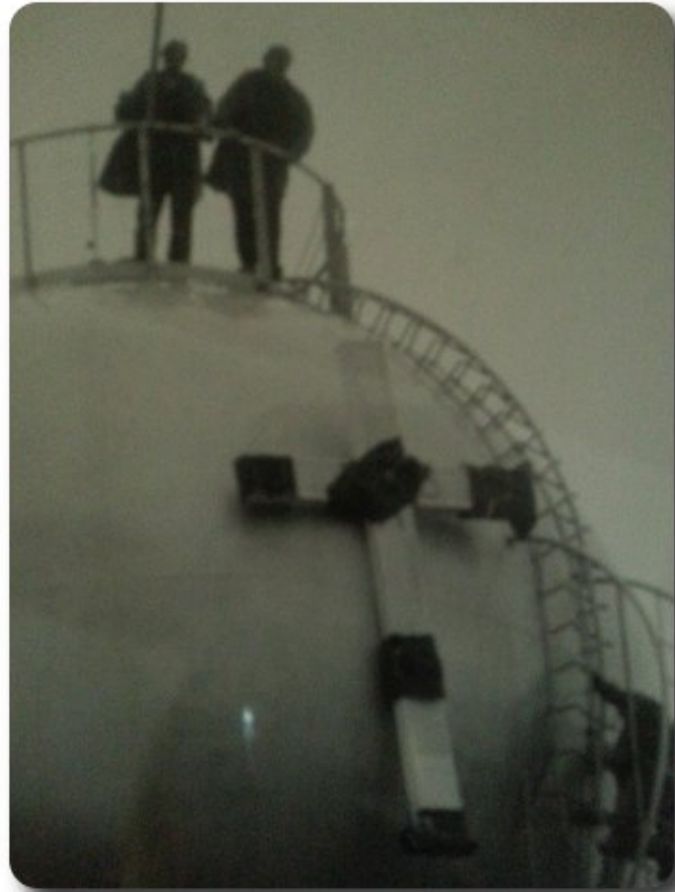


Fletcher Jones cross came a cropper



Brian Fitzgibbon and Anthony Kelly winch the original Fletcher Jones cross up the silver ball for one of the last times. Image courtesy Amy Fitzgibbon.

The mystery of the missing Fletcher Jones cross has been solved, and, unfortunately, the ending is not pretty.

As [we wrote](#) recently, the very first illuminated cross that sat on top of the Fletcher Jones silver ball water tower in Warrnambool every Christmas and Easter for about 20 years has

not been seen since it was removed from the ball sometime in the 1980s.

The replacement cross – made of aluminium – has also since been replaced by a newer, more eco-friendly illuminated cross that no longer tops the silver ball, but the Warrnambool Uniting Church in Koroit St.

One of the few people who knew the first two crosses intimately was **Brian Fitzgibbon**, who worked at Fletcher Jones' for 15 years as a leading hand in the maintenance department.

"It was made of galvanised iron folded over, with fluorescent lightbulbs running up each of its sides, that were then covered in perspex: all of which made it very, very heavy," Brian said.

The cross, which was made by **Bill Lovell** and **Alan Beales**, was winched into place before each Christmas and left until after Easter, but one year things went awry.

"It was blowing an absolute gale, harder than it's even blowing today," Brian said.

Amid the atrocious conditions, the cross was hauled into place but, Brian now confesses, he forgot to fully secure one of the toggles that held the cross in place.

"So the wind is working away, working away, and the toggle is getting looser and looser and eventually the cross crashed completely on its side," he said.

The cross broke in half from the fall and was partly dangling over the side of the silver ball in a spectacle that was apparently captured by the local newspaper, *The Warrnambool Standard*.

Unfortunately Brian can't remember the exact date that it happened, but he does remember the awful guilt at having not fully secured the toggle.

"I will admit it, I am the one to blame," he said.

The damaged cross was relegated to the skip bin and a new, aluminium cross – the one now in storage at the Warrnambool City Council depot – was hastily assembled to appease a very unhappy public.

"We modelled the new one on the star that they used to have at the Warrnambool Drive-In, which had lights all around the outside," Brian said.

"It was so, so much lighter and easier to handle."

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Missing: one old cross, last seen at FJs.



Retired: the second (and final) Fletcher Jones cross sits in council storage, having been replaced by a more modern cross that is erected on the Uniting Church. The whereabouts of the original FJ cross, first used in 1967, remains unknown*.

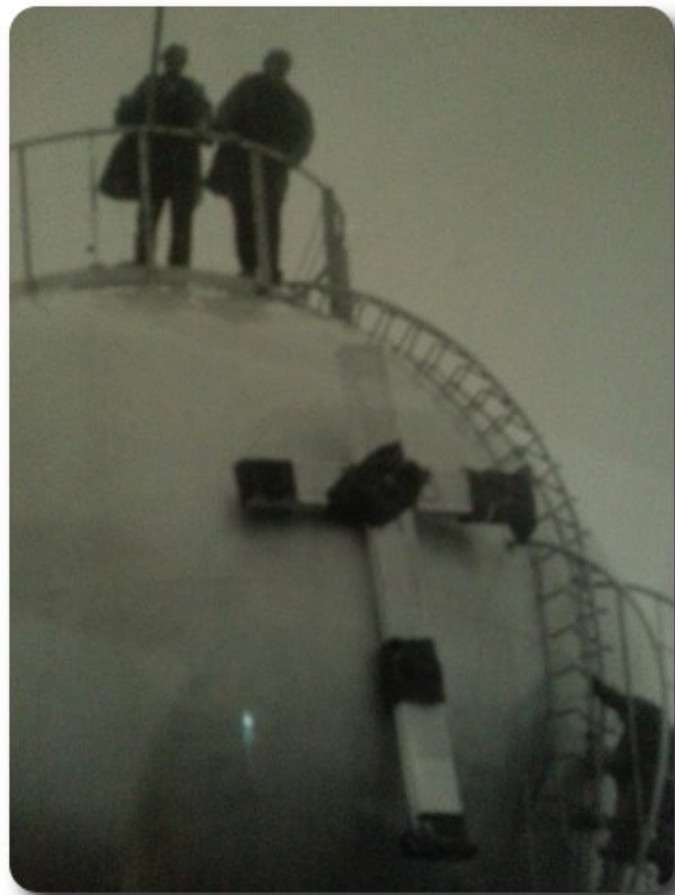
[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] W [/dropcap]ith the former Fletcher Jones factory in Warrnambool [officially changing hands](#) last Thursday (19/6), there has been a renewed focus on tracking down the iconic, original fixtures in the hope that they can be returned to the site, including the very first FJ

cross.

New owner, the Geelong-born, China-based businessman **Dean Montgomery**, has indicated his willingness to restore the garden furniture and features, including what we call 'The Man in the Pressed Pants', but who was formally known as 'the FJ man', who once stood so proudly in his pleats at the front of the property.

The man, unfortunately, is now a broken shell of his former self. What does remain, however, has been enough to inspire Mr Montgomery to consider commissioning an artist to rebuild his legs and restore him to his full glory.

Another iconic piece of the original factory that is proving harder to trace is the original Fletcher Jones illuminated cross that was winched up the silver ball water tower each Christmas (and removed after every Easter) to cast its comforting glow across the city.



Up she goes: this image is believed to show the original, much heavier cross being hoisted into position using a boat winch. Image courtesy Amy Fitzgibbon.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] S [/dropcap]ir Fletcher Jones was a socialist Christian, or what might now be called a left-leaning Christian, who believed the cross would provide a gentle reminder of the role of Christ around an increasingly consumer-driven Christmas.

The cross was first erected when the silver ball was built in 1967 and, it is understood, was literally plugged into a powerpoint on top of the silver ball and ran off a timer.

At some time in the late 80s (nobody we spoke to was exactly sure when), this cross was replaced with a much lighter, aluminium structure that had light bulbs mounted along its sides.

This newer cross continued to be placed on the silver ball each year, right up until 2010 when the deteriorating condition of the ball made it unsafe.

In a now infamous move, the Warrnambool City Council (WCC) – who had taken over responsibility for the cross – found a new home for it on top of a west Warrnambool water tower, owned by Wannon Water.

The cross had barely been lit, however, before it was removed by Wannon Water [after a single complaint](#) by a resident, Graham Keith, who claimed that it was “religious advertising” on “public property”. (Mr Keith must have been apoplectic during all of those years that Sir Fletcher Jones and his family kept “advertising” their religious beliefs).



The second cross, with its somewhat antiquated light system, was relocated – briefly – to a water tower in west Warrnambool before a single complaint saw it removed in 2011. Image: Robin Sharrock, Herald-Sun newspaper.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] A [/dropcap]fter a fierce backlash to the decision by Wannon Water to remove the 2.5m tall cross, the WCC found a new home for it on top of the Uniting Church, in Koroit St, not far from where Fletcher Jones once ran his clothing store, "The Man's Shop".

The cross, however, again proved to be a safety hazard due to its basic lighting system. This cross – the second FJ cross – was retired and placed in council storage and a new, smaller cross, with environmentally friendly LED lighting, was built for the church to use.

What became of the original 1967 cross, however, remains a mystery, despite our attempts to track it down*.

The Uniting Church has certainly had never seen it, and the WCC only have the second cross in storage.

WCC media spokesman **Nick Higgins** sent us the following words about the mystery:

"Our infrastructure chief thinks the wooden cross may have its origins in the 1960s. It's possible it was replaced with aluminium, not because it was rotten, but because aluminium was lighter and easier to install. But we don't know for certain – this was at a time when the council was not closely involved with FJs."

Perhaps a reader can help to fill in the gaps?*

* We now know the answer – [see story here](#).



The second Fletcher Jones cross shone like a beacon across the Warrnambool skyline for more than 25 years, after replacing the original cross that was first erected in 1967. Image: Courtesy Mitch Stansfield.

[box] Former Warrnambool City Council planner and [photography enthusiast](#) **Lisa Gervasoni** is one of the few people to photograph the cross on all three structures. Lisa no longer lives in Warrnambool (although she maintains close ties), but she kindly gave us permission to reproduce the three images below:[/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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