

DEATH IN THE MORNING

An Execution at Dawn by a Council Demolition Squad

By Mike Peters

In 2006 a council plan was unearthed to quietly demolish the Franklin Football Clubhouse, a part of the Franklin landscape since 1947, and to purchase the Rowing Club land and building. Crown land was then to be given to the Rowing Club and a 2 storey building attached to the current Franklin Bowls Club was to be constructed. This plan was interrupted by concerned residents who organised for a temporary Heritage Order to be placed on the old Clubhouse. This was to create breathing space to allow for community consultation with council on such a dramatic alteration to the precious Franklin foreshore.

Perhaps foolishly, Franklin residents relaxed. They believed this matter resolved, and that their concerns had been noted and respected.

Last week residents realised their trust in council had been sadly misplaced. At 6.00 a.m. on Thursday morning, like a thief in the night council destroyed this building.

Very few residents knew what was in store for the clubhouse. Those that did had immediately raised objection and there was a groundswell of opposition. By late last week residents were very confident of obtaining funding from the Federal Government to restore the building, a petition with hundreds of signatures was up and running and a series of new uses and functions to utilise the building had been devised. Interestingly, one of council's claimed excuses for demolition was that the building was not being utilised. Perhaps this was because council would not allow any one to use it.

At a closed meeting between a select few on Wednesday night, a meeting that the public were not allowed to attend, it was announced that council had no intention of preserving the building and were so hell bent on destroying it they intended to start the very next day.

One wonders why such indecent haste.



Franklin Clubhouse in excellent condition - July, 2006

Most residents had no idea what was unfolding. On Thursday morning at 6.30 a.m. a local truck driver rang me in tears to tell me half of the building was gone already. Campers who approached me later in the day told me the demolition noise started around 6.00 a.m., the crews arriving while it was still dark!

This is surely against council's own regulations?

A local resident not involved in the destruction but who had got wind of the dawn raid told me he had arrived at around 5.00 a.m. to try to salvage something - anything - from the building. He was not allowed to do so.

It is a common practice with developers on the mainland to make their move either on weekends or very early mornings so as to present a fait accompli before anyone gets a chance to step in. As someone told me "Mate, once you knock 'em down, they can't exactly put 'em back up again can they?"



By the time I and other residents arrived at 6.45 a.m. a demolition crew was already taking the club house away to use as landfill.

That building was in very good condition considering the active neglect it had been subjected to by council. We were not allowed to approach the building, the Police presence saw to that.

And why exactly was there a Police presence that morning?

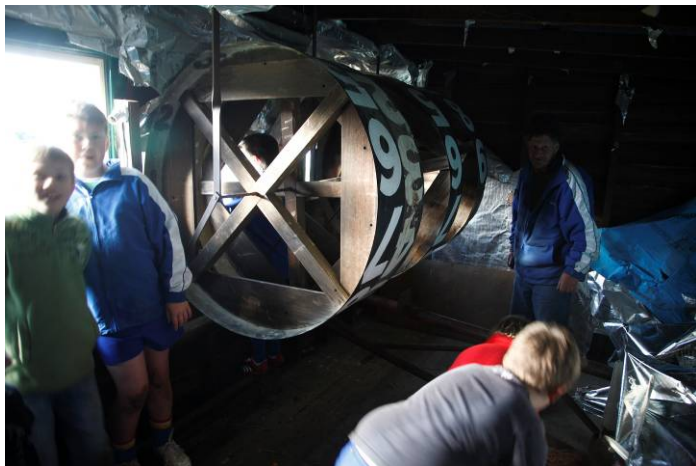
Please note, I take no issue with the workmen or police doing the job they were instructed to do, although the looks I got weren't exactly friendly. I was instructed to stay well back as it was 'dangerous' yet I observed that not one of them was wearing a hard hat.

I couldn't help but notice that as the demolition continued, this proud little building simply refused to fall over. No matter what it was hit with, it stood there. It required the excavator operator to actually push it over, piece by stubborn piece.

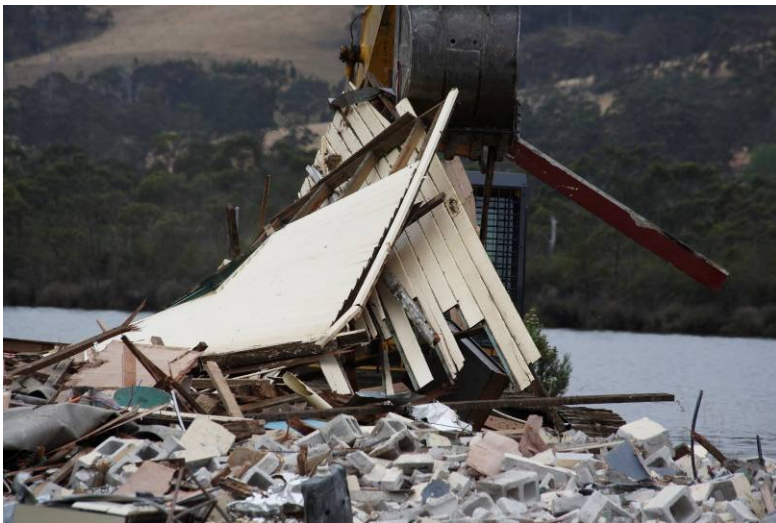
And we could see nothing - and I mean nothing - wrong with the timber, both of the structure or the floor. One of us managed to ask that an antique table be spared and that the mighty 'Lion' emblem be cut from the dance floor. The weatherboards were all very re useable, the framework timber was in very good condition. We even heard the sound of crockery smashing as the excavator pummelled everything into oblivion.

As each section was pulled down it was systematically smashed, with the excavator pounding it into rubble. This included the entire timber framework, immaculately preserved tongue and groove flooring, huge sheets of perfectly good roofing iron, weather boards, a stove, a barbeque, chairs, cupboards, doors etc.

There seemed to be a deliberate and systematic destruction of everything, which was then summarily loaded onto trucks and quickly taken to become landfill in a quarry down south.



Local kids having fun, helping the scorer during a cricket match in 2007



Good roofing iron, wonderfully preserved weather boards, tongue and groove flooring – all trashed.

There was not even the pretence of recycling anything. In fact I got the distinct impression that everything was obliterated so as to leave no uncomfortable questions about the building's structural integrity. Contrary to our mayor's statements to the Mercury two weeks ago, nothing bar a few token weather boards removed last week was salvaged for recycling.

And I mean absolutely nothing.

I have since spoken to many local townspeople and even those who didn't care if the building stayed or went are angry at what they saw as the criminal waste of a large amount of resource material. So much of this could have been made available to a community that is struggling in these hard economic times.

The images I took that miserable morning show clearly a building in very good condition. The council report claiming rotten timbers and decay simply does not hold up.

Photographs of the clubhouse taken in 2007 show it being enjoyed and in excellent condition. These images as well as the photographs of its demolition are now published online and all of these images are available on request.

This building did not have the grace of the Franklin Palais or the Bowmont. It was not an architectural wonder like the Sydney Opera House. No, it was a simple weather board 1940's clubhouse. But it had the honest integrity of its time and place.

This building was built with love by local people. On weekends, by themselves. Sometimes it involved them carting material down from the hills of Franklin in wheel barrows. They held barbeques and raffles and donated their time and resources - all to build their town a little place to congregate and socialise around their beloved sports ground. It was a place that was their own. And there aren't too many locals who can't remember with fondness attending a dance or a function in that little hall over the years.

This building was an honest building. It stood to remind us of the people who worked the orchards and farmed the land and who thought enough of themselves to build themselves a clubhouse - with no help from outside.

It was an icon of Franklin, one of the few remaining older style sporting buildings left in Tasmania. It was commented on so often by tourists who loved its funny little scoreboard. It takes an incredible lack of foresight - or maybe lack of soul is the word I'm looking for - to arbitrarily destroy something like that.

Or a hidden agenda

You know, I have a funny feeling that this time council went too far, too many people are angry. And too many people will now start to investigate who was behind this outrageous act of vandalism and begin to watch more closely a council that acts with no fear of accountability and with such arrogance.

Mike Peters,
Franklin



And still the little building would not fall



The proud Lion emblem, all that was saved of the perfectly preserved dance floor. And in front of it, the antique table that so nearly went as landfill, saved by an onlooker.



Everything pounded to oblivion to leave no trace.