Olde worlde

Flagstaff Hill’s peacock was welcomed to Melbourne yesterday in an ceremony befitting the $1 million insurance cover on its elaborate plumage.

In typical olde worlde pageantry the Loch Ard porcelain peacock was officially loaned to the Victorian Government Travel Authority for the Melbourne International Centenary Exhibition.

Dressed for the occasion in period costume, Warrnambool’s Mayor, Cr John Lindsay, Town Clerk, Vern Robson, Cr Jack Daffy and tourist information centre officer Sally Clark were there to give the peacock a send-off fit for royalty.

With the Warrnambool officials in tow in a restored longboat, the peacock was sailed up the Yarra to Henley Wharf for the handing-over ceremony to the Premier, Mr Hamer.

ABOVE: Hear ye, hear ye. The Premier, Mr Hamer officially accepts the Loch Ard peacock, on loan from the Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village.

BELOW: Is this really 1980? From left, Mayor Cr John Lindsay, tourist information officer Sally Clark, Cr Jack Daffy and Town Clerk Vern Robson decked in period costume, make their way up the Yarra in a long boat.
Is our peacock real?

The authenticity of Warrnambool's Loch Ard peacock has been questioned by a leading porcelain manufacturer.

British ceramic maker, Royal Doulton, in its 1977 Review, pictures a lifesize porcelain peacock from the same mould as the Loch Ard peacock.

The Loch Ard peacock is a feature of Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village but has been temporarily taken from its 'home' to be on display at the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition next week.

The historic statue has been insured for $1 million by the Victorian Government Travel Authority. The peacock was purchased by the Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village for $4500 in 1975. A public appeal was launched to raise part of the funds.

British uncertainty that the peacock is a genuine relic from the Loch Ard shipwreck, is refuted by Australian historians.

In his book entitled "The Loch Ard Disaster", Jack Loney concludes that the peacock is genuine.

He describes the discovery of the peacock by the man who salvaged the wreck of the Loch Ard, Mr Miller.

"One of the few artifacts of value Miller recovered was a life sized peacock in highly glazed Minton pottery, gorgeously painted, life colored, designed by the Italian artist, Paul Comolera, when he was employed by Mintsos at their famous Staffordshire Pottery in the 1850s. Only five were produced."

Intended for display at the Melbourne exhibition of 1880, it was recovered from a case found floating in the gorge, and hauled up the cliff by Miller, and diver Tom Keys.

Miller packed it off to his home, and for more than half a century it stood in the hall, a silent reminder of the tragedy.

The relic was displayed by his daughter Mrs Florence Miller at the Melbourne Museum in 1935, but, following her death in 1937, its whereabouts were unknown to all but a few. Many believed that a similar peacock displayed by the Peacock Hotel in England was the one lost on the Loch Ard, but a few years ago Mrs Lee of Ivanhoe told representatives she had purchased a peacock at an auction of the late Mrs Miller's effects, and it was still in Australia.