

# Crowther Statue Removal

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A factual report on arguments for and against the removal of the Crowther Statue from Franklin Square, Hobart



*SIMPLIFYING GOVERNMENT*

Prepared for:  
Heritage Tasmania  
November 2022

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## Disclaimer

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# 1 Introduction

Community activism seeking statue removal is an increasing phenomenon in both Australia and overseas as community values change over time.

This report provides the Tasmanian Heritage Council (THC) with a high-level summary of public calls for the removal of the Crowther statue from Franklin Square, Hobart. This report references the findings of a companion report prepared for the THC titled *Monumental Issues - A factual report on the management of historical statues/monuments in response to changing community values*.

## 1.1 Background

The Hobart City Council (HCC) is implementing a four-stage public art and community engagement project titled *'Crowther Reinterpreted'*. As a result of Stage 2 of that project, the HCC passed the following motion in August 2022:

*That:*

1. *In recognition of the Council's 2020 Aboriginal Commitment and Action Plan and the submissions received in response to the Crowther Reinterpreted project, Council support the proposal for partial removal of the William Crowther statue from Franklin Square - the bronze component – to the City's Valuables Collection, pending further negotiations with local collecting institutions, for a permanent location for this element (Stage 3).*
  - (i) *This partial removal would be subject to receipt of planning approval by the Council and be paired with the instatement of temporary signage on the Franklin Square site, explaining the project.*
2. *Subsequently, that officers develop a detailed proposal, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, for commissioning new, permanent, interpretative and/or sculptural elements to be installed beside the Crowther plinth (Stage 4). This would form the basis of a future report to the Council.*
3. *Following the completion of the Crowther Reinterpreted project, the Council support the development of a Monuments Policy to inform future additions or removals to the City's collection.<sup>1</sup>*

As part of Stage 3 of the project and prior to commencing any work, the HCC is preparing a Development Application to remove the bronze component of the statue and add temporary signage on the site.<sup>2</sup>

Places listed under the Tasmanian Heritage Register (THR) are provided legislative protection under the *Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995*. Under the Act, any applicable 'heritage works' undertaken on a registered place require formal approval by the THC.

As Franklin Square is listed on the Tasmanian Heritage Register, the THC will need to assess the HCC's proposed Development Application with respect to impact on the listed site.

## 1.2 Methodology

This report involved Internet research examining the following research questions:

- Arguments for/against the removal of the Crowther statue from Franklin Square
- What is proposed to happen to the statue after removal?
- Alternative approaches to removal that have been suggested.

## 2 Overview

Ten examples of online articles and reports regarding the HCC's proposal to remove the Crowther statue are analysed in Section 3 to identify the key arguments for and against statue removal and suggested alternative actions. This included the report considered by the HCC's Community, Culture and Events Committee that contained the recommendation that the Crowther statue be removed.

The arguments advanced for and against the removal of the Crowther statue are categorised using those arguments identified in the companion report *Monumental Issues - A factual report on the management of historical statues/monuments in response to changing community values*. The outcome of this analysis is contained in Table 1 and Table 2.

The arguments for statue removal broadly reflected those identified in the companion report. A further argument for statue removal was identified, being 'Removal would assist in reconciliation with indigenous people'. Overall, the arguments for statue removal tended to fall into two main categories:

- The statue presents an incomplete account of history
- The statue commemorates past social injustices.

Table 1: Arguments for Crowther statue removal

Arguments for Statue removal	Ref #s
They commemorate people who/events that are linked to attitudes or activities that do not meet contemporary societal beliefs, values or laws, such as slavery <sup>3</sup> , white supremacy <sup>4</sup> , and racial segregation. <sup>5</sup>	1, 2, 3, 9, 10
They do not represent history from the perspective of indigenous people, meaning that <i>'people will not get a full understanding of the past'</i> . <sup>6</sup>	2, 5
They commemorate people who are linked to activities that adversely impacted indigenous people. <sup>7</sup>	1, 3, 7, 10
They, or the inscriptions on them, present an inaccurate or incomplete representation of history. <sup>8</sup>	5, 8
Removal is necessary to change <i>'how history is remembered'</i> . <sup>9</sup>	2
Removing statues and monuments is not a new phenomenon and has happened historically when societal beliefs and values have changed. <sup>10</sup>	
They are in public areas where people see them regularly, <i>'which in turn can make their actions [...] seem normal or something to celebrate'</i> . <sup>11</sup>	4
Removal would assist in reconciliation with indigenous people. <sup>12</sup>	1, 6

Similarly, the arguments against statue removal broadly reflected those identified in the companion report. Again, the arguments against statue removal tended to fall into three main categories:

- The statue represents significant historical figures / events that should continue to be recognised
- Retention will provide a base for discussion on how the past can inform the present
- Removal will not directly resolve past social injustices and may inflame divisions.

Table 2: Arguments against Crowther statue removal

Arguments against Statue removal	Ref #s
They represent the community/society attitudes of the time the statue was erected. <sup>13</sup>	2
They commemorate significant historical figures or events that are relevant to the community. <sup>14</sup>	3, 5, 8, 9
Their removal will omit parts of history which have contributed to modern society <sup>15</sup> or will ' <i>cancel, whitewash, and potentially forget that history</i> '. <sup>16</sup>	1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10
Their removal would cause more community division than reconciliation. <sup>17</sup>	1
Their retention doesn't legitimise the views of the person they represent but provides a base for discussion on how the past can inform the present. <sup>18</sup>	6, 8
Removal ' <i>will not remove the attitudes and institutional racism that allowed for their creation in the first place</i> '. <sup>19</sup>	4

The motion passed by the HCC in August 2022 to partially remove the William Crowther statue from Franklin Square indicated that this would involve removing the bronze component of the statue and placing it in the HCC's Valuables Collection, '*pending further negotiations with local collecting institutions, for a permanent location for this element*'. No further information could be identified in the public domain on progress with confirming a permanent location for the statue.

The following alternative suggestions have been identified to the removal of the Crowther Statue:

- The installation of panels or plaques to provide additional information
- The installation of temporary or permanent artworks which allow education and truth telling opportunities
- The statue be conserved and reinterpreted in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.



### 3 Examples of Calls for Crowther Statue Removal

There were numerous online articles and reports regarding the HCC’s proposal to remove the Crowther statue. Table 3 analyses ten of these to identify the key arguments for and against statue removal and suggested alternative actions. This included the report considered by the HCC’s Community, Culture and Events Committee that contained the recommendation that the Crowther statue be removed.

Table 3: Examples of community activism seeking removal of the Crowther statue

Ref #	Reference	Argument FOR Removal	Argument AGAINST Removal	Alternatives Suggested
1	<a href="#">Agenda - Community, Culture and Events Committee Meeting   City of Hobart</a>	<p>According to Indigenous groups and others, the statue should be removed as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it commemorates the mutilation of Tasmanian Aboriginal man, William Lanne, because of his race</li> <li>• Crowther’s memorialisation adversely impacts the Tasmanian Aboriginal community</li> <li>• the Hobart City Council retaining the statue represents their support for the actions of Crowther</li> <li>• it prolongs the ‘<i>agony endured by the Aboriginal community by the statue’s presence</i>’</li> <li>• it would recognise the Council’s 2020 Aboriginal Commitment and Action Plan.</li> </ul> <p>The Council Report indicated the following reasons for change:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Showing leadership – it is our asset, we are a capital city</li> <li>(ii) Reconciliation and truth telling – making a clear and physical effort toward change</li> <li>(iii) Historical validity - Considering the statue in depth raises questions regarding the significance of Crowther to contemporary Hobart</li> </ol>	<p>The statue should be retained as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• history cannot be rewritten</li> <li>• its removal would be considered disrespectful and divisive.</li> <li>• <i>‘removing the statue would be denying the facts and not contributing to present and future generations understanding what had taken place’</i></li> <li>• the statue’s physical location is part of its cultural significance.</li> </ul>	<p>Installation of information panels and temporary or permanent artworks which allow opportunities for education and truth telling.</p>



Ref #	Reference	Argument FOR Removal	Argument AGAINST Removal	Alternatives Suggested
		<p>(iv) Connection to current values of Hobart – is Crowther’s presence right for our city now and into the future?</p> <p>(v) Equitable representation – the City of Hobart currently has only seven named statues, all of caucasian male figures.</p> <p>(vi) Cultural safety – the palawa/Tasmanian Aboriginal community have made it clear that the statue is a culturally unsafe element.</p> <p>(vii) The life of an asset – what should the life of any asset like this be?</p>		
2	<a href="#">Carrie Bickmore and Steve Price clash over removal of William Crowther statue   News.com.au</a>	The removal of the statue would avoid commemorating ‘ <i>a time in our history when scientists and doctors wanted to prove theories of European superiority</i> ’.	Removal would be erasing history of the societal attitudes at the time the statue was erected.	
3	<a href="#">‘A small step to reconciliation’: Hobart council to remove statue of William Crowther who stole Aboriginal skull from morgue   The Guardian</a>	The removal of the statue would avoid commemorating a tradition which ranked people based on their race.	The statue commemorates Crowther’s contribution to Tasmania and its removal would ‘ <i>sanitise history</i> ’.	The statue be conserved and potentially reinterpreted in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.
4	<a href="#">A statue of a Tasmanian colonist has been covered up. Should it ever return?   The Guardian</a>	Removal would enable Aboriginal Australians to interact with this central area of the city, as many actively avoid the park due to the statue.	The Hobart City Council has limited resources and it ‘ <i>should be directing it to areas where we can actually improve society</i> ’.	
5	<a href="#">Aboriginal artist sets record straight with ‘bloody’ statue of William Crowther   ABC News</a>	The statue only tells one side of the story and therefore presents an inaccurate representation of history.	It highlights ‘ <i>great achievements</i> ’ which laid ‘ <i>the foundation stones for future generations to enjoy</i> ’.	Installation of an interpretation plaque placed next to the statue.
6	<a href="#">Hobart’s historical heretics violated   Spectator Australia</a>	Removal would emphasise the City of Hobart’s Aboriginal Commitment and Action Plan which aims to promote awareness, discussion and empathy.	The statue does not legitimise the values of Crowther. It exists as a ‘ <i>silent guardian of cultural memory</i> ’.	



Ref #	Reference	Argument FOR Removal	Argument AGAINST Removal	Alternatives Suggested
7	<a href="#">William Crowther's statue is coming down - but is that the only way to reckon with our history?   ABC News</a>	It commemorates someone who is linked to activities which adversely impacted Aboriginal Australians.	Removal is seen as a simple fix and could <i>'erase the history we need to face'</i> , leading to the past being forgotten.	
8	<a href="#">Hobart City Council passes vote to remove statue of former Tasmanian premier William Crowther in Australian first   Sky News</a>	Removal would emphasise the Council's ambition to <i>'celebrate and acknowledge a more honest representation of our past'</i> .	The statue recognises Crowther's <i>'political and professional service'</i> to Tasmania. Removal would be an attempt at forgetting Tasmania's history.	
9	<a href="#">Tasmanian museum apologises for mistreatment of Indigenous people   News.com.au</a>	Modern society should not commemorate <i>'racist people who have done so much damage to Aboriginal people, who today, if they did it, would be given five years in jail for a criminal offence'</i> .	It commemorates Tasmania's 14 <sup>th</sup> premier as well as his work in the medical field.	
10	<a href="#">Tearing down statues is the latest salvo in the anti-historical mission   The Centre for Independent Studies</a>	The statue and its history should not be commemorated due to the accusation against Crowther which involved the posthumous removal of William Lanne's skull.	The statue should be retained as <i>'the discipline of history is to be faithful to its purpose of discovering empirical truth about the past'</i> and it therefore must be preserved.	



# Endnotes

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- 1 [HCC website](#), accessed 21 November 2022
- 2 [Ibid.](#)
- 3 [Historic statue removal - top 3 pros and cons, ProCon.org](#)
- 4 [Silent Sam will stay off the University of North Carolina campus as the school turns the statue over to Confederate group, Washington Post](#)
- 5 [Richmond's Robert E. Lee statue is headed to a Black History Museum, Smithsonian Magazine](#)
- 6 [Whose history: the role of statues and monuments in Australia, Australian Museum](#)
- 7 [Richmond's Robert E. Lee statue is headed to a Black History Museum, Smithsonian Magazine](#)
- 8 [On statues and history: the dialogue between past and present in public space, LSE](#)
- 9 [Monumental changes: history isn't always written by the victors, MU](#)
- 10 [Monuments to historical figures should remain – Debating Matters](#)
- 11 [Whose history: the role of statues and monuments in Australia, Australian Museum](#)
- 12 [Hobart's historical heretics violated | Spectator Australia](#)
- 13 [Historic statue removal - top 3 pros and cons, ProCon.org](#)
- 14 [Statues, politics and the past, History Today](#)
- 15 [Monuments to historical figures should remain – Debating Matters](#)
- 16 [Historic statue removal - top 3 pros and cons, ProCon.org](#)
- 17 [Tearing down statues is not reconciliation: Brian Lee Crowley, MLI](#)
- 18 [Monuments to historical figures should remain – Debating Matters](#)
- 19 [Monumental changes: history isn't always written by the victors, MU](#)

