

Gundagai's famous Dog on the Tuckerbox returns home to hero's welcome after vandalism attack

ABC Riverina
By Rosie King

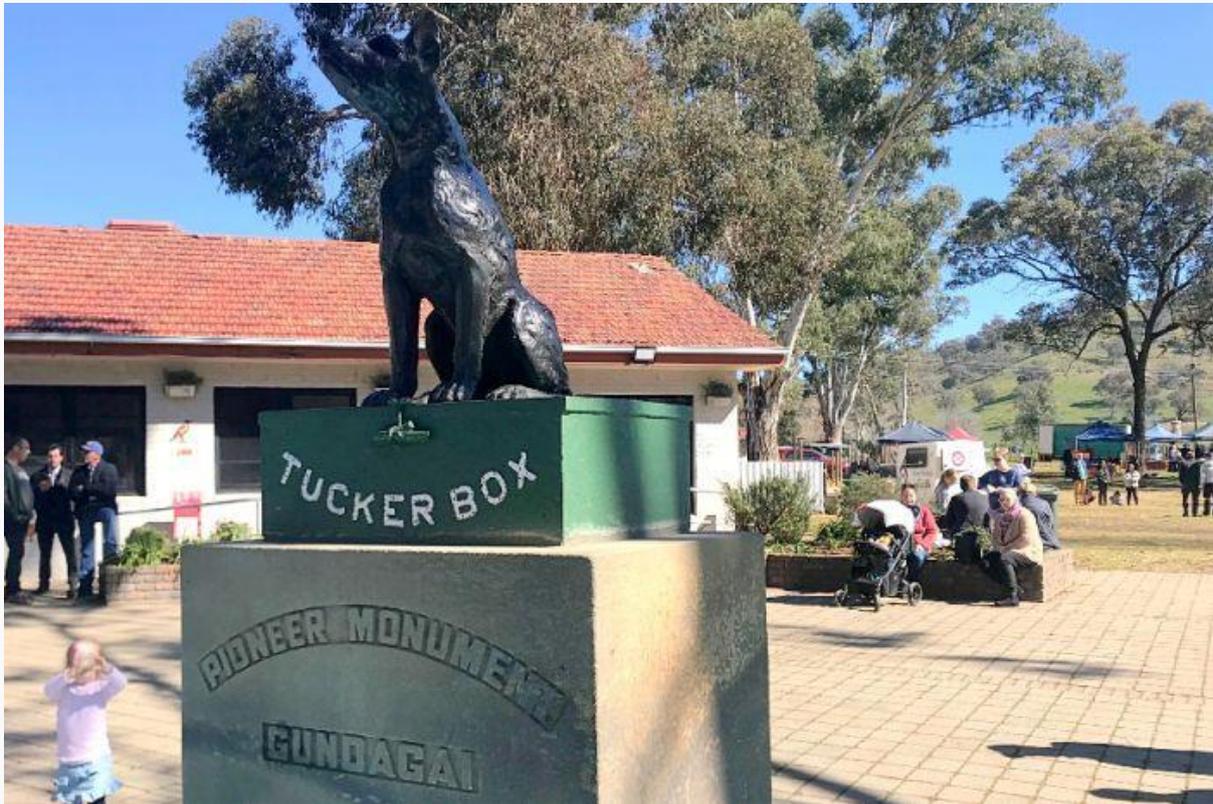


PHOTO: A sculptor restored the Dog on the Tuckerbox after it was vandalised last month. (ABC Riverina: Rosie King)

It has been a long road home for Gundagai's much-loved Dog on the Tuckerbox after the 87-year-old bronze statue was vandalised last month.

Key points:

- The Dog on the Tuckerbox has been returned to pride of place in Gundagai
- The statue has been repaired, recoloured and waxed after being vandalised
- CCTV has been installed at the site, and a man will appear in court next month on property damage charges

During the attack the pooch was knocked from its sandstone plinth, lost an ear and sustained a number of scuffs and scratches.

The incident sparked outrage and disbelief across the country but on Saturday — after the work of more than a dozen people — the dog received a hero's welcome as it was returned to its pedestal at Snake Gully.

"Our old mate looks fantastic. She's come back in great order after her time at the health farm, shall we say," said Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council Mayor Abb McAlister.

"I reckon she would've barked and wagged her tail the whole way home."

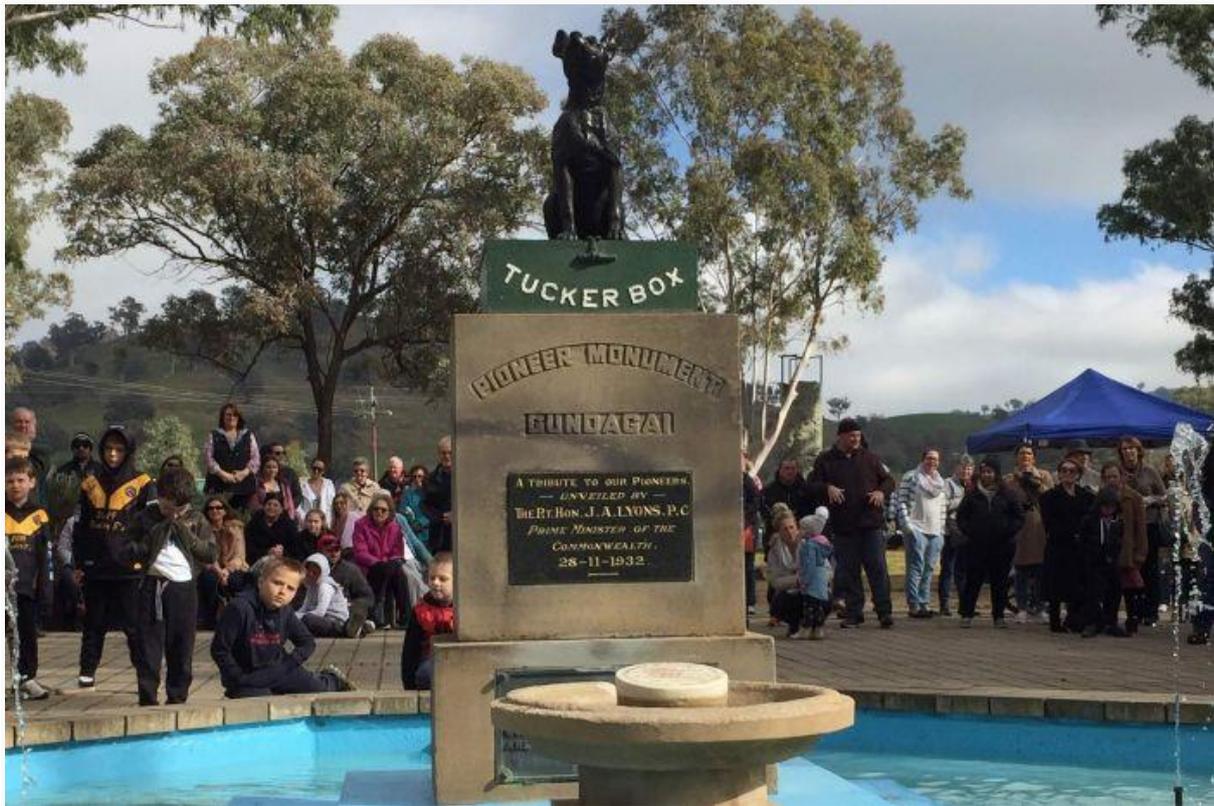


PHOTO: Gundagai's beloved pooch received a hero's welcome when it returned home. (ABC Riverina: Moyra Shields)

Detective work in restoration

The council did some of the minor repairs, but a significant portion of the restoration was the work of sculptor Nick Stranks from the Australian National University's (ANU) School of Art and Design.

"It [the statue] arrived at the entrance gate to ANU on the back of a ute," Stranks said.

"It must have been quite a sight for anyone watching it come up the Hume Highway from Gundagai."

Stranks was tasked with repairing, recolouring, and waxing the sculpture.



PHOTO: Nick Stranks returned Gundagai's beloved dog to its former glory. (Supplied: Lannon Harley/ANU)

"The thing I find really rewarding in a project like this is going through the layers of evidence and history that are in the sculpture," he said.

"There's a story that the ears were originally sagged down like a labrador's but had been removed and replaced with upright ears that sit up like an Australian cattle dog's.

"When you look at the work you can see the ears have been welded on there, and fairly roughly as well.

"There's actually quite a lot of evidence of the original construction work and its original placement on the tuckerbox."

Under different circumstances, Stranks would have removed those imperfections.

"If I wanted to reflect on the work as an artist I would alter a lot of those finishes because they're a lot rougher than what I would expect in a work today," he said.

"But because the work is getting on to 90 years old, they're part of its history and what I was most interested in was retaining that history.

"I felt I had a responsibility to protect those layers for future generations to appreciate as well."



PHOTO: The damaged Dog on the Tuckerbox needed repairs, recolouring and waxing. (Supplied: Lannon Harley/ANU)

The journey home



PHOTO: Andrew Brock says bringing the restored statue back was a "huge responsibility". (ABC Riverina: Rosie King)

The council's facilities manager Andrew Brock transported the Dog on the Tuckerbox from Canberra back to its rightful spot.

"I was extremely nervous. Safe to say I definitely stuck to the speed limit.

"We had her bolted down onto a pallet and then the pallet was all strapped down, plus additional padding and extra covers [were placed] over the top of that to keep the weight down in the ute.

"It's been a tumultuous couple of weeks for her and it's so nice to have her back."



PHOTO: The dog was carefully hoisted up on to the plinth, where it's stood for 87 years. (ABC Riverina: Rosie King)

Security has been ramped up at the site.

"We've installed CCTV. We didn't want to put a fence around her because people want to stand on the edges of the fountain to see her, you know," Cr McAlister said.

"We'll also be bolting her down a bit more strongly.

"She's an Aussie icon and we've probably taken her for granted a bit. So this has really proven that we've got to look after her."

Andrew Bowden travelled from Tamworth to see the statue unveiled.

"It's been an awesome day. It's the first time I've seen the Dog on the Tuckerbox so I've picked a very historic day.

"It looks unreal and the kids are loving it."



PHOTO: The refurbished statue has been a drawcard for tourists. (ABC Riverina: Rosie King)

A silver lining

A 28-year-old man handed himself into Riverina Police shortly after the statue was vandalised.

He will face Wagga Wagga Local Court on property damage charges next month.

But, in an interesting twist, some are saying the vandalism is the best thing to have happened to the Dog on the Tuckerbox and the town of Gundagai, population 2,000, in years.



PHOTO: Mayor Abb McAlister is pleased to see the revamped statue back home in Gundagai. (ABC Riverina: Rosie King)

"There's always a positive that comes out of a negative," Cr McAlister said.

"It's been a great promotion for the town. No matter where you go, everyone's talking about Gundagai and the Dog on the Tuckerbox.

"It's an unfortunate thing that's happened but it'll be great for the town in the long-term.

"I certainly hope it will bring a lot more visitors. Even with the dog not being here — that's brought more people to Gundagai.

"It's revitalised an Australian icon. It's a tribute to our bullockies and years gone by and I think visitors [we'll have] to see it now are going to go sky high."