

# Council to review security after elms destroyed



Robert Hinrichsen, 2, visiting Fitzroy Gardens yesterday with his mother, examines a vandalised elm.

**Jamie Berry**

Melbourne City Council has vowed to review security at the city's parks after vandals caused more than \$60,000 damage to elm trees in Fitzroy Gardens.

The vandals are believed to have used handsaws when they tried to cut down the four elms on either Monday night or Tuesday morning.

The elms, between four and 10 metres tall, were more than 10 years old.

Council workers had to cut down the semi-mature trees yesterday, citing safety concerns.

Lord Mayor John So said the vandalism was senseless.

"We have a lot of international visitors coming to the gardens and they all praise Melbourne's magnificent gardens," Cr So said.

The gardens feature hundreds of elms valued at about \$10 million.

Some trees are more than 100 years old.

Cr So said the council would have to review its security.

A Victoria Police spokeswoman said the matter was being investigated and that anyone with information should call Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000.

PICTURE: JASON SOUTH



**Destroyed:** Robert, 2, with a vandalised elm tree. Picture: **BILL McAULEY**

# Tree vandals fell prized park elms

FITZROY Gardens elms have been cut down in a late-night attack.

Vandals used a handsaw to slice through four elms, including a tree that had been in the park for 20 years.

Melbourne City Council is baffled by Monday night's attack, which is believed to have taken just 30 minutes.

It will increase nightly security patrols to protect the gardens' elms.

Some of the elms in the park are more than 100 years old.

Lord Mayor John So said the trees, which stood between 4m and 10m, were sawn some time after midnight.

Security teams patrol city parks and gardens each night, but the damage was not discovered until yesterday morning.

By **MICHELLE ROSE**,  
urban affairs reporter

Cr So appealed for anyone with information about the attacks to contact police or the council.

"I cannot believe or understand why anybody would come at night to cut down the trees and for what reason," he said.

Council environment spokeswoman Cr Kate Redwood said Melbourne's elms were special because many others around the world had succumbed to Dutch elm disease.

The council will replace the elms with new trees after it has removed the four stumps.

# Thieves strip pansy patch

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By Fiona O'Doherty

PANSY thieves have struck at Fitzroy Gardens, forcing Melbourne Council gardeners to put up signs appealing for help to catch the flower filchers.

Cr Kate Redwood said flower and shrub thefts had become a regular occurrence during the past two years and the latest theft of 300 pansy, alyssum and marigold seedlings on July 21 and 22 would result in unsightly gaps in flowerbeds near the Hilton Hotel this spring.

The seedlings were planted as part of a floral display designed to last three to four months. Cr Redwood said police had already been asked to keep a closer eye on city parks and gardens after vandals recently axed four elms in Fitzroy Gardens (*Leader*, July 21). But there had been no further news on the culprits responsible for the elms.

She said council security had also been increased in the short term to avoid more seedlings being stolen.

More than 1000 plants had been stolen in the past three months, she said.

Most had been replaced but it was too late in the season to replace the latest stolen seedlings.

Cr Redwood said thefts of plants from city gardens seemed to be occurring more often but Fitzroy Gardens appeared to be the main target of thieves.

"Unfortunately, plant theft in our parks and gardens happens far too frequently. Over the past two years, around 5700 seedlings at a cost of \$3500, including labour, have been taken from Fitzroy Gardens," she said.

The repeated nature and sheer quantity of seedlings stolen suggests that the thieves may be selling their illegal gains and making a commercial benefit from their crime.

"This spring there will be gaps in our flower beds and we'll have to explain to tourists and garden lovers that it's due to the selfish acts of a selfish few."

■ Anyone with information about the thefts is asked to call the gardens' nursery on 9419 4118 or Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000.



Fitzroy Gardens Conservatory manager Keith Smith is flummoxed by flower thieves.

Picture: ANDREW HENSHA W N06M E112

# Beware: thieves at large bearing trowels



Flower thieves are destroying the efforts of gardeners Andrew Caithness and Brendan Leahy (legs pictured) at the Fitzroy Gardens. The gardens' little-boy sculpture, left, was stolen in 1977. Pictures: Craig Sillitoe

## Liz Minchin

Police will patrol the Fitzroy Gardens in a bid to catch or deter thieves who have stolen thousands of flowers from the gardens since the start of last year.

The Melbourne City Council asked for the police patrols after seedling thefts two weeks ago and a separate vandalism attack on four elms the week before. The council will also double it

nightly security patrols in the area.

Councillor Kate Redwood said 5700 seedlings had been stolen from the gardens since February last year — more than 1000 of them in the past three months — at a cost of \$3500 to the council.

"We are putting in replacements where we can, but with annual plantings like these you need to put them all in at the same time for an even [effect](#). [so](#)

some of our floral displays may be a bit patchy or less attractive than usual," Cr Redwood said.

She said the council had no leads on who was responsible, but it suspected someone might be potting the flowers and selling them.

Signs have been put up around the gardens asking people to call Crime Stoppers or the council if they see anything suspicious.

**The night-time and early**

morning raids of pansies, marigolds, linarias and begonias have mainly been from beds near the Hilton Hotel and in the centre of the gardens near the miniature Tudor Village.

A Victoria Police spokesman said that the Fitzroy Gardens was being added to regular patrols at night, and that anyone caught with tools to remove plants could be arrested.

"Usually when people are going equipped to steal they

have a large screwdriver or a jemmy bar, but if we find someone with gardening tools or a trailer in the gardens at 10 o'clock at night, they'll have to have a pretty good excuse (not to be arrested)," he said.

In March 1977, thieves stole a heavy, 19th century bronze fountain of a boy on a turtle from the gardens. It was found abandoned in a Richmond car park two years later and is now back in the gardens' ornamental lake.





# The afterlife of trees

Sculptor Bruce Armstrong has a network of tree surgeons who let him know when a mighty tree has fallen. Below: A felled elm in Fitzroy Gardens.

PICTURES: PAT SCALA, CRAIG ABRAH

Earlier this month, storms felled many old trees across the city. For some it was just a beginning. **Olivia Davis** reports.

**O**N WEDNESDAY April 2, Melbourne was lashed by a violent storm with winds of up to 117 km/h.

There were mass blackouts, roads blocked and commuters stranded for hours. In the Fitzroy Gardens, a huge elm was wrenched out of the ground and dumped across a path. Across the city, other great trees also saw their last day: another elm in Macarthur Square, Carlton; a poplar in Gosch's Paddock; a 23-metre cypress at Como House; and many others.

What happens to them? When that elm in the Fitzroy Gardens was planted 150 years ago, Melbourne was in the grip of the gold rush and people were getting around by horse and carriage. Such longevity surely demands something more honourable than the mulcher.

Fortunately, many of these trees will have a meaningful afterlife. The reception desk at

Council House 2 in Little Collins Street, for example, is a sculptural piece made by furniture maker David Emery using trees that fell in Swan Street, Richmond, several years ago. Emery has stacked slices of the honey-coloured trunks one upon the other, to create a piece that looks like an old cutout boat.

According to the City of Melbourne, the elm from the Fitzroy Gardens has been allocated already. It will be used for the restoration of an old tram signal box at Art Play in Birrarung Marr. Some of the timber will also make its way into a children's adventure playground called the Venny, in Kensington. But any surplus is up for grabs. "Whether you want to make a sculpture, a new work bench or just get some logs for your fire, come and take it away, free of charge," council spokesman Phil Buckley says.

Smaller branches and trees do tend to be mulched, but when a mature exotic tree is lost most councils try to find some use for it. "Most people in the (tree surgery) industry would look at how you can reuse or recycle the wood, and try to get some good out of losing an old tree," says Phillip Price, parks manager for Darebin council.

Sculptor Bruce Armstrong certainly does his bit. Armstrong is probably best known for his monumental sculpture *Eagle*, at Docklands, but his loveable chunky animals can also be seen



**COUNCIL HOUSE 2, LITTLE COLLINS ST**  
In 2005 tram works damaged the roots of several 80-year-old elm trees in Swan Street Richmond. Furniture maker David Emery used the timber to create the "pod" reception desk (above) in CH2.

in the garden at NGV International (they used to sit out front, before the renovation) and at Heide Museum of Modern Art.

When Armstrong is first contacted for this story, he is in the midst of lugging the cypress from Como House. He says he was tipped off about the wood by a tree surgeon who keeps him on speed dial. "He rings me up every time he's got something a bit interesting."

According to Duncan Cuthbert, the gardener at Como House, there are plenty of willing hands to help take away any trees that fall in their grounds.

Cuthbert says the arborists seem to have their own networks of people who are interested in using any large or interesting trees. Armstrong describes these relationships as, "a win-win-win situation".

## DEAD WOOD ON DISPLAY

**NGV INTERNATIONAL, 5, KILDA RD**  
Bruce Armstrong's *Guardians* are a pair of hybrid animals made from a Murray River red gum that was hundreds of years old when it fell at Koondrook in 1986.

**HEIDE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**  
Armstrong's sculpture *Tiger* is made from a 100-year-old elm tree that fell in Parkville in 1984.

**YARRA RIVER, ALPHINGTON** In 2001, four mature oak trees were mistakenly poisoned by

a contractor. The City of Yarra commissioned artist Damian Curtain, who hand-carved four sculptures based on animal life, now at Rudder Grange, Alphington. **FOYER, 574 ST KILDA RD** Painter-sculptor Mark Schaller made a "form collage" called *Metamorphosis* from a 70-year-old cypress pine from Sandringham golf course. This type of tree starts to lose its limbs around that age and, according to Schaller, "the wives get very concerned".

"The arborist doesn't have to spend his day cutting a huge log wood to the association. The into little pieces," the sculptor VWA will shortly call for explains. "It's good for me expressions of interest from because I get the material and "woodies" who would like to get to recycle it, which I like; and create pieces from this timber, it's good for the crane company and plans to hold an exhibit as they get a job. So everyone's bit of the resulting happy." pieces, to be called *Storm*

The Victorian Woodworkers Association has many members who work with salvaged wood. Association secretary Peter Stansfield says the VWA is storing about seven tonnes of salvaged wood from trees that fell during storms in February 2005. In that incident, about 100 mature trees were lost from the Flagstaff, Treasury and Fitzroy gardens, as well as Fawkner and Yarra parks.

The trees were a mix of elms, poplars and eucalypts. Most of this rare old-growth wood was sold at auction, but the City of

cribes the milling, storing at curing, the penny drops: wood slow. You don't chop down a tree one day and make a table the next. It needs to be cured for two to three years. The skill to work the wood can take a lifetime to acquire. Then there's the making of the object itself. As Stansfield says, "it takes time to craft piece in wood".

Scott McFadden is an art and furniture maker who works only with salvaged timber. He calls his pieces "function sculpture". He says the integrity of the tree has to be put into the piece. "I try to enhance the beauty of the timber that's taken so long to establish," he says. "The piece I make should last at least as long as the tree it came from." An hour after the exchange, McFadden rings back excited. He's just been contacted about an old walnut that's got

down. For this tree at its afterlife is only just beginning.

