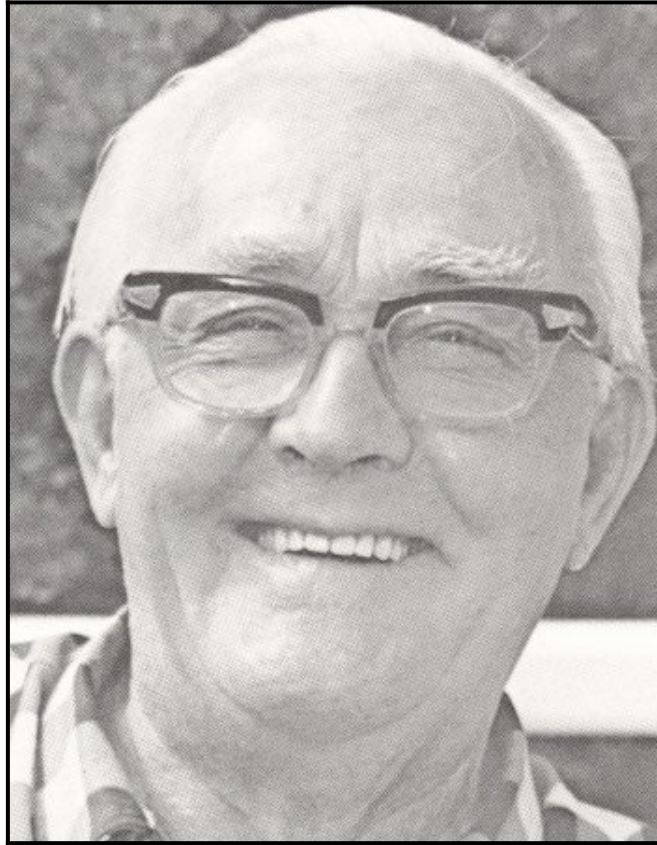


Who will step up for Fletcher Jones?



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](#).

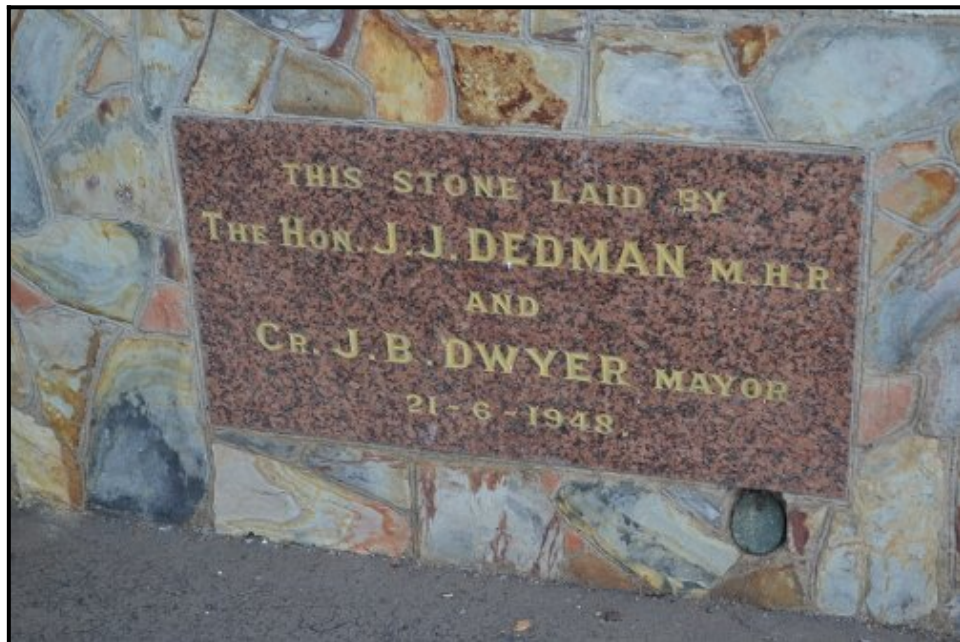
Surely it is time, then, for The Standard to take the lead – to set the agenda – on saving Fletcher Jones.

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.