

David Jones Jr on the future of the FJ site



This stunning image of the Fletcher Jones' silver ball was taken by Deakin University fine art academic **Mark Rashleigh** who has kindly given us permission to reproduce it here. It depicts the tower with its ladder and railings intact.

OPINION

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #ABCCAB;"] A Heritage Victoria prepares to inspect the dilapidated Fletcher Jones factory in Warrnambool next Monday (7/4), the grandson of Fletcher Jones said his family would be delighted to see something "creative" happen with the site.

In so saying, however, **David Fletcher Jones Jr** said that his family fully appreciated the complexity of the situation that has developed since the current owner, Daramking (owned by failed Geelong businessman Ian Ballis), went into receivership in 2012.

"I am anxious to stress that we recognise how challenging this all is," Mr Jones said in an exclusive interview with *Bluestone*.

Mr Jones is the son of the late David and Isobel Jones and lived in Warrnambool until his teenage years. As a result, he is keenly aware of the connection that many people feel to the Fletcher Jones factory site because of the high esteem in which his grandfather was held.

"How the site looks today is very sad," he said.

"Everyone would like to see something better done with it."



THIS MODERN clothing factory at Warrnambool, west of Melbourne, symbolises industry's trend towards garden surroundings.

Fletcher Jones factory, Warrnambool circa 1950's.
Photo source: Land of the Southern Cross Australia.
Published by The Australian Publicity Council.
Private collection.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #ABCCAB;"] M
[/dropcap]r Jones, who with his sisters, Susan and Anne, oversees the philanthropic [FJ Foundation](#), said the debate around the future of the site reinforced that there was no easy answer and a solution would require a "thorough engagement with the council and the community".

"Quite a complex and thoughtful solution is going to be needed," he said.

"And we would be excited if something thoughtful and appropriate could be done."

While Mr Jones did not wish to specify what sort of development he would like to see on the site, he agreed that a

project that linked to the broader community would certainly reflect the values of his grandfather.

The Jones' family have had no direct involvement in the FJ factory site since the company was sold in 1995, but the personal links remain strong.

The water tower was designed by Fletcher Jones' son, **Ralph**, who was a consulting engineer and is now aged in his 80s. The Pleasant Hill gardens, meanwhile, were designed by Fletcher Jones' brother-in-law **Darby Boucher**.

The heritage-listed water tower, gardens and other key elements of the iconic site have been central to recent discussions between Heritage Victoria, the Warrnambool City Council, the administrators and the mortgagors as to who has responsibility for maintaining these historic elements.

A [Save the Silver Ball and Fletcher Jones Gardens](#) group has also added a strong element of grassroots community activism.



[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #ABCCAB;"] I
[/dropcap]n the meantime, the various tenants occupying different parts of the building are still paying rent and, in most cases, repairing what they can as the building continues to crumble around them.

The **Triton Woodworkers Club**, for example, pays around \$9000 a year for a space directly under the silver ball that is substantial in size, but leaks like a sieve whenever it rains.

The club has rigged up an improvised internal drainage system that keeps most of the rain off their equipment – if not the floor – but an outsider can't help wondering why they are being charged anything at all, especially as a not-for-profit community group who, simply by being there, help to keep the vandals out.

So where does the long-term solution to the site lie?

Hopefully a constructive plan will emerge from the talks between the various parties, but, in the meantime, it is worth revisiting a key recommendation of the 2003 consultants' report, commissioned by the council, into the site's future.

It suggested the council, even if it no longer owned the site, keep the dialogue open between the community, any developer and the council to ensure its future life was in keeping with community expectations.

[To date, this has not happened](#). This may change and, if it does, we may be on our way to the "thoughtful and appropriate" solution that such a high-profile and important site deserves.

[box] **Postscript:** According to the Warrnambool City Council, it spent almost \$160,000 on the Fletcher Jones site between 2002 and 2008. A breakdown of this figure was unavailable, but it included repairs on the silver ball after an assessment in 2004.[/box]



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Don't drop the ball on FJ's silver icon



And up it goes...the Fletcher Jones silver ball (which is not looking quite so silver) is carefully placed onto its tripod. The ball has watched over Warrnambool for more than 45 years. Image supplied by: Julie Eagles.

OPINION – Carol Altmann

[box] The campaign to restore the Fletcher Jones silver ball is gathering pace, amid questions of whether it is still structurally safe. [The group working to save the ball](#) held its first think-tank last week to map out a strategy.[/box]

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] I
[/dropcap] want to offer some words of reassurance about Warrnambool's iconic Fletcher Jones silver ball: it will not suddenly topple off its perch and roll down Lava St.

Ralph Jones, an engineer and the son of Sir Fletcher, was much smarter than that. He made sure that the water tower not only

looked fabulous, but was engineered to withstand Warrnambool's excoriating weather.

According to those who worked on the ball, it sways a few centimetres in the wind and this is not a bad thing, as it means it bends to weather, rather than chests it like a brick wall.

The ball also has legs that extend into the silver ball itself (see photo above), and this means it can't roll away unless all three pylons were rusted through and, as of its last thorough inspection in 2010, there was no suggestion of this being even remotely close.

Now that we have cleared that up, the question remains as to why this magnificent, retro, visionary and unique piece of industrial art that has watched over Warrnambool and welcomed its visitors since 1967, is being left to rust.



The campaign to preserve the silver ball

has prompted some wonderful images of the structure, including this one by Kate-Maree Jackway.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] D
[/dropcap]espite being heritage listed for its local and state significance, the job of caring for the silver ball has fallen into the too-hard basket all because its most recent owner, Ian Ballis, went into receivership in 2012.

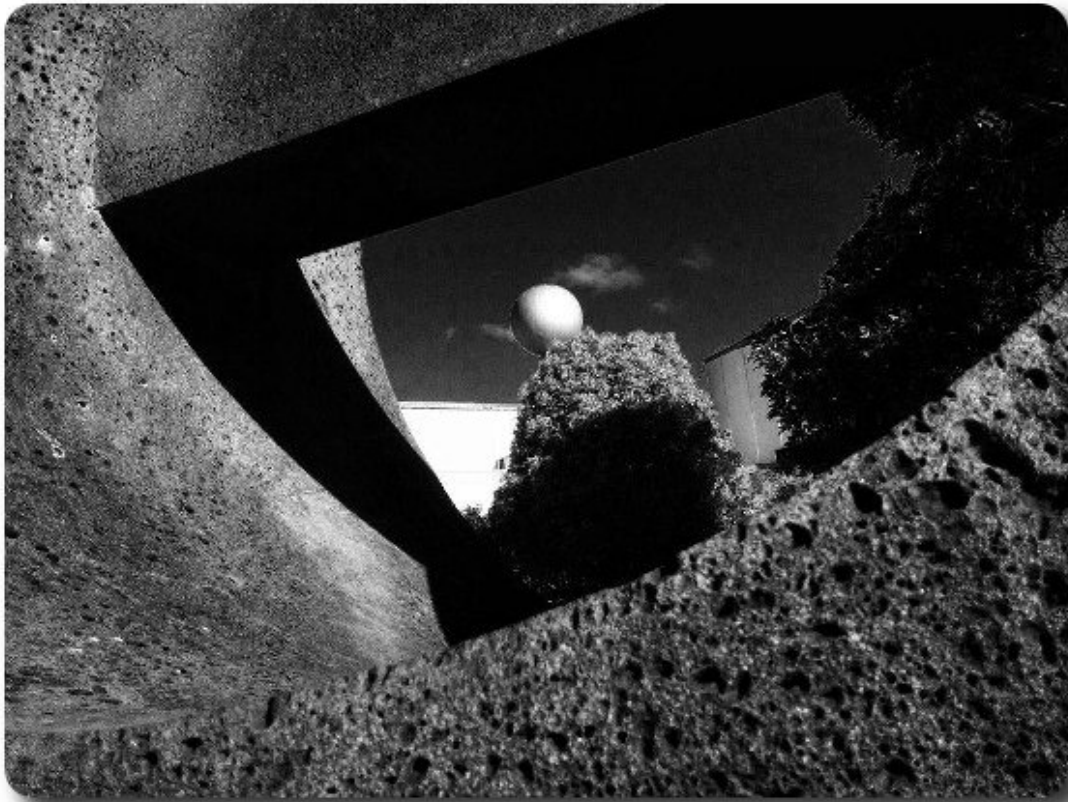
The financial misfortune of just one man has been enough to throw the future of an iconic Warrnambool landmark into jeopardy.

There was no plan B.

The ball is not about to topple over, but it does need annual inspections and on-going repairs, as required, to keep it from rusting in Warrnambool's sea air. It has also not been painted for many, many years.

Given how shabby it looks these days, no wonder some people consider it an eyesore and question whether it is worth saving.

But the [Save the Silver Ball and Fletcher Jones Gardens](#) group thinks differently.



Another perspective, this time by Gordon Baldwin, shot through the Robert Ulmann sculpture that pays tribute to Sir Fletcher Jones.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] T
[/dropcap]his motivated bunch of people know that if the silver ball is removed, Warrnambool will lose an irreplaceable part of its skyline and its social heart.

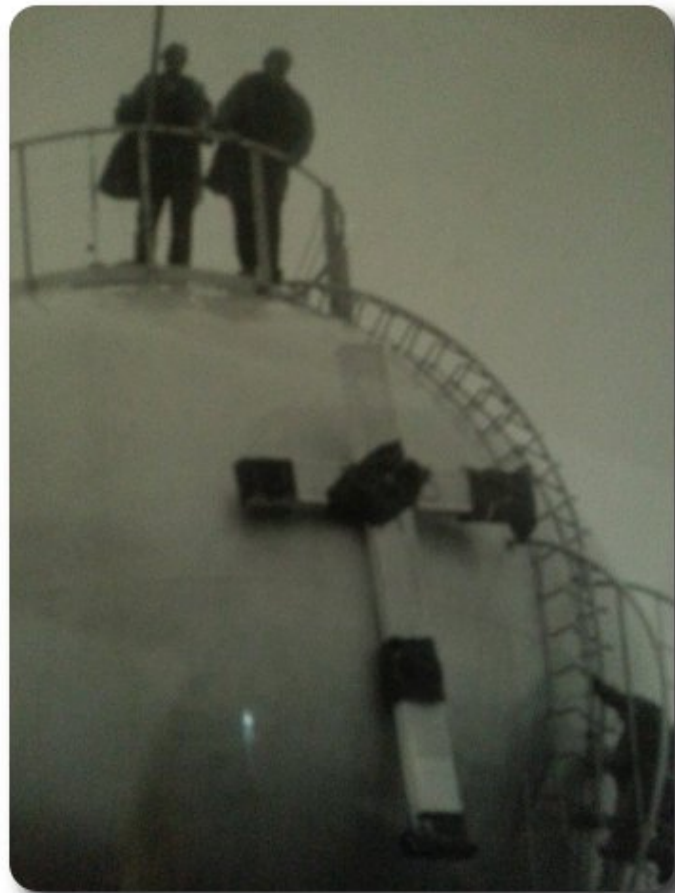
The group held a think-tank last Thursday to brainstorm ideas to save the ball and a lot of the discussion was around how much it would cost to maintain each year, where to find a crane for the work, and how to raise funds for all of these things.

In trying to answer these questions, it is worth looking back at recent history.

The Warrnambool City Council owned the Fletcher Jones site from 1992 to 2007 and, I presume, had a maintenance plan in

place for the ball during those 15 years. How much did this cost and what work was involved? Could it continue this work if the community helped to off-set some of the expense, as is happening with [the \\$4 million redevelopment](#) of the Reid Oval football park?

There is a precedent with the Fletcher Jones silver ball for such an arrangement.



This image, supplied by Amy Fitzgibbon, shows workers pulling up the illuminated cross for the festive season. Vertigo? What vertigo?

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] A

[/dropcap]fter the site was sold to Ian Ballis in 2007, the council continued to pay for the illuminated cross to be hoisted onto the silver ball each Christmas up until 2010, when the cross was removed completely.

For those three years, **Keppel Prince Engineering** donated the use of a crane, so perhaps Keppel Prince would consider donating a crane again for annual inspections and maintenance work?

And maybe Hammonds Paints, Ponting Bros or even Bunnings might consider subsidising the cost of the paint and other materials?

If one thing is certain, it is the ball will only be saved through creative – not mainstream – solutions.

The Save the Silver Ball group is already working on ideas for a public fundraising campaign and a spring picnic. I really like the idea of a reviving an annual Christmas picnic in the fabulous Pleasant Hill gardens, with food, musicians, market stalls and a treasure hunt for the kids, with a portion of the proceeds to go toward annual maintenance of the ball.



The silver ball can be seen for miles around Warrnambool, including from above Lyndoch. Image by Butter Nutz.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] A [dropcap]nd then there is crowd-sourcing through online fundraising sites like [Pozible](#), where author Regina Lane recently raised \$15,000 in a matter of months to write the story of [Saving St Brigid's](#) at Crossley.

If we can find \$4 million for an upgrade of a football oval, and [\\$2 million for steeplechase](#) horse racing in Warrnambool, surely we can't give up on the silver ball because it might cost 10, 20 or even 30 thousand dollars a year to maintain?

The greatest travesty would be to see the ball pulled down because of a perceived lack of money: what is lacking is not money, but positive, creative thinking and a large dose of motivation.

And the Save the Silver Ball group has this in spades.

Far from giving up, as [our local newspaper appears to suggest we do](#), the fight has only just begun because the silver ball does not belong to Ian Ballis, or the council, or the State Government or Heritage Victoria – it belongs to *all* of us and we each need to do what we can, however small, to help keep the ball in the air.



The iconic silver ball is far from a write off, but needs an ongoing commitment by the community to keep it in the air.

[box] Bluestone Magazine is committed to the campaign to save the best of the Fletcher Jones site. Please join the 500-plus people at the [Save the Silver Ball and Fletcher's Gardens Facebook page](#) to be part of this effort. [/box]



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Broken link prompts a fresh start



Warrnambool artist Jenny Altmann was the last person standing at the former Artlink program and has since left to start her own art classes.

By Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A5CECD;"] W
[/dropcap]hen the wheels fell off the Artlink program earlier this year, Warrnambool artist **Jenny Altmann** found herself to be the last woman standing.

[Artlink](#), a unique art program for people with disabilities, was [effectively gutted](#) when the owner of the program, **Western District Employment Options** (WDEA), decided to relocate it from the heart of Warrnambool's CBD to the industrial estate because of concerns about rising costs.

Most of the professional artists attached to the program had already tendered their resignations before the move, but Jenny decided to "hang in there" and see if the rump of Artlink that remained was where she wanted to be.

She stayed only a few weeks before making the decision to strike out on her own.



And then there were none. All of the artists in this photo taken at Artlink last December – Daneel Robinson, Jenny Altmann, Amanda Lines and Gayle Clark – are no longer involved with the program, while Deon Cameron has a new position with WDEA.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A5CECD;"] J
[/dropcap]enny is now in the process of setting up classes at the former Fletcher Jones factory in Warrnambool, as an [extension of those already on offer](#) by well-known Warrnambool artists **Glenn Morgan, Barry “Po” Tate and Chris Small.**

“I see this as something different for me, creatively,” Jenny said.

“I want to offer classes not only for people with disabilities, and not as an art therapist, which involves a whole different form of training, but as what I call a creativity coach,” she said.

The classes will, therefore, be open to anyone interested in using art to work through any form of blockage in their life, be it emotional, professional or personal.

"It might be a writer who has writer's block, or a musician...it is about trying to get back on your feet creatively," Jenny explained.

Jenny knows from her years with Artlink that art has the potential to unlock parts of a person that may otherwise have never been discovered. It also has the power to heal, to reinvigorate and to connect likeminded souls.

"I have a number of tricks up my sleeve that have worked for me over the years and I know, from my own experience, that it has always been art that has pulled me through," she said.



Making a few adjustments...the studio space at the former Fletcher Jones factory had been used by a church group but will soon be used for creative coaching.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A5CECD;"] I [dropcap]ronically, the decision to run her own art classes has taken Jenny full circle. Before Artlink existed, Jenny was involved with a smaller program called Art Options that was

run by WDEA out of the Fletcher Jones building.

Now she is back to a blank slate: an empty, but pleasant, light-filled room, that was previously used by a church group.

“At this point I am just putting it out to the community that I am setting this up and getting what we need in place,” Jenny said.

Anyone interested in donating tables, chairs, easels or other materials that could be used to help set up the studio space can contact Jenny on 0447 627 901. People can also register their interest in the classes.

[box] Last week, WDEA was awarded a five-star rating by Disability Employment Services for its disability management services. It also announced its expansion into Shepparton and Echuca, taking its total number of offices to 12. [/box]



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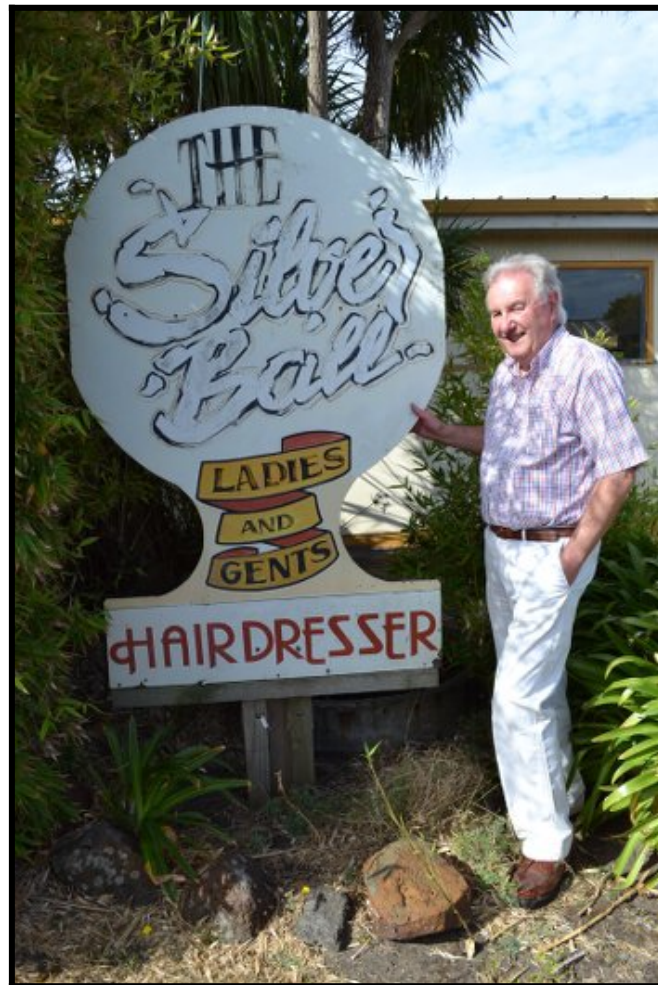
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The Silver Ball under the silver ball



In the shadow of the silver ball: Clive Bray has been the owner operator of the Silver Ball Hair Design Salon in Warrnambool for almost 45 years.

If there is one thing **Clive Bray** has never had to worry about during his many years as a hairdresser, it is explaining how

to find his salon: it sits right under the famous Fletcher Jones silver ball.

Indeed, Clive deliberately named his salon after the silver ball because of its landmark status in Warrnambool and the **Silver Ball Hair Design** salon, in Flaxman St, is almost as old as the ball itself.

“My salon was the first one outside of the CBD, so I needed to choose something memorable,” Clive explained.

“I also had Isobel Jones and Lady (Rena) Jones as clients, so I asked them if I could use the name and they were quite happy for me to do so.”

Silver Ball Hair Design was originally named the **Silver Ball Beauty Salon and Hairdressing** and will celebrate a remarkable 45 years of business in August this year.



As it happens, Clive, who grew up in Naringal, is among the hundreds of Warrnambool people with a personal link to the Fletcher Jones factory, as he worked there for two years “in the design and pleating department”.

Clive, however, took a leaf out of Sir Fletcher Jones’ book by deciding to break new ground and pursue his own business.

Being the 1960s, there were not a lot of men working as hairdressers in salons, as opposed to barber shops, and Clive could see an opportunity to cater for a growing market for personal grooming.

He spent four years training in Melbourne, followed by a year in Adelaide, before returning to Warrnambool and starting a mobile hairdressing service.

After building up a client base, Clive decided to set up his own salon and bought a weatherboard house at 46 Flaxman St, to which he added the salon that looks almost exactly the same today as it did when it first opened in 1969 – two years after the ball was erected.

The purple vinyl chairs, disco-silver wallpaper and egg-shaped hairdryers are the ultimate in retro cool, even if unintentional.



Clive inside his silver-wallpapered salon that has changed little since it first opened in 1969.

Clive's loyal clients have proven to be equally as durable.

"I have had one lady coming here for 45 years, another two for 43 years and about six who have been clients for 35 years," he said, smiling.

His co-worker, **Pam Henderson**, has been at the salon for 43 years.

"I like to think that we create a relaxed and easy-going atmosphere here," Clive said.

"We treat our clients like personal friends."

But Clive, who has two sons that work in other professions, knows that when he retires, his salon will go too.

"When I pull the plug, then this building comes down," he said.



The view across the road from the Silver Ball salon is certainly not what it used to be, with the buildings falling into disrepair.

And what about the silver ball water tower? Should it come down too?

As a long-time observer of the silver ball, we asked Clive if he had an opinion [on the campaign](#) to save the icon from further neglect.

“Well there is no doubt it is an iconic landmark. The number of people who still stop outside our salon and take photographs of it is quite incredible,” he said.

“I would like to see it saved, but if it is saved, it needs to be maintained: it is no good just letting it sit there.”

[box] Bluestone Magazine supports [the grassroots campaign](#) to save the best of the Fletcher Jones site in Warrnambool from being lost through neglect. We support a sensitive development of the site that respects its social and physical history and preserves the gardens and silver ball for future

generations.[/box]



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Fletcher Jones site taken off the market



EXCLUSIVE

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A5CECD;"] T
[/dropcap]he Fletcher Jones site has been withdrawn from sale, pending a change to its zoning by the Warrnambool City Council.

Real estate agent **Mark Wilson**, from Wilson Real Estate, told Bluestone that the site had been withdrawn from sale by administrators just after Christmas in anticipation that it would be rezoned from industrial to mixed use.

"There are still 'for sale' signs all over the property and I am sure if a cashed-up buyer walked in tomorrow they would not be turned away, but it is not on the market right now," he said.

Mr Wilson said a change of zoning would hopefully make the site a more attractive prospect for a potential purchaser because it allowed for greater flexibility.

"That is certainly the aim," he said.

The present Industrial 3 zoning allows for such things as small scale retail, workshops, mini factories and office space.

The derelict site was listed for sale again in July last year, at which time [the council indicated it might be prepared to change the zoning](#) if it was presented with a compelling plan.

Despite the withdrawal from sale indicating such a plan may be afoot, the Warrnambool City Council told Bluestone that it has not received a submission for the zoning to be changed.

The 2.3ha site was owned by Geelong businessman **Ian Ballis**, who developed the Mill Markets, but has been under administration since July 2012 as part of his company, Daramking.

Administrator **Ken Sellers**, from SellersMuldoonBenton, is handling the affairs of Daramking, but was unavailable for comment.



The former owner of the Fletcher Jones site, Ian Ballis, who developed the Mill Markets before going into receivership in 2012. Image: Jeremy Lee, ABC Radio. Click on the image to hear Jeremy's story from 2008.

[box] Bluestone Magazine is part of a [growing grassroots campaign](#) to save the best of the Fletcher Jones site in Warrnambool from being lost through neglect. We support a sensitive development of the site that respects its social and physical history and preserves the iconic gardens and silver ball for future generations.[/box]



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