

## Heritage Council member's purchase of convict-era hospital from deceased estate sparks investigation

By Adam Holmes Monument and Heritage Site

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Set behind some houses, the crumbling remains of the 1840s convict hospital in Fingal, Tasmania, is easy to miss. (Supplied)

### In short:

A derelict 1840s former convict hospital in a small Tasmanian town is at the centre of an internal department investigation and could be part of an Integrity Commission probe, a minister has told state parliament

The building was initially bequeathed to the Tasmanian Heritage Council, which decided not to accept it. It was then privately bought by the then-deputy chair of the council, Genevieve Lilley.

### What's next?

Ms Lilley says the Integrity Commission should be left to carry out its work without political comment or speculation.

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Inland from Tasmania's picturesque east coast sits the small town of Fingal.

Even by Tasmanian standards, it's relatively rural, with forested hills to the north and south, paddocks to the east and west and the distant peaks of Ben Lomond National Park on the horizon.



Fingal is a small town on the Esk Highway, on the way to popular tourism areas on Tasmania's east coast. (ABC News: *Owain Stia-James*)

In the 1840s, it played a key role in colonial expansion.

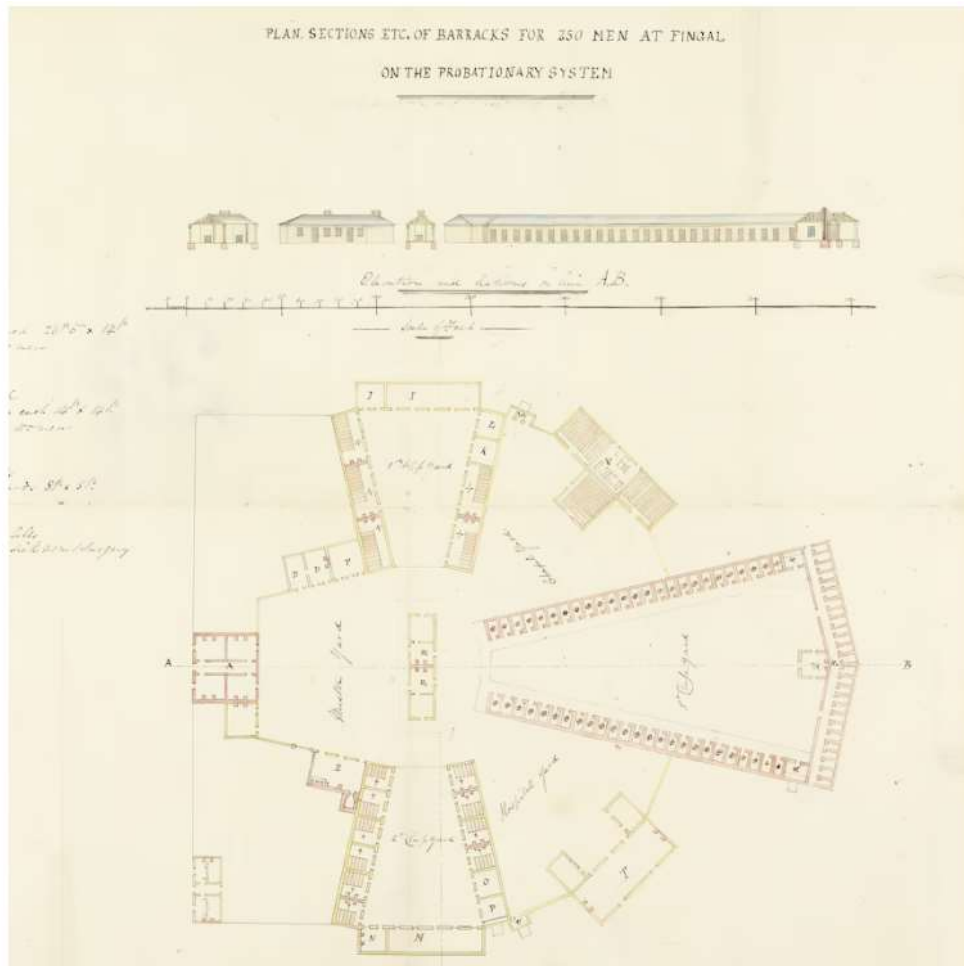
On Fingal's western edge – behind a group of houses and a police station – sits a crumbling, derelict building, easy to miss by passing motorists on the Esk Highway.



The former hospital is one of the last structures remaining in the Fingal convict probation station. (*Supplied*)

It was once a hospital for a convict probation station that housed more than 300 men, originally working to build roads to connect the remote east coast to the interior, and then on farms.

As years went by, the station fell into disrepair and almost all of its buildings disappeared, later forming an important archaeological site for Tasmania's convict history.



The probation station was vital in the colonial expansion to Tasmania's east coast. The hospital is building "T", in the bottom-right corner. (Supplied: Libraries Tasmania)

The old hospital, however, has remained. And last year, it got a new owner.

## From bequest, to refusal, to a \$42,000 sale

When its previous owner passed away in 2022, the property was bequeathed to the Tasmanian Heritage Council.

The council then investigated various options to conserve it.



The former convict hospital doesn't have power or stormwater connections. (Supplied)

But as described in the minutes of its April 2023 meeting, the council's 15 members decided not to accept it, instead encouraging the executors to "explore other options for the ownership of the property".

As the regulator of heritage sites, it was decided it should not own one of them.

At its next meeting, the council's deputy chair Genevieve Lilley declared an interest — she had personally made an offer on the property, which had been accepted by the vendor.

The sale was for \$42,000, with the contracted date one month after the Heritage Council made its decision. Settlement was in August.

Ms Lilley has since left the heritage council.

Five years earlier, the property's land was valued at \$33,000.

The old hospital has no power, driveway, storm water connection or council recognition as a dwelling, meaning it will require a full development application to be used.

A larger block across the road is for sale for offers over \$90,000, with access to power and storm water.



When the building's owner passed away in 2022, they bequeathed it to the Heritage Council. (Supplied)



Fingal is a tourist stop for travellers on Tasmania's east coast. (ABC News: Loretta Lohberger)

Ms Lilley said the property had been "informally on the market for 31 years with zero interest".

In response to a question about the sale price, Ms Lilley said that the old convict hospital was estimated to cost \$500,000 to restore — which she said would have further devalued the property.

## Sequence of events 'may raise eyebrows', MLC says

Tasmania does not have a heritage minister, so it falls under the Arts portfolio.

Arts Minister Madeleine Ogilvie was questioned in a parliamentary committee last week about the series of events.



Arts Minister Madeleine Ogilvie is responsible for heritage matters in Tasmania. (ABC News: Maren Preuss)

Without naming Ms Lilley, Nelson independent MLC Meg Webb asked whether the department was investigating the matter.

**"You would see why eyebrows may be raised over that sequence of events," Ms Webb said.**

Ms Ogilvie said it had been referred to the Integrity Commission and that a government department was also conducting an internal investigation on "matters of this type".

"Specifically around identifying, declaring and managing conflicts of interest," she said.

Ms Ogilvie then confirmed that the Integrity Commission had accepted the matter for investigation.

**"With an Integrity Commission investigation underway it's inappropriate to wade into that," she said.**

It is an offence for any person who becomes aware of a notice served by the Integrity Commission to disclose that information.

The ABC understands Ms Ogilvie later wrote to the committee saying she misspoke, and that an Integrity Commission investigation could be underway.

Ms Lilley said she respects the "thoroughness and independence" of the Integrity Commission and that it should be able to carry out its work without being made into a "political issue" and without speculation.

#### Tasmania's Integrity Commission pleads for more resources



Following a scathing report saying its powers to investigate "fall short in comparison to other Australian agency jurisdictions", Tasmania's Integrity Commission issues a plea for more funding.