

Where are the 'police' Norfolk pines now?



The Terrier – Carol Altmann

There is an interesting follow-up to our March piece [about the removal of the two historic Norfolk pine trees](#) from the Warrnambool Police Station, including where the timber is now.

Thanks to a couple of tip-offs, I can firstly pass on a local newspaper article from 1998 that stressed the importance of retaining these trees when the new police station was being designed.

I can also tell you that the bulk of the timber from these two towering specimens has ended up in Melbourne and will be turned into furniture.

But first to the newspaper article.



It confirms that the project designers, L. U. Simon Pty Ltd, went out of their way to make sure that trees were preserved because of their historical connection to the neighbouring Church of England complex, of which they were once a part, and their "valuable" contribution to Warrnambool's heritage.

According to the article, written as part of a special promotion for the opening of the new police station, an arborist was bought in to ensure the trees were protected as the new station was built.

Site manager Matthew Wood was quoted as saying: "Part of our contract was to look after the trees. We had to design and build around (them)."

Yet despite this, as we now know, the trees were removed last year because they were apparently causing flooding to the police building.

[Donate](#)

Based on the documents [we received in a Freedom of Information application](#), the removal was approved by the Warrnambool City Council without the need for any arborist's report, or any detailed assessment whatsoever, but rather the word of the police officer who made the request.

This, as I have said before, is not just about two trees. It is about due process, and how what was once considered precious to our city is so easily done away with.



Timber from the two Norfolk pines is now in storage at Mark Tuckey furniture, in Melbourne. Image: [Mark Tuckey Furniture](#).

At least the trees didn't end up as landfill or mulch.

Again, thanks to a tip-off, I learned the bulk of the timber has been taken to Melbourne to high-end furniture making firm, [Mark Tuckey](#).

A spokesman for the company said it was in storage, drying

out, but didn't respond when I asked who had given it to them.



The Silver Ball inspired table at the Warrnambool Art Gallery made from a piece of the historic Norfolk pine removed from the Warrnambool Police Station last year.
Image: Tomoya & Co.

One piece of the pine has already been turned into a giant table now in use in the revamped foyer of the Warrnambool Art Gallery.

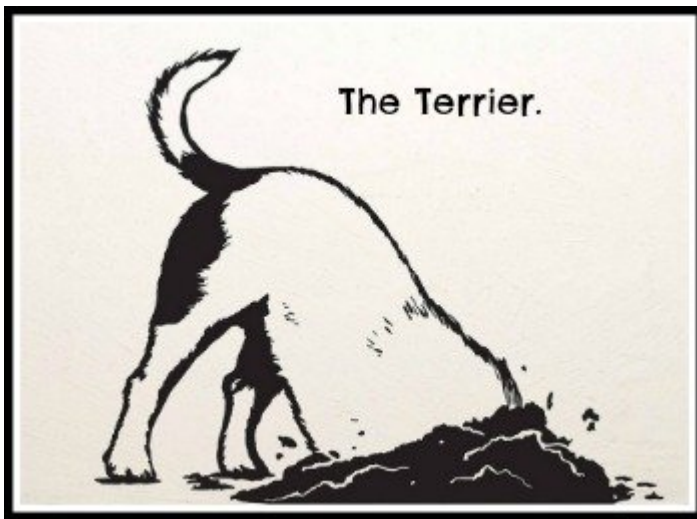
Inspired by Fletcher Jones' silver ball water tower, the piece was made by Melbourne interior designer Chris Tomoya ([Tomoya & Co](#)) as part of the foyer refurbishment.

There is no doubt that this timber makes for beautiful furniture, but I still can't help feeling its a bit like having a deer's head above the fireplace: the living thing is so much better.



Did you miss this story?

Historic trees could have been saved



Opinion/Analysis by Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 35px; color: #8cc7d0;"] D
[/dropcap]o you remember the two giant Norfolk pines that were cut down at the Warrnambool Police Station late last year?

I do, because I couldn't believe the Warrnambool City Council didn't try harder to save them – but, as I have since learned, they actually ignored their own advice to let the chainsaws in.

Here is a photo of what we are talking about, taken after the limbs were cut off in preparation for their full removal last August:



The two mature Norfolk pines being prepared for removal in August 2016.

These weren't just any old trees.

The pair had historical links to the beautiful Church of England property next door (built in 1855) and were considered so important by the council that they were specifically mentioned in the planning permit issued in 1996 for the new Warrnambool Police Station in Koroit St.

In particular, the trees were not to be "removed, destroyed or lopped" without written consent from the council.

The new station opened in 1999 but, it appears, had immediate problems with drainage and flooding which to me says more about a poor build in the first place rather than the position of the two trees.

In 2005, a member of Victoria Police – I don't know who,

because names have been redacted from the Freedom of Information documents I received from the council – sent the council an email, saying the pine trees were continuing to cause water damage to the new building and needed to go.

“All advice we have and our own observations tell us that our problems will continue whilst the trees remain in place. I seek approval to remove both of them forthwith,” he/she wrote.

Two weeks later in November 2005, a council officer wrote a detailed response on behalf of the council’s Built Environment Committee.

The most important paragraph of that letter is this:

“...the trees have a positive contribution to the streetscape, have demonstrated historical links with the church property next door, clearly the intention of the endorsed plans is to retain the trees and therefore the removal of the trees should only be considered **as a last resort.**” (my emphasis)

Crucially, the council also recommended the police obtain a Structural Engineer’s report on what could be done to either the building (eg. adding more gutters) or to the trees (eg. root barriers) to fix the problem.

The council even offered the police a free arborist service and access to its Heritage Advisor.

But neither happened. In fact, nothing happened.

Fast forward five years to 2010 and the police wrote to the council again and – again – asked how it could get rid of the trees.

This time, however, there was no detailed response, but a six-line letter from a different council officer to that who responded in 2005.

And this time, the historic trees were suddenly considered

dispensable because they might – *might* – cause problems.

“Given the retention of the trees is **likely** to be problematic, Council does not object to their removal,” he/she wrote. (My emphasis).



It is hard to get a sense of the size of the remaining tree stumps, but you could stand on them and stretch out your arms and your fingertips. I hope that helps.

I am not sure when a written permit expires, but it *took a further six years* before it was used to cut down two Norfolk pines that were apparently causing so much trouble.

No wonder so many people were shocked – at no time has there been any public information or discussion about the trees, despite their significance.

Instead, a six-year-old permit, issued behind closed doors and by a different group of councillors (if they knew about it at all), was enough.

I have tried to talk to the police about why they removed the trees *now*, more than 10 years after they were considered a dire problem. They didn't respond.

As such, I am unable to confirm one story doing the rounds that the space will be used for extra car parking.

Surely not.

Now some of you will be shrugging your shoulders and saying, oh, they were just trees, but to me this sequence of events reveals so much about the weakness of our planning laws, the way decisions are made in private and then how they are pitched to the public.

As custodians of our natural and built heritage, we can surely do better than this.

[box]You can see all of the Freedom of Information documents relating to this story [here](#) and [here](#).[/box]

This is the first of three Terrier pieces that will be free to access. If you would like continued access, please become a paying supporter by clicking the box below.

[Donate](#)