisation can be proved from the tangible evidence of the wreck to have taken place on the Warrnambool Town Common, it will be a pleasant fact for our young people to know in connection with the history of their town and of their country.

Peter Heylin, in his cosmographic, under "Terra Australis Incognita" tells us that "in the year 1543 the Governor of New Spain sent Villa Lobos with a fleet towards the Moluccas, who, in that voyage, made a discovery of rich and flourishing country which he called Nova Guinea, and by others since his time, called Terra de Piccinocoli, and in the year, 1563, Cantro the licentiate, then Viceroy of Peru, sent a fleet from Lima, which, under the conduct of Lopez Garcia de Castro, discovered the Island of Solomon," etc.

We, whose great ships travel as regularly almost as omnibuses, are unable to realise as a fact that the explorers of the 15th and 16th centuries, grand seamen as they were, and provided too with good compasses, did not know when they started on a voyage in their vessels not larger than good-sized lighters, where they were going, nor when they had made a discovery, what they had found. It is only necessary to look at their maps to see this. We must, therefore, not be misled by such terms as "Nova Guinea" &c. The ship on our common, as is quite possible, may have reference to one of these early expeditions from Spanish South America, and there really appears some evidence in support of such a theory.

I remain yours, etc
J. ARCHIBALD

Warrnambool, June 9th