

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.

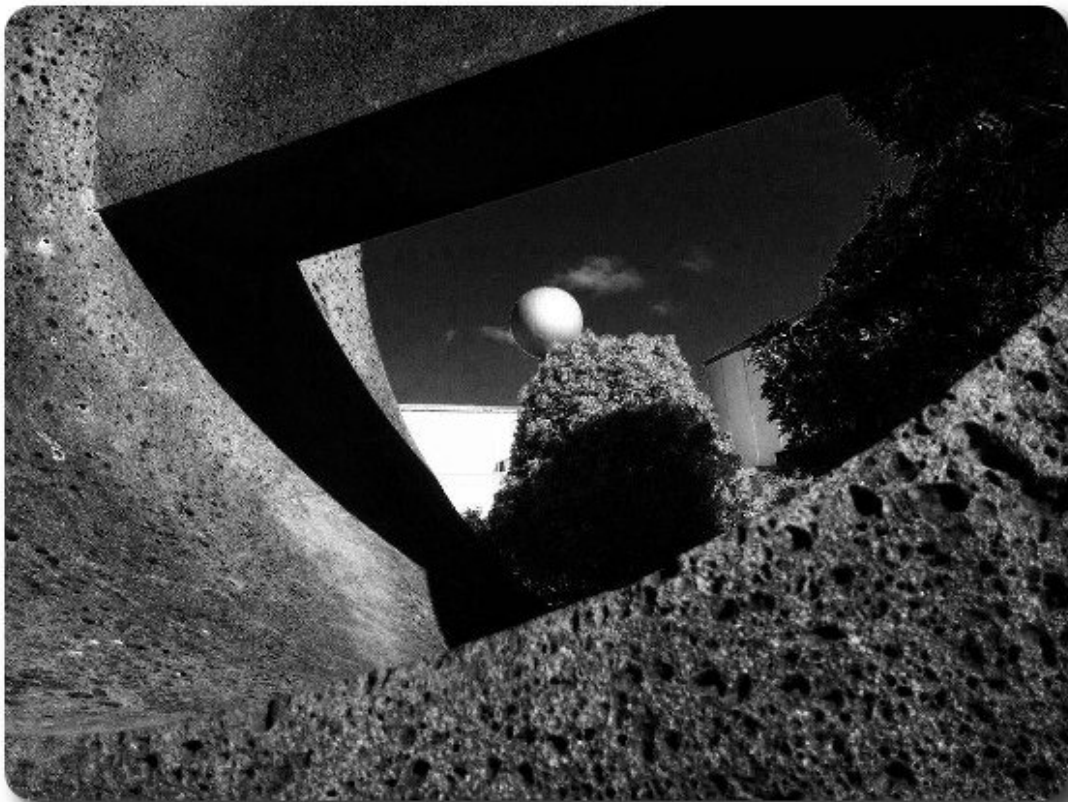
There was no plan B.

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.

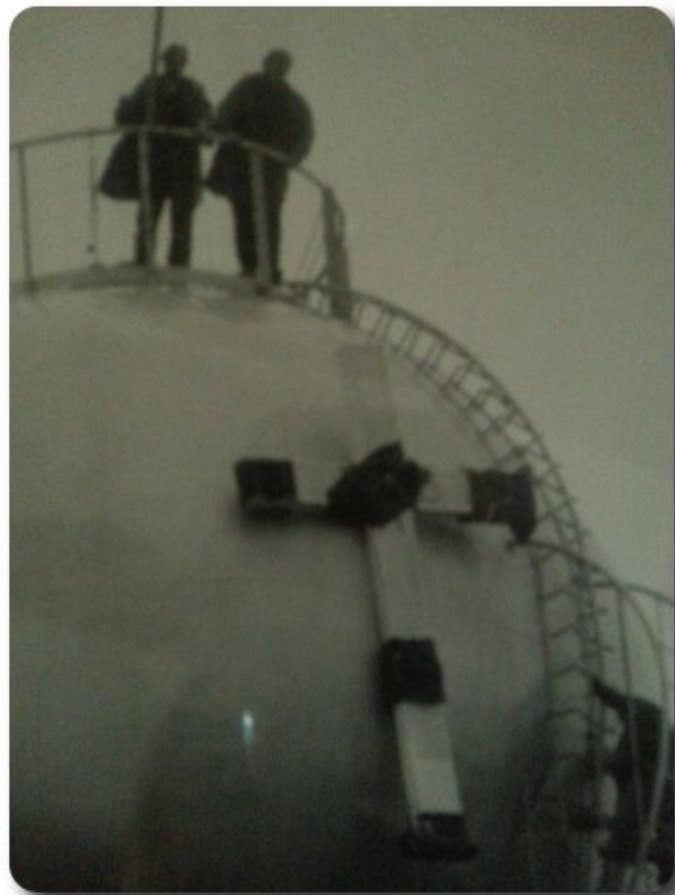
[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] T
his motivated bunch of people know that if the silver ball is removed, Warrnambool will lose an irreplaceable part of its skyline and its social heart.

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.

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[/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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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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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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