

# **The Rotary Club of Bendigo Easter Art Show**



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**THIS WAY UP**

Daryl Watts and Bill Gray of the Rotary Club of Bendigo were yesterday hanging the final entries in this year's Art Exhibition that opens at the Town Hall on Good Friday.

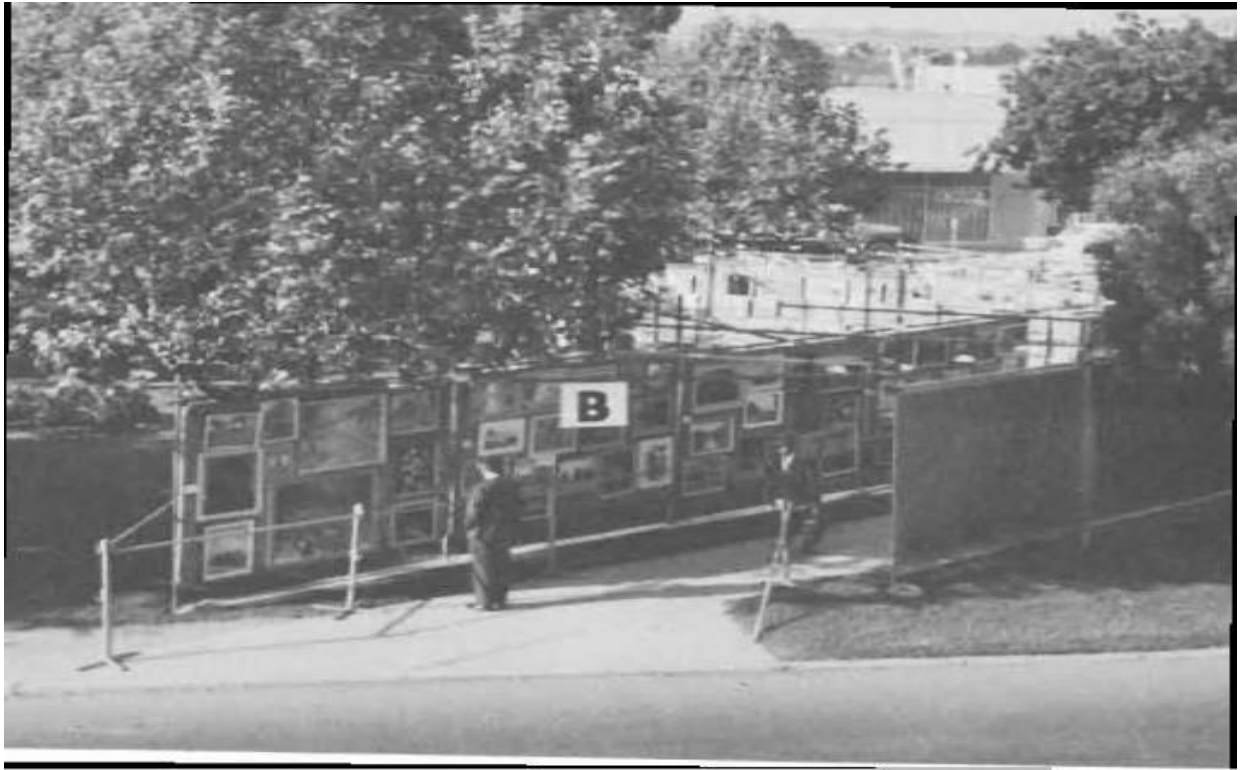
Picture: JESSICA MC CARTHY

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guide

## When did the Art Show begin?



The first **Outdoor Art Show** began on Friday, April 12, 1968. It was hoped that it would be the most colorful Easter attraction in Bendigo. The first site for the Art Show was the Queen Victoria Gardens, Pall Mall.

The first chairman of the Art Show was Ralph Birrell. Ralph was principal of the Bendigo Institute of Technology. It was envisaged that the Art Show would become an annual event. All artists from Bendigo and Melbourne were encouraged to contribute their work. The idea was based on the highly successful Box Hill Outdoor Art Exhibition.

For four years the Rotary Club of Bendigo had undertaken a practicability study on whether to hold an annual art show or not. Despite many Rotary Clubs having lost large amounts of money running an art show, the club felt there was a need to promote local art in the city of Bendigo. Consequently, the club members were very strong in their resolve to make sure the Outdoor Art Show was a success.

### **Given the Art Show was outside, how did the club manage security and the problem of rain?**

According to member Norm Phillips (who assisted at our very first Art Show): ***the Art Show was well-lit at night. Rotarians patrolled the Art Show during opening hours (10am – 10pm) and a security guard patrolled at night. The artwork and stands were covered with large sheets of brown paper at night to protect the valuable artwork from the weather.***

## **Was the Art Show successful in the early years?**

In its first four years, 70% of the artwork displayed was from Bendigo and district artists. Profit in its first year (1968) was \$571.00. In 1971, there were 405 paintings on display and the profit rose to \$1,128.28. Of the 405 paintings on display, 103 paintings were sold on behalf of the artists for \$2,884.

## **Why did the Art Show leave Queen Elizabeth Gardens?**

The Art Show was forced by Bendigo Council to find another venue after being told they could no longer hold the Art Show at this location. At very short notice, the right of our Club to use the gardens for the Art Show was withdrawn and the gardens were given to the Bendigo Easter Fair Society for their use.

On hearing the news, President Charles Bell sent a memo to Bendigo Council, voicing his disgust that this occurred due to the Easter Fair Society's request to be able to use the gardens for a similar purpose over the Easter period.

## **When did the Art Show move indoors to the YMCA?**

In 1972, the Outdoor Art Show became the Rotary Art and Pottery Display Show and was held indoors at the YMCA stadium. This year, 485 paintings were on display and 350 pottery items. The Art Show was now receiving excellent publicity from all media. In 1973, the total profit was \$1,866. In 1974, the profit rose to \$2,500 and 1975: \$3,200. In 1977, due to poor sales, the handcraft section was deleted from the Art Show.

In 1981, an Antiques and Weavers Exhibition began in conjunction with the Easter Fair Society and was held at the RSL Memorial Hall raising \$2,523 in funds. In the same year, the Bendigo Easter Art Fair Art Show joined together with our Rotary Art Show. In 1982 there was a dramatic increase in art sales with Bankcard being available for those purchasing any artwork. Later, in 1986 the club introduced a raffle which added more funds to club profits.

In 1987, the Pottery section was deleted from the Art Show as it was felt the club should concentrate solely on the paintings. (The pottery did return the following year, but in later years it was moved to the RSL hall). A bold move was undertaken by the club in 1989 to double the admission price of entry to the Art Show from \$1 to \$2. Interestingly, this did not have any real negative impact on numbers that attended over the Easter period. In 1993, a shed was built at the Bendigo Tram Depot to store our Art Show equipment (to the huge relief of committee members) and in 1994 our very first preview evening was held with over 80 people attending.





## YMCA 1972 – 1997



## What precipitated the move to the Bendigo Senior Secondary School Campus?

The move from the YMCA to the Bendigo Senior College campus in 1998 was as a result of an overall plan to provide a facelift for the Rotary Art Show. The Pottery Display Show was to come together with the Art Show a year later in 1999; consequently, there would no longer be 2 venues which would be much easier to administer both the Art Show and the Pottery Display Show. (Until then, there was a Rotary committee for the Pottery Display Show and a committee for the Art Show).

Importantly, school students would have the opportunity to display their art at the new venue. Another consideration was that on opening night, the music students from BSSC would be able to perform for the guests at the preview evening.

Larrie Winzar: ***The other reason for the shift to BSSC was for catering for the opening night. There were few facilities at the YMCA- no hot water, ovens and air conditioning. It was very challenging with food requirements. The lighting was also a challenge for the artwork even with the generosity of the lighting donation.***

Overall the move resulted in immediate dividends for the club as there was a 33% increase in sales in its first year!



## Bendigo Senior Secondary College 1998 – 2003



### When did the Art Show move to the Town Hall?

In 2004, the Art Show moved once again. This time the Art Show moved to the recently refurbished Town Hall.

I asked Larrie Winzar to detail the events which led up to why the Art Show is now at its present location.

Finally, I asked Bryan McMahon, who has been involved with the Art Show for over 30 years, to share some of his memories.



## **Why did the Art Show move from BSSC to the Town Hall in 2004 by Larrie Winzar.**



***After a few years at the Bendigo Senior Secondary College, when we realized that the Town Hall, in all its refurbished glory just MIGHT be an option, the Art Show Committee decided to explore that option with passion. As well as the beauty of the venue, there was the attraction of returning the Art Show to central Bendigo because of the increased foot traffic in the CBD. At the time, there was less Easter Festival activity near the BSSC and we had become a “destination” rather than being where all the action was.***

***The side shows had also moved away from the CBD so moving the Art Show in would add some class to the Easter Fair. We really wanted to showcase our Easter Art Show and in our proposal to the City of Greater Bendigo to hire the superbly newly refurbished Town Hall (it was still a building site when we first approached them!) we stated that we saw it as an opportunity for visitors to Bendigo and for local residents too, to view the magnificent historical building at the same time as viewing and purchasing works of art. A community win/win.***

***The committee, when the members saw the potential, was extremely proactive and keen to secure the Town Hall before other community groups thought of the idea. The ‘work horses’ on the Art Show committee worked tirelessly to ensure that the logistics would work whilst the ‘strategists’ worked with the Council to secure the venue. It was a stroke of brilliance.*** “

In 2005, a curator was hired to ensure the artwork was more professionally displayed. Other recent changes have been entry fees for artists being reduced to encourage more local artists to display their work. For potential buyers, a special viewing room being made available to experience a private viewing of any artwork. Furthermore, for those patrons attending the preview evening, came the opportunity to purchase any artwork prior to the Art Show being open to the public.



## Town Hall 2004 –





## **Bryan McMahon's memories of the Art Show over the years.**



***My first memories of the art show go back to the mid-80's, after I joined Rotary and was given a very minor role in the Art Show. Ron Slattery said to me: "the best way to see how Rotary works is to be on the Art Show committee". And how right he was! Rotarians such as Ray Downey, Hal Moors, Warwick Johanson, Norm Phillips, Bruce Perrin, Jack Rowe, Ron Meurer, Bruce Beasley and others made the Art Show run like clockwork. Each chair of the committee lent his/her skills and ideas enabling improvement each year. Warren Cambridge, through Cambridge Press, played an integral part each year with printing of catalogues in a short space of time.***

***The Art Show commenced in the Conservatory Gardens, an open air event, sometimes affected by inclement weather, with Rotarians the overnight security. The YMCA stadium in Mundy Street became the next venue for many years, with crowds of people lined up outside for the opening at 10am, eager to purchase paintings. Part of the art show was a pottery exhibition held in the Memorial Hall, which was a great money-spinner, as people wandered about town after the processions, with not much to do, so they paid \$1 for entry. Each potter had a table with their wares, but for security of their pottery, the potter had to be around all over Easter, which was difficult, eventually leading to the demise of the pottery exhibition. Manning both exhibitions was also a big ask for Rotarians.***

***The next move for the Art Show was to Bendigo High School's gymnasium, near the old Bendigo Gaol. Over 1100 paintings were displayed, with many of them at floor level, making viewing difficult. Under Larrie Winzar's guidance, a small area was found for***

***pottery. Setting up for the Art Show at Bendigo High became a problem when school holidays did not coincide with Easter, so another venue was sought. This resulted in the Bendigo Town Hall becoming the new venue, which caused some dissension within the Club for a number of reasons, but a move that has seen the Art Show grow in visitor numbers, painting sales, and a quality exhibition.***

***Brian Doherty was a great chairman of the Art Show for about 6 years, lifting its community exposure and profitability. It was easy for me to follow him for the next 6 years. We younger (?) Rotarians still use many of the practices introduced by Dad's Army mentioned earlier, practices that have stood the test of time, with some refinements.***

***In 2004, I halved the price to enter a painting to \$5 and made the winning paintings non-acquisitive, and artists now enter paintings valued far more than the prize money, making for better quality art. For many years, food for the preview evening was successfully provided and served by partners of Rotarians, until a local caterer offered to give the Club an exceptional deal, which still continues. Wine was purchased from a local winery - a big improvement from cask wine.***

***More changes have been made in recent years by Graeme Clarke and Brian Figg with the Art Show continuing to be the Club's main income and ensuring its future success.***

***Note: In recent years, we have also established a web presence [www.bendigorotaryeasterartshow.com](http://www.bendigorotaryeasterartshow.com) which has made it easier for the entry forms to be downloaded - saving lots of mailing costs etc.***