

Monumental Issues

A factual report on the management of historical statues/monuments in response to changing community values



SIMPLIFYING GOVERNMENT

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Heritage Tasmania
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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 with a high-level summary of a range of examples of public calls for statue removals and how they are being handled in other jurisdictions – nationally and internationally.

1.1 Methodology

This report involved desktop research examining the following research questions:

- Arguments for/against removal of statues (put forward locally / nationally / internationally)
- Statue removals (or attempted removals) that have occurred in other jurisdictions and the follow-on effects (e.g., legislative responses, momentum for other removals etc)
- What has happened with the statues after removal? (e.g., some have gone to museums)
- Alternative approaches in other jurisdictions where they have not been removed (e.g., additional installations, interpretation etc).

Information on specific statue removal techniques or storage guidelines were beyond the scope of this report.

The agreed target jurisdictions for the research were Australia, United Kingdom, Canada, USA and New Zealand (additional examples involving Belgium and South Africa were identified and have been included). Internet research was used to identify online sources that dealt with issues relating to the above research questions. This involved using Google to search the following terms:

- management of historical statues/monuments in response to changing community values
- options for dealing with controversial statues
- options for dealing with controversial statues Australia
- alternative options to statue removal and relocation
- processes and guidelines for statue removal and relocation
- statue removal and relocation.

Some evidence presented in this report was gathered from the bibliography and other links contained in the online sources found through the Google searches.

2 Overview

Nineteen examples of community activism for statue removal were identified across the target jurisdictions. Summary details of these examples is contained in Section 1.

A high-level analysis of the reasons advanced for and against statue removal are outlined in Table 1 and Table 2.

The reasons 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 statue removal

Arguments for Statue removal
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 ¹ , white supremacy ² , and racial segregation. ³
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> . ⁴
They commemorate people who are linked to activities that adversely impacted indigenous people. ⁵
They, or the inscriptions on them, present an inaccurate or incomplete representation of history. ⁶
Removal is necessary to change <i>'how history is remembered'</i> . ⁷
Removing statues and monuments is not a new phenomenon and has happened historically when societal beliefs and values have changed. ⁸
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> . ⁹

The reasons 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 statue removal

Arguments against Statue removal
They represent the community/society attitudes of the time the statue was erected. ¹⁰
They commemorate significant historical figures or events that are relevant to the community. ¹¹
Their removal will omit parts of history which have contributed to modern society ¹² or will <i>'censor, whitewash, and potentially forget that history'</i> . ¹³
Their removal would cause more community division than reconciliation. ¹⁴
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. ¹⁵
Removal <i>'will not remove the attitudes and institutional racism that allowed for their creation in the first place'</i> . ¹⁶

Of the nineteen examples, nine resulted in the removal of the statue. In those instances, the outcome following their removal have included (some removals resulted in more than one outcome):

- Display in a museum (three instances)
- Display in an alternative location – for example, a cemetery (two instances)
- Storage in a museum (four instances)
- Destruction and replacement of the statue (one instance).

Of the ten examples where the statue was not removed:

- three involved the relevant authorities formally refusing requests for removal
- three involved the relevant authorities taking no action
- four involved the following alternative solutions:
 - The installation of plaques that provided additional information
 - The augmentation of the statue to alter its interpretation.

In several instances, there have been flow on effects from either the removal of the statue or the alternative solution – these have included:

- Statue removal established public momentum for the removal of other similar statues
- Replacement of the statue with an alternative statue/artwork
- Introduction of legislation to facilitate statue removal
- Educational reforms to better explain historical events
- A parliamentary commission to examine historical events
- Renaming of locations named after the historical figure in question.

3 Examples of Calls for Statue Removals

Nineteen examples of community activism for statue removal are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3: Examples of community activism seeking statue removal

Jurisdiction	Example	Argument FOR Removal	Argument AGAINST Removal	Outcome Category	Outcome Description	Flow on Effects
Australia	Monuments (cairns) for explorer Angus McMillan in Wellington Shire, Gippsland, Victoria Monuments exist on council land, Victorian Government land, and privately owned land. ¹⁷	It commemorates an explorer who is linked to multiple massacres of Indigenous Australians. ¹⁸	Removal would cause more division than reconciliation. History would be removed and re-written. ¹⁹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempted Removal 	Wellington Shire Council voted to keep the two monuments (cairns) commemorating Angus McMillan on council land. They also decided against seeking approval with the Victorian Government or other land managers to commence discussion in removing other McMillan cairns within Wellington Shire on land not managed by the council. ²⁰	None identified
Australia	Statue of explorer Captain James Cook in Sydney's Hyde Park.	It commemorates colonialists and colonial events and does <i>'not tell the full story of history'</i> . Incorrectly <i>'supports the idea'</i> that Australia was uninhabited prior to Cook's arrival in 1770. ²¹	Removal would cause more division than reconciliation. History would be removed and re-written. ²²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No action taken 	Calls from the public have increased for the statue to be removed; however, no action has yet been taken. ²³	None identified



Jurisdiction	Example	Argument FOR Removal	Argument AGAINST Removal	Outcome Category	Outcome Description	Flow on Effects
Australia	Statue of Australia's first Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, in Port Macquarie, New South Wales.	It commemorates a person held to have had racist attitudes (the statue is located on an Indigenous burial site). ²⁴	It ' <i>commemorates Australia's first Prime Minister and the centenary of Federation</i> '. ²⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No action taken 	Calls from the public to remove the statue have increased and the public are pushing for Port Macquarie Hastings Council to vote on the issue; however, no action has yet been taken. ²⁶	None identified
Australia	Memorial for King George V in the Parliamentary Triangle, Canberra.	The memorial overlooks the Aboriginal Tent Embassy and represents the impact colonisation had on Indigenous Australians. ²⁷	It is not just a memorial to the King, but a war memorial for Australia's contribution to the First World War. ²⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No action taken 	Calls from the public for the memorial to be moved or modified by the Australian Government have increased; however, no action to do so has been taken. ²⁹	None identified
Australia	Explorers' Monument in Fremantle, Western Australia. ³⁰	It commemorates ' <i>the leader of a punitive expedition that killed up to 20 Aboriginal people in Western Australia</i> '. ³¹	It commemorates ' <i>three white men killed in the far North West</i> '. These men were considered explorers and the monument stands as ' <i>an appreciate token of remembrance</i> '. ³²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional installations (Plaque) 	Plaque was placed on the statue which gives the Indigenous Australian perspective of the events to which the Monument relate. ³³	None identified

Jurisdiction	Example	Argument FOR Removal	Argument AGAINST Removal	Outcome Category	Outcome Description	Flow on Effects
Belgium	Statue of King Leopold II of Belgium in Ghent.	It commemorated a former monarch held responsible for slavery and the death of millions of Africans under Belgium's colonial rule of what is now Congo. ³⁴	It commemorates a <i>'foundational figure'</i> ³⁵ in Belgium history who was the longest reigning Belgian monarch. ³⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal • Museum storage 	The statue was transferred to a museum's warehouse. ³⁷	<p>Regional authorities in Belgium <i>'promised history-course reforms to better explain the true character of colonialism'</i>.</p> <p>The Belgium Parliament established a commission to review Belgium's colonial past.³⁸</p> <p>The King Leopold Ranges in Kimberley, Western Australia were renamed following the Belgium government's removal of the statue.³⁹</p>
Canada	Statue in Kingston, Ontario of Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald.	It commemorated a person who had a role in the establishment of Canada's residential school system, which was seen to be responsible for harm to Indigenous people. ⁴⁰	Removing the statue may further divide the community as removing a monument some people wish to retain may result in <i>'pitting people against people'</i> . ⁴¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal • Alternative display 	The Kingston City Council voted to remove the statue and place it into storage, and then put it up in Catarqui Cemetery, where Macdonald is buried. ⁴²	None identified



Jurisdiction	Example	Argument FOR Removal	Argument AGAINST Removal	Outcome Category	Outcome Description	Flow on Effects
New Zealand	Statue of Queen Victoria in Christchurch, New Zealand. ⁴³	The statue does not properly reflect the partnership between the Crown and the Māori people established by the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand's founding document. ⁴⁴	It commemorates the Queen and ' <i>the Golden Jubilee of the founding of the Canterbury Settlement (1900)</i> '. It is ' <i>also a memorial to those soldiers of Canterbury [...] who were killed in the South African War between 1900-1902</i> '. ⁴⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional installations 	The statue is now augmented by two Māori carved canoes, to ' <i>emphasise the partnership between the Crown and iwi as Treaty of Waitangi signatories</i> '. ⁴⁶	None identified
South Africa	Statue in Cape Town of Cecil Rhodes, former Prime Minister of the Cape Colony (part of modern South Africa), by the University of Cape Town.	It commemorated a figure who ' <i>represented an institutional racism which continues to exist within the university today</i> '. ⁴⁷	Removing the statue would re-write history as the removal would ' <i>wipe away the past and replace it with the new</i> '. ⁴⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removal Museum Storage 	The statue remains in storage by the University of Cape Town. ⁴⁹	The removal of the statue built public momentum for the removal of other statues commemorating Cecil Rhodes, such as the statue at the University of Oxford's Oriel College in the UK. ⁵⁰
United Kingdom	Statue of Cecil Rhodes, former Prime Minister of the Cape Colony (part of modern South Africa), at the University of Oxford's Oriel College. ⁵¹	It commemorates a ' <i>white supremacist, colonialist and slave owner and a deeply controversial figure of his time</i> '. ⁵²	Retention ' <i>enables us to acknowledge and address the legacy of our past with openness and honesty [...] not to try and erase history but to place it in its proper context</i> '. ⁵³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional installations (Plaque) 	A plaque was placed besides the statue which states Cecil Rhodes' background and why the statue is controversial. ⁵⁴	None identified

Jurisdiction	Example	Argument FOR Removal	Argument AGAINST Removal	Outcome Category	Outcome Description	Flow on Effects
United Kingdom	Melville Monument for Henry Dundas, the 1st Viscount Melville, in Edinburgh, Scotland.	It commemorates a colonial figure who played a <i>'role in subjugating indigenous populations in the British Empire and for his part in delaying the abolition of the slave trade'</i> . ⁵⁵	It commemorates the first Viscount Melville who was once the most powerful politician in Scotland. The Viscount was considered <i>'instrumental in the Scottish Enlightenment, the prosecution of the French Revolutionary Wars and British colonial expansion in India'</i> . ⁵⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional installations (Plaque) 	A plaque has been installed which provides further detail on Henry Dundas' role in colonialism and the slave trade. ⁵⁷	None identified
United Kingdom	Statue of explorer H.M Stanley in Denbigh, Wales.	It commemorates an explorer who worked for King Leopold II of Belgium. The former Belgium monarch was held responsible for slavery and the death of millions of Africans under Belgium's colonial rule of what is now Congo. ⁵⁸	It commemorates an explorer who was best known for his successful search for fellow explorer David Livingstone. ⁵⁹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempted removal 	The residents of Denbigh voted to keep the statue, with 471 people in favour of keeping the statue and 121 people in favour of removing it. ⁶⁰	None identified
United Kingdom	Statue in Shrewsbury, England of Robert Clive (Clive of India), first British Governor of the Bengal Presidency (a subdivision of the British Empire in India). ⁶¹	It commemorates a person who is connected to <i>'200 years of theft [and] misrule that led to thousands of deaths'</i> within the Indian subcontinent. ⁶²	Removal takes away the opportunity for it to be used as a platform to educate people about public figures of the past: <i>'let understanding him be the ultimate judgement rather than getting rid of him'</i> . ⁶³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempted removal Additional installations (Plaque) 	The Shropshire Council voted in favour of 'no further action' after two petitions called for the statue's removal. ⁶⁴ The Shropshire Council has since received a grant of £7000 to install a contextual plaque on Clive's life with the statue. ⁶⁵	None identified

Jurisdiction	Example	Argument FOR Removal	Argument AGAINST Removal	Outcome Category	Outcome Description	Flow on Effects
United Kingdom	Statue of merchant Robert Milligan outside the Museum of London Docklands.	It commemorated a slave trader. ⁶⁶	It commemorated ' <i>one of the key driving forces in the docks construction</i> '. ⁶⁷	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removal Museum storage 	The statue was transferred to the Museum of London and is currently in storage. ⁶⁸	None identified
United Kingdom	Statue in Bristol of merchant Edward Colston.	It commemorated a slave trader. ⁶⁹	Removing the statue would censor and exclude elements of history ⁷⁰ and national heritage. ⁷¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removal Museum display 	Statue removed and displayed in the M shed Museum in Bristol ⁷² and there are plans to exhibit it alongside Black Lives Matter placards. ⁷³	The statue of Edward Colston was replaced with a sculpture of a Black Lives Matter protestor. ⁷⁴
USA	Statue in Charlottesville, Virginia of General Robert E. Lee. ⁷⁵	It commemorated a racially prejudiced general within the Confederate army who ' <i>led Confederate forces during the American civil war, [...] in an attempt to maintain slavery</i> '. ⁷⁶	It commemorates war veterans and the lives lost during the American civil war. Removing the statue would be ' <i>punishing us for our ancestors</i> '. ⁷⁷	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removal Destruction & Replacement 	The city approved a plan to melt down the statue and put a public art installation in its place ⁷⁸	Virginia's governor introduced legislation in April 2020 to allow cities to remove statues. This led to the removal of five confederate statues in Richmond, Virginia. ⁷⁹
USA	Statue of Jefferson Davis, the first and only President of the Confederate States of America, at the University of Texas.	It commemorated Davis' values in which he ' <i>firmly believed in the importance of the institution of slavery for the South</i> '. ^{80,81}	Removing the statue may be linked to ' <i>whitewashing or erasing history</i> '. ⁸²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removal Museum display 	The statue was transferred to the Briscoe Centre for American History at the University of Texas ⁸³ as an exhibit that centres more on the controversy of the statue rather than the person it portrays. ⁸⁴	None identified
USA	Statue in Richmond, Virginia of General Robert E. Lee.	It commemorated the Confederate States, which practiced slavery and racial segregation. ⁸⁵	The statue should be conserved as part of the national cultural heritage. ⁸⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removal Museum display Museum storage 	The statue was transferred to a Black History Museum ⁸⁷ and the pedestal for the statue has been placed into government storage. ⁸⁸	None identified

Jurisdiction	Example	Argument FOR Removal	Argument AGAINST Removal	Outcome Category	Outcome Description	Flow on Effects
USA	Statue of 'Silent Sam' at the University of North Carolina.	The statue was a symbol of white supremacy. ⁸⁹	It represents Southern USA history. It was a monument to the University's alumni who fought in the Civil War. ⁹⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal • Alternative display 	The statue was removed by the University and is now owned by a North Carolina Confederate heritage group. ⁹¹	None identified



Endnotes

- 1 [Historic statue removal - top 3 pros and cons, ProCon.org](#)
- 2 [Silent Sam will stay off the University of North Carolina campus as the school turns the statue over to Confederate group, Washington Post](#)
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