



RELICS FROM THE PAST: The ruins of the old West Coast mining town of Crotty in 2016, main picture, and the Crotty smelter and houses in 1902, inset.

Picture: iStock/slovegrove

GHOST TOWN

Take a walk through our boom and bust history

HAVE you ever heard about the town of Crotty?

Perhaps you have seen photos like those above, or even visited the site of Tasmania's version of Atlantis.

Of course Atlantis, the underwater lost city in the Atlantic Ocean, is believed to be a mere legend.

But Crotty is real and it is underwater - well usually it is.

Crotty is one of the many 'ghost' towns scattered around Tasmania, and like many of the others it is the crumbling ruins of a once bustling mining community.

Named after Irish gold prospector James Crotty, it is

located on Tasmania's West Coast - on the eastern side of Mt Jukes, below the West Coast Range.

The town has an interesting, if short history.

James Crotty is a fascinating character in his own right.

He arrived on West Coast seeking his fortune in 1884, and bought a one-third share in a mining lease at My Lyell called Iron Blow.

James Crotty found what he was looking for - gold, and declared he would be rich enough to buy Ireland.

But the gold was in short supply and the determined young man actually lost money.

Unfortunately, he didn't realise he was sitting on a fortune, but not of gold.

The real riches were deeper underground—a huge deposit of copper.

In desperation James Crotty sought out an investor, and in 1891 Mr Bowes Kelly of Broken Hill Proprietary Limited (BHP) arrived to inspect the mine.

Bowes Kelly clearly liked what he saw, and a deal was agreed to.

James Crotty became a minor shareholder in the Mount Lyell Mining Company, and still did pretty well, because large volumes of copper were soon emerging from the Iron Blow mine.

The Abt Railway, from Queenstown to the port of Strahan, was built to take the copper to market.

Bowes Kelly became extremely wealthy, and James Crotty believed he had been cheated.

He purchased another lease on land at North Lyell and began the North Mount Lyell Copper Company.

During the construction of roads to service the new mine, another copper deposit was discovered, and the copper was more pure than at Iron Blow.

James Crotty then built his own railway along the King and Bird Rivers to Kelly Basin.

A number of towns sprung up

along the line, including Crotty on the southern bank of the King River.

But just when it looked like James Crotty was going to fulfill his ambition and surpass Bowes Kelly, tragedy struck.

In 1898, the North Mt Lyell smelters at Crotty collapsed.

Then James Crotty, who had travelled to England to attract more investors, became ill and died within a few weeks.

Attempts to fix the smelters failed, and in 1903 The North Mount Lyell Copper Company had to accept being taken over by the Mount Lyell Mining Company.

Continued Page 2

