

Mini FJ's silver ball to shine again



The mini Silver Ball as it was in 2005 when the multi-media installation was unveiled at the back of the Fletcher Jones factory in Warrnambool. (Image supplied by Brenda O'Connor).

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color:#A02F2F;"] A [/dropcap] miniature, but otherwise almost perfect replica of the iconic Fletcher Jones Silver Ball in Warrnambool is poised to be brought out of storage and re-assembled for the first time in almost nine years.

The three-metre tall replica was built in 2005 as part of an interactive art project managed by the Melbourne-based arts company, [Experimenta](#), and funded through a \$34,000 grant from

the then Bracks State Government.

Experimenta worked over three months with local artists, community groups and young film makers to create the silver ball installation, which was unveiled during a weekend event staged at the back of the Fletcher Jones factory, off Lava St.

At that time, three flaps on the side of the ball dropped down to reveal television sets (of the old-fashioned, big-bummed variety) that broadcast a series of short films made by the young film makers about [the Fletcher Jones story](#) and site.



The keeper of the sphere: Murray Adams with the deconstructed ball in a farm shed at Wangoom.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] T
[/dropcap]he ball has not been seen in public since and is now stored in a farm shed at Wangoom under the watchful eye of artist, machine operator and welder **Murray "Muzz" Adams** who was one of the artists involved in its creation. The other artists included **Tamara Sharp, Kate Gage, Carolyn Rundell** and **Nathan Nicholson**.

"It is a fully engineered piece of work with a fibreglass skin fitted over a steel framework," Murray explained.

Just like the real Silver Ball water tower, the miniature version was built to withstand Warrnambool's famous winds (up to 90kph, at least) and the three orange, steel legs form a sturdy tripod inside the sphere to ensure it will never topple off its perch and roll away.

"It really is quite durable and can take a bit of a beating," Murray said.

Plans are afoot to re-assemble the ball, which is currently detached from its legs and base, for the F-Project Cinema's [Silver Ball Screening Project](#) scheduled for early May.

"We are planning to locate it at the back of the post office, in the carpark end of Ozone Walk," said F-Project President **Emma Charlton**.



One of the three flaps on the ball that opened to reveal a television on which local films about Fletcher Jones were screened.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color:#A02F2F"] T
[/dropcap]he replica ball will again be used to screen films made by locals, although the obsolete TV sets will be replaced by more modern technology. It is also hoped to revive another part of the original installation, which saw a person either pedal a bicycle or operate a manual sewing machine to provide power for the flaps to open and reveal the screens.

"We won't know what is to be screened in the ball until (the films) are submitted at the end of March, but we're also thinking of reviving the films which were initially made as a part of this previous project," Emma said.

The theme of the Silver Ball Screening Festival is 'Keeping the ball in the air' and has already inspired some quirky interpretations.

Some of the ideas, Emma said, included animated bugs collecting the silver ball, a documentary about social services in Warrnambool (therefore keeping the metaphorical

ball in the air), and a narrative including the water tower tumbling down Lava St in an Indiana Jones-style action film (god forbid!).

[box type="bio"] The Silver Ball Screening Project on May 9-10 is part of the Hidden Histories Laneway Festival, and is supported by the F Project, Regional Arts Victoria, Warrnambool City Council and Warrnambool Art Gallery. Bluestone Magazine is part of a grassroots movement to save the best of the Fletcher Jones factory site and gardens from being lost through neglect. You can read [more about the campaign here](#) and join the Facebook group [here](#). [/box]



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**Fletcher
recommendations:**

Jones



THE WARRNAMBOOL PLANNING AND HERITAGE GROUP:

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] R
[/dropcap]ecommendations to council:

i) Council and Heritage Victoria to conduct a survey of the Fletcher Jones site in Warrnambool to consider the current condition and integrity of its state heritage listed aspects. The survey should re-examine what remains of the most significant aspects of the site to the local community and to the state. We would like to see Heritage Victoria and Council take a proactive role with the owner (present or future) to find a solution for renewal of this site and a way to share the stories attached to this site. Examples of best practice and processes for renewal of similar sites could be used to inspire recommendations for options and incentives to ensure it has a viable, vibrant future.

ii). Council and Heritage Victoria to provide funds for a current structural assessment of the Fletcher Jones water tower (locally called the Silver Ball) with a view to

determining a schedule of repair and maintenance works (and their cost) to ensure this state heritage listed structure is safe and viable for the next 50 years.

iii). Council and Heritage Victoria work with the Jones family to develop a social history project that tells the Fletcher Jones story and connection in Warrnambool.

The Warrnambool City Council's response (as listed 9/12/13):

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] A [/dropcap] number of buildings and features within the site are listed on the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) as significant.

Council is interested in working with the current landowner, or any future landowner, to ensure that significant elements of the site are properly protected and managed. Council is also interested in ensuring that any future redevelopment of the site involves renewal and moves away from its historical manufacturing past.

A structural assessment of the former water tower (silver ball) was undertaken in 2004. The assessment identified rectification works including replacement of hold down bolts on the south-western column, and removal of ladder and water pipe. The assessment also recommended a painting program to protect the tower from further corrosion.

In 2010, the bolts were replaced, and the water pipe and ladder were removed. It is unknown whether the painting program has been implemented.

Council officers will continue to work with the current landowner, or any future landowner, with a view to update the 2004 structural report and identify any further matters that may need addressing.

The former Fletcher Jones factory is clearly of social

significance to Warrnambool and the State of Victoria. There will many people within the community who have strong links to this site. It is becoming increasingly important that these stories are captured and shared.

Council officers will investigate funding opportunities to undertake a social history of the site (involving the Jones Family, former factory workers and members of the community). These stories will assist in the preservation of important elements of the site and in any future redevelopment of the site.

* * *

The Save Fletcher Jones campaign

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A5CECD;"] B
[/dropcap]luestone Magazine is part of a [growing grassroots campaign](#) to save the best of the iconic Fletcher Jones site in Warrnambool from being lost through neglect.

The site is rapidly deteriorating and yet there is still no firm plan in place to preserve what has been deemed a place of state significance. It is also an important part of Warrnambool's social history and holds a special place in our hearts.

Shortly after we wrote two opinion pieces on this issue, two people – **Julie Eagles** and **Tonia Wilcox** – started a Facebook page for those who wish to see the gardens, the silver ball

and other important parts of the site saved. An enormous number of people are sharing their memories and images on this page, some of which we have collated for our youtube clip.

[box] You can join the Save the Silver Ball and Fletcher Jones Gardens group by [clicking here](#).[/box]

You can also read our latest opinion pieces about the Fletcher Jones site below:

[Close Flagstaff Hill; save Fletcher Jones](#)

[Who will step up for Fletcher Jones?](#)



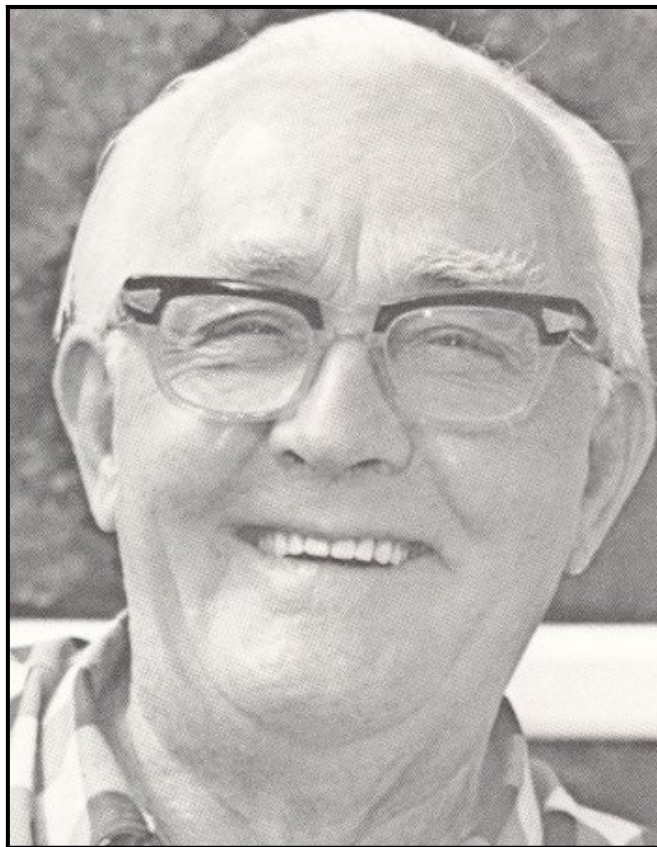
The Warrnambool Planning and Heritage Group [wrote a report 18 months ago](#) that warned Fletcher Jones faced the same fate as the demolished 94 Merri St, which dated back to the earliest days of Warrnambool in the mid 1800s, unless action was taken now. The Warrnambool City Council's response to the group's 15 recommendations was tabled at its 9 December 2013 meeting (see

[a summary here](#)).

For more information you can also read the [Heritage Victoria statement of significance](#) on why the site is important and which parts have been listed for protection.

[box] If you are passionate about the future of the Fletcher Jones site, as we are, please take a moment to read the latest and to get involved. Bluestone Magazine will have regular updates as the campaign unfolds.[/box]

Who will step up for Fletcher Jones?



Sir Fletcher Jones: a man who helped to put Warrnambool on the

map, but whose most visual legacy is being destroyed by neglect.

Analysis – Carol Altmann

In December last year, we first [published an opinion piece](#) about the future of the iconic **Fletcher Jones Pleasant Hill** site in Warrnambool that questions why it is being left to rot as our civic leaders stand by and, it seems, wait for a white knight to show up and make a decision about its future.

At the same time, we also questioned why the [Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village](#) – having been invented as a tourist village in the 1970s – continued to be a priority in terms of concern about its future and its funding, despite its [flagging popularity](#).

We suggested closing Flagstaff Hill and creating a combined Warrnambool Art Gallery and Museum (with a strong maritime history presence) at Pleasant Hill.

Whether people agreed with this idea or not, the piece has been our most popular story.

It had more than **1600** page views and almost **500** people shared it on Facebook. We received almost **40** comments on our site and the same amount again on [our Facebook page](#). Almost two months after it was first published, it is still attracting attention.

Fletcher Jones matters to Warrnambool and to Warrnambool people. This message is being sent loud and clear, but I doubt that it is being heard by the people that can actually determine its future.



Will Premier and local Member Denis Napthine step up for Fletcher Jones? Has he even been asked? (Image: www.portnews.com.au)

After writing this piece, I sought out a copy of an extensive review into the Fletcher Jones site that was commissioned by the Warrnambool City Council in **2002**: that is 12 years ago.

At that time, the council spent what was no doubt a considerable chunk of your money (\$10,000? \$15,000?) to hire an international consultancy firm [Sinclair, Knight, Metz \(SKM\)](#) to conduct a fulsome investigation into the Pleasant Hill site. SKM spoke to anyone and everyone. They held focus groups and they set up a steering committee made up of existing and former staff, members of the community and council.

And at the end of all this talking and consulting and investigating, SKM wrote a 100-page report with the not very gripping title of *"Investigation into future economic opportunities for the Fletcher Jones site"* that was presented to the Warrnambool City Council on July 8, 2003.

A copy of this report is now kept under lock and key, literally, at the Warrnambool City Library where a cheerful librarian retrieved it for me and I had the sense that I was the first person to ask for it in a very, very long time.



Will Mayor Michael Neoh or
Councillors Rob Askew,
Kylie Gaston, Jacinta
Ermacora, Peter Sycopoulis,
Peter Hulin or Brian Kelson
step up? Image: ABC.

The report outlines a number of potential recommendations for the future use of the FJ site – for retail, housing, aged care – and also suggested the council, who owned the site at the time, to sell it to a willing private developer. This did not mean, however, that the council simply walk away.

Instead, SKM made a key recommendation that there be **“continuous consultation and communication between the council, developers and the community”** about the site’s future.

The council sold the site in 2005.

And it walked away.

It has been more than a decade since this report was commissioned and the council has done nothing concrete to ensure the preservation of this site. There has certainly been no “continuous communication” about its future.

The council’s apathy is shameful.

All of that time, all of that energy and all of that money – and for what?

Pleasant Hill is recognised by Heritage Victoria as having historical, social and aesthetic significance to *the state*. So perhaps the state should be contributing to its upkeep?

If so, why isn’t the council lobbying **Premier Denis Napthine** for this to happen? **The Premier is our local MP – what better opportunity and access could you ask for?** But has anybody from the council even asked for state support? I don’t think so.



What about the The Standard and its editor Steve Kelly? Will the paper step up? (Image: TheCitizen.org.au)

And what is our local daily newspaper, [The Warrnambool Standard](#), doing to take up the cause? From what I can see, nothing.

In the middle of last year, the editor of The Standard, **Steve**

Kelly, [told a forum here in Warrnambool](#) that he believed print was “still king” in the regions and that his paper firmly set the agenda for this city and that other media outlets (the ABC, regional TV) followed.

“Do we have an absolute monopoly on setting the agenda in this district? Well, my answer to that would be ‘Yes’. I think the radio station follows our lead. I think to a large extent [the ABC] follows our lead and I think to a large extent [WIN TV] follows our lead,” Mr Kelly is [quoted as saying](#).

Surely it is time, then, for The Standard to take the lead – to set the agenda – on saving Fletcher Jones.

As a new, still growing forum, *Bluestone Magazine* can only do so much and we are thrilled to have reignited the conversation, but it takes more than conversation: it takes pressure, and it takes action.

Who, I wonder, will step up for Fletcher Jones?

If we care about the Fletcher Jones site, and I believe we do, then we need to make our leaders accountable and ensure it is preserved before all we have are memories, vintage postcards and a dusty report under lock and key to remind us of our failure.

[Since this piece was written, a grassroots supporters group has started to try and save the most important parts of this site. You can join the Save the Silver Ball and Fletcher Jones Gardens group on [Facebook here](#). Read more about the FJ site [here](#).]



Friends in high places: it was a different story of support when Fletcher Jones opened at Pleasant Hill in 1948.

Close Flagstaff Hill; save Fletcher Jones

If there is one thing Warrnambool needs to get right, it is the preservation of Pleasant Hill and the Fletcher Jones site...so why are we spending so much time, money and effort on Flagstaff Hill instead?