

History & Heritage

Circulating throughout Bendigo, Eaglehawk, Heathcote, Castlemaine, Maldon, Kyneton, Elmore, Echuca, and Rochester areas

A publication of the National Trust Bendigo & District Branch

May 2025

Rethink Bendigo Art Gallery Redevelopment?



Cover Story: The Art Gallery Redevelopment - the need for a petition

The National Trust submits that the proposed works in size, style and scale will detract from the 19th century streetscape, the landmark qualities of the earlier Art Gallery buildings, and the Capital Theatre.

Next Branch Meeting Tuesday 27th May 5.30pm, Bendigo Library (enter via Hargreaves Street door) all members and supporters welcome.

Discussion will include the Art Gallery redevelopment, the petition and what needs to be done to gain transparency and a positive outcome for the whole community.

In this issue:

- P 2. Cover Story: The need for a petition
- P 4. Update on Council Question time
- P 4. Plenty of excitement at the Australian Heritage Festival
- P 5. Bendigo events at the Festival
- P 6. Future potential of the Former Bendigo Law Courts
- P 8. Cottages visited during Festival
- P 10. Have your say on planning reforms
- P 11. Share your stories about Quarry Hill
- P 11. Wattle Gully Mine, Chewton vandalised again
- P 11. Conservatory closure for restoration works
- P 12. A tribute to women: Mothers' Day plea to relocate the fernery's bats
- P 13. Membership, contacts, newsletters

Cover image:

Artist's impression of the streetscape. Image: City of Greater Bendigo

Cover Story: The Art Gallery Redevelopment - the need for a petition

Over the past two years the Branch has been seeking information from the Greater Bendigo Council about details for the redevelopment of the Bendigo Art Gallery. After a request from the Branch in March 2024, the Council published details of the project on its [website](#) but there has been no further updates. It is understood that another \$21 million is required to proceed. The Branch has spoken to many people and organisations throughout Greater Bendigo, and very few have heard about the project. They have been shocked at the cost and the impact that the new build will have on the existing State Registered Heritage Buildings in the View Street precinct. Therefore, it was decided at the April Branch meeting to circulate a petition on the redevelopment to raise awareness about the project and to get Council to release information:

To the Mayor and Councillors of Greater Bendigo Council
We, the undersigned residents and ratepayers request that the Council undertake an urgent review of the plan to demolish the bulk of the Bendigo Art Gallery which was opened in 2014 at a cost of \$8.5 million which doubled the exhibition space and included storage areas and a cafe. Council is asked to inform the public of its current plan and costs before any further action is taken. The bulky concrete form of the \$54 million new build is at odds with the 19th century heritage streetscape.

This has raised a lot of debate within the Branch. On the one hand the Branch is working closely with Council and the State Government on a range of heritage issues including the preservation of Specimen Cottage, the Former Law Courts and the Former Gas Works, among other issues, yet it also has a responsibility to speak out where issues are in conflict with its heritage values. The Art Gallery is one such conflict. The Branch too has written to all Councillors who were elected last November but it is understood that they have been told it is a project that has been decided by the former City Council, and they cannot change it.

The Branch also asked two questions at the recent April Council meeting:

- 1. When will the Council update the community on the redevelopment of the Bendigo Art Gallery to include changes to planning permits, costings, details of contracts that have been awarded and release the final plans?**
- 2. Why is the Council demolishing works that doubled the amount of exhibition space in 2014 just ten years ago?**

The question was taken on notice and a response by the Council Governance Officer this week said "I have just checked our system, and relevant officers have not yet provided a response to your question. I have sent them a follow up email requesting that this be done as soon as possible and I will send it through as soon as available."

The Branch has made many requests for information over the past twelve months with no new information being made available.

To further complicate the discussion, some Branch members have argued that it should only object to the project based on heritage issues. Heritage Victoria when considering its permit can only assess it on heritage grounds and it did make some changes. So, when are all the other issues, such as need compared to other projects, building and operating costs, timelines, the Gallery being closed for over two years during the rebuild and the project's impact on the 19th century streetscape, discussed? These points would usually be debated at a public Council meeting where the media and the community could scrutinise the project through a public debate. But it never came to a Council meeting for final approval. It has been the practice of former Councils to approve such large projects at a Council meeting, notably the \$33 million Former Bendigo Goal redevelopment, now Ulumbarra Theatre. While not requiring a public debate at a Council meeting, the Ulumbarra was listed and debated at the request of Councillors to demonstrate transparency.

More about the project

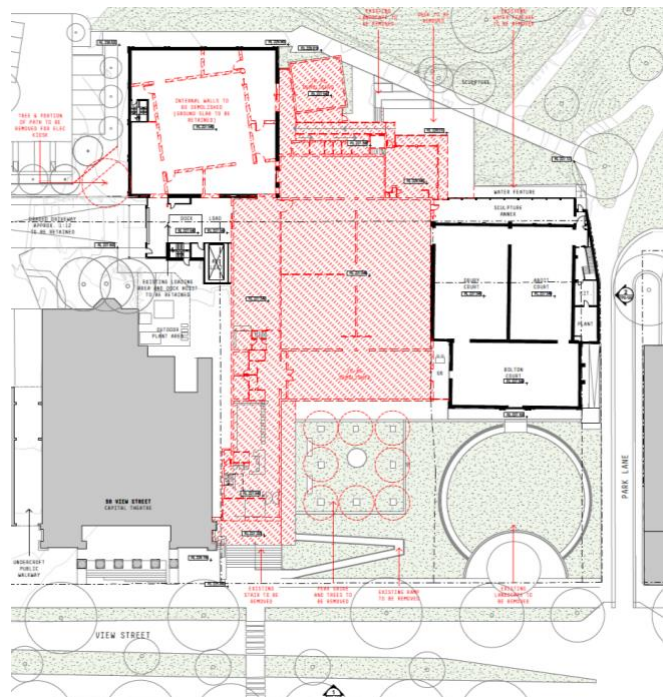
The Council doubled the exhibition space in the Art Gallery in 2014 along with a new Café and storage facilities. Now these are to be demolished after just 10 years.

Other issues raised include:

- This will be Bendigo's biggest ever project costing more than \$54 million
- The existing Art Gallery can host more than 200,000 for an exhibition. Why is there a need for a new one?
- Less than 20% of locals visit the Gallery.
- The Gallery will be closed for two years to undertake works.
- There has been no project update for over 12 months.



The proposed new Art Gallery foyer. Photo: City of Greater Bendigo



Red areas indicate ground floor sections to be demolished. Image: Bendigo Art Gallery Development pdf City of Greater Bendigo

Update on Council Question time

The Council has now responded to the questions raised by the Branch at the April Council meeting. It says -

Re: 2524042 – Public Question – April 23, 2025, Council Meeting – Response

Thank you for your question submitted for the April 23, 2025, Council Meeting and for your patience while officers prepared an adequate response. Please see response below provided by relevant officers, which will also be addressed at the May 19, 2025, Council Meeting as previously discussed.

“The City will update the community this month on the progress of the project. To date, no amendments to planning permits have been required. A call for expressions of interest for a Head Contractor are expected to be released mid-year, with confirmation of the successful tenderer in late 2025.

The plans have always been and remain to retain the entire 2014 extension.

Gallery and public space will be increased on the ground floor and the first floor, with the inclusion of a dedicated blockbuster exhibition space. The original heritage buildings of Bolton, Abbott and Drury courts will receive some interior restoration and conservation to the floors and exterior as part of the project, which will result in improvements to their current condition.

All relevant information has been published on the City's website. There have been no updates or major changes to plans since permits were issued in March 2024.”

It appears that the statement differs from the Plans shown on the Council website. The Branch has previously asked if Council representatives or the architects could attend a Branch meeting to explain the architectural drawings, but no response was received. The request will be made again.

Come along to the Branch meeting on Tuesday 27th May 5.30pm at the Bendigo Library and be a part of the discussion

Plenty of excitement at the Australian Heritage Festival

25 organisations organised 68 events over 23 days and provided plenty of excitement and entertainment during the Australian Heritage Festival held between 18th April and 18th May in the Bendigo region. Peter Legg was out with his camera to capture some of the venues during the Festival.





Some Bendigo events at the Australian Heritage Festival

Left: Bendigo Railway Workshop and Steamrail Victoria at the Bendigo Roundhouse Turntable. Photo: Peter Legg

Below: Eaglehawk Council Chambers (Star Cinema) Wine Chambers. Photo: Peter Legg



The Bendigo Branch marquee on Pall Mall. Photo: Peter Legg



Left and below: Gary Hill and Elaine Doling presenting at the Gasworks. Photos: Peter Legg



Future potential of the Former Bendigo Law Courts

During the Festival visitors to the Former Bendigo Law Courts were asked to write down their ideas on possible future uses for the Law Courts. If you have some ideas, please [submit](#) to the newsletter.



James Lerk conducting one of the Courthouse tours for the Heritage Festival. Photo: Peter Legg



Former Bendigo Courthouse from Pall Mall, during the Heritage Festival. Photo: Peter Legg

Here are a tour attendee's suggestions:

Absolute treasure for Bendigo, a masterpiece!

This beautiful old Law Courts building is an absolute treasure for Bendigo, showcasing the very best of 19th century architecture and intricate craftsmanship. It must be preserved at all costs and be opened up for the public to enjoy and appreciate. Given that Bendigo is in the running to be part of a UNESCO World Heritage area, a building like this should be on top of the list for preservation and restoration. Because of its age, it is obvious that a great deal of money

would need to be poured into it for modern day upgrades, but the outrageous amount of money being earmarked for the unnecessary Art Gallery redevelopment could be better spent here.

Initially, in order to gauge public interest and suggestions as to a possible future purpose for the building, a number of open days could be held for artisans or anyone wishing to pursue a commercial space to showcase their creative works. A building of this grandeur most certainly would complement any business venture.

Some further suggestions include: **Creative Art Spaces** - making use of the many smaller rooms similar to the artisans in the Valentines Antique building in View Street. A space for collectives to exhibit and showcase their creations; **Photography Studio** - wedding photos, portraits or deb photos on the beautiful staircases; **Artificial Indoor Plant Studio** - beautiful areas to display artificial plants and trees which today are so popular for styling offices, homes and commercial spaces; **High Teas** - with a tour of this unique historical treasure and/or photographic record of the memorable occasion. Bendigo needs to campaign to protect such a masterpiece!



Courthouse tours during the Heritage Festival highlighted the beauty of this city treasure. Photos: Peter Legg and Bendigo Branch.

Do you have ideas on what you would like to see open during the 2026 Festival and how the next Festival could reach a larger audience? Send your ideas to this [email address](#).

Cottages visited during the Festival



Top: Jan and Rob kindly opened their historic home for the Heritage Festival. Below: modernized interior. Photos: Bendigo Branch

Three miners' cottages were opened during the Festival and visitors were welcomed inside the homes to see how the owners had restored them and changed them for modern day living.

Pandora Cottage was one of them. Owners Jan and Rob Sonogan give us a brief history of their cottage:

We purchased the property at 34 Valentine Street Ironbark in 2019, undaunted by its dilapidated state, excited by the idea of restoring this humble link to the goldfield's era and not least entranced by the name of the suburb. There is a delight in being in the place, immersed in the history of such a time of social change. We were aware that there would be heritage requirements but did not see this as a problem as we are sympathetic to the cause. In our situation the tricky aspect was having to build our addition behind and to one side of the heritage cottage, however, this was managed satisfactorily. We found interesting evidence of previous people and times along the way, including the ceiling boards which were buried under multiple layers of other linings, now restored, hessian backed wallpaper, home fashioned nails and the notched arrangement of joining structural timbers. We have kept the rooms mostly intact as found other than converting one to a modern bathroom, and reused many of the doors, windows, dado boards, light fittings, all of course labour intensive but satisfying. A small section of the wall and roof line has been retained as evidence of the skillion addition which was

allowed to be demolished. We have a few reminders of our previous home with the floorboards and some railway line used around the fireplace, and have added some quirkiness, exposing the two brick chimneys which had been internalised by a previous owner's addition.

The house is now very liveable, old blending in with new, well insulated, situated to make the most of the winter sunshine and needing minimal cooling in summer. The garden was scant on large trees, so we have planted many, deciduous for shade and sun and indigenous for the wildlife of the area.

I have tracked the house existence back to 1873 and probably as early as 1862. Whether the dwelling referred to is our cottage or the rock hut which sits in the yard at the rear, we will probably never know. The hut has been painstakingly restored and has been visited by a 97-year-old who spent the first 10 years of her life in the two-room structure with her family of seven, food for thought and evidence of the hardiness and resilience of Bendigonians.

Jan and Rob's "rock hut" Photos: Bendigo Branch



It has been fascinating to track the property back through the changes of addresses it has had, telling the story of changes that happened in the area over the years. Unlike the name of the street, a good number of miners' cottages in the area have survived relatively intact though many more have been lost. Long may they be protected from further demolition and neglect so that they can continue to be a reminder of the ordinary people who laboured and survived in this town of gold.

Jan and Rob's house is located in the Ironbark Heritage Precinct where there are hundreds of miners' cottages protected by a heritage overlay. The cottage overlooks the Garden Gully Reserve. Take a walk around this fascinating area of historical significance.



Interior of Jan and Rob's "rock hut" Photo: Peter Legg



Above: Elaine Doling presenting the history of miners' cottages at *Hard Hill* for the heritage Festival. Photo: Peter Legg. Right: Phil Howe conducting one of the Courthouse tours. Photo: Bendigo Branch



A big thank you to all the volunteers who have assisted to conduct the many events staged during the Australian Heritage Festival. 25 organisations put on 68 events over 23 days of the Festival in the Greater Bendigo region. A wonderful effort supported by outstanding contributions from many volunteers who have made it all possible. The Festival was well supported by the City of Greater Bendigo and Court Services Victoria.

Restoration commenced on another cottage

Gail reported at the last Branch meeting that the cottage at 5 Tomlins Street Bendigo is undergoing a renovation. Reading realestate.com it says that the property has been vacant for many years and has a demolition order on it. It is very encouraging that the owners have chosen to renovate.



The house at 5 Tomlins Street, Bendigo. Photo: realestate.com [Click here](#) for more photos

Have Your Say on planning reforms that could change Victoria forever

The Victorian Government is proposing sweeping changes to the state's planning system — and we all have an opportunity to help create a planning system that delivers balanced policies for heritage protection, rather than overlooking it in favour of development.

Through recent amendments to the Victorian Planning Provisions (VC257, VC267 and VC274), the Government aims to fast-track housing development across the state. But in doing so, it has not adequately considered the impact on heritage places and local character.

The National Trust believes there is a better way — one that integrates housing needs with the protection of the places that make Victoria unique.

Now is the time to act

A Parliamentary Inquiry currently examining the amendments is set to report recommendations next week. The National Trust is calling on members and supporters to contact their local Member of Parliament to urge them to support recommendations for a planning system that:

- Recognises and protects heritage values
- Integrates heritage early in planning decisions
- Promotes design excellence that responds to place and identity

To help you get started, NT has prepared a simple guide: [Write to your MP now](#)

Why it matters

These reforms could allow developments to proceed with limited community input, weaken local oversight for re-developments of unassessed heritage sites, and encourage demolition over adaptive reuse of existing buildings. Mature trees may be replaced with saplings, heritage streetscapes may be compromised, and local councils could lose the ability to shape significant development outcomes for their communities.

Heritage is not a barrier to housing — it is part of what makes our cities and towns liveable. Thoughtful, place-based planning can achieve both.

National Trust Recommendations:

In its submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry, the National Trust has put forward practical recommendations to protect cultural heritage alongside new housing, including:

- Clearer integration of Heritage Overlays
- Stronger protections for existing tree canopy
- Heritage Impact Assessments
- Community consultation rights
- Support for adaptive reuse
- A dedicated heritage unit within the Department of Transport and Planning

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to get it right.

Let's make sure Victoria's planning system honours our past while building a better future.

[Read our position in full](#)

Thank you for standing with us to protect what matters.

Share your stories about Quarry Hill's history, character and heritage

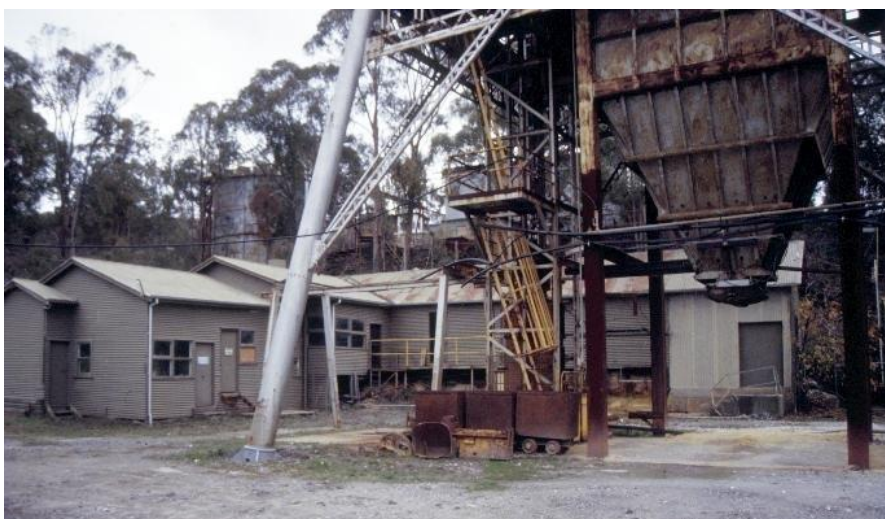
The City of Greater Bendigo is inviting community members to share stories, photos and documents about Quarry Hill's rich history and character. We're putting together a thematic history to identify and explain the main factors, processes, places and events that have shaped Quarry Hill.

Your stories, photographs and documents will be invaluable to provide local knowledge and a broader historical perspective. If you're unable to attend the in-person session, you can visit [Let's Talk](#) to share information or pinpoint significant historical places on the map.

Wattle Gully Mine vandalised again

It was very disturbing to hear on the ABC Central Victoria breakfast program that the Wattle Gully Mine at Chewton is being vandalised and looted and the gates being left open with the site unsecured. It has been happening for some years, with a group of concerned locals raising concerns back in 2023. The Branch had a very successful Festival tour there back in 2018 and everyone was so impressed with the site.

The Branch has been active in the Bid to gain recognition of the Victorian Goldfields as a permanent World Heritage Site. If it is going to be successful, Victorian credentials as a custodian of its mining history must be impeccable and require immediate action to protect sites. To be recognised at world level status a Protection Plan for all sites is necessary and must be implemented with appropriate staffing, security measures and funding. This is a measure that the Victorian Government must take immediately.



Wattle Gully Mine Chewton. Photo: Heritage Victoria

To read more about the mine, check out [Heritage Victoria's citation and photographs](#) as it is listed on the Victorian Heritage Register.

Conservatory closure for restoration works

The City of Greater Bendigo is undertaking important restoration works on the historic Conservatory in Rosalind Park.

The Conservatory was constructed circa 1897 and since that time the structure has undergone many modifications to its original fabric.

The City is committed to restoring it to its original state so it can continue to be enjoyed by future generations. Works are anticipated to take six to eight months and during this time the building will be closed to ensure public safety and to allow safe access for works to occur.



A tribute to women: a Mothers' Day plea to relocate the fernery's bats

Bendigo Advertiser

When taking visitors on my personal tour of Bendigo, I always left Rosalind Park until last; for deep inside the park was a special oasis of magic. Dark, cool and verdant, with running streams and little footbridges, [the fernery](#) always surprised newcomers with its sense of mystery. Indeed, I was fond of telling children that there were fairies in this fernery, all you had to do was be still and listen.

The clincher for visitors was the bronze dedication on the stone pillars either side of the fernery's iron gates: "Erected by Francis James Every as a tribute to all good mothers of whom my wife - Emma Jane Every and my mother - Mary E Every were shining examples. 1953."

Legacy of the Every family preserved



The Every family was typical of Bendigo's pioneers who gladly contributed to its institutions, including its gardens. Pip Johanson says her grandfather, Francis James Every, was a generous and thoughtful man who witnessed the suffering of his mother when she waited for her sons to return from the First World War; he also witnessed the anguish of his wife when her sons were in the Second World War.

Francis Every simply wanted to build a consolation, something beautiful for women and their children.

The Every plaque at the Rosalind Park Fernery.
Photo: supplied.

Rather than mothers, our historical fernery is these days dedicated to a colony of bats. The shining examples amongst us forgotten, the fernery locked to the public.

The colony of upstart, grey-headed flying-foxes came to town in 2010. In an appalling display of bad manners, they trashed Rosalind Park, as well as the fernery. They covered the precious few hectares of our parkland with their foul excrement and shat over innocent tourists as well. And while the bats' numbers are based on environmental conditions, there is no guarantee that they will hold to a treaty of peace.

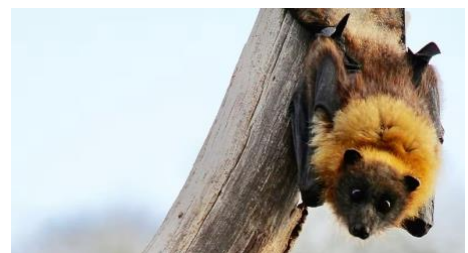
Humane options to disperse bats

The City of Greater Bendigo argues that the flying foxes are an endangered species, and yes, they are vital for the regeneration and dispersal of native plants.

But relocating [the bats](#) from this small area of land will hardly affect the viability of the species. Indeed, council could have chosen the method employed by Melbourne's Botanical Gardens when they used an armoury of noise to guide their bats to Yarra Glen in 2003. There is also the example of the Albury Botanical Gardens which successfully relocated its Flying Fox colony in May 2014.

Francis Every's dedication may seem somewhat sentimental these days, but I can't think of a more lovely tribute to women, particularly now that Mothers' Day is upon us.

Dianne Dempsey



Join the National Trust

Advocate for Preservation! Support! Explore! Enjoy! A National Trust Membership is your ticket to the world, with over 1000 destinations to explore.

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) is the state's largest community-based heritage advocacy organisation actively working towards conserving and protecting our heritage for future generations to enjoy, representing 40,000 members across Victoria. [Click here](#) to join.

You can keep up with the current advocacy issues at the Trust Advocate blog: [Click here](#)

History & Heritage Branch newsletter - receive, contribute, read past issues

Everyone has a story that, when combined with others, provides a record of the social history of our region and draws attention to the significance of local built heritage. The Branch welcomes your ideas, contributions and photographs for the newsletter which is published monthly. The contribution deadline for the June *History & Heritage* will be **June 1st** For previous issues of *History & Heritage* [click here](#)

To help increase circulation send it to your friends and family or sign up your organisation to receive it. To join the editorial group, contact the Branch President, Peter Cox on 0447 473 674

Next committee meeting **Thursday June 5th at Bendigo Library 10am**

Next editorial group meeting **Thursday June 5th at Bendigo Library 11am**

Email: National Trust of Australia (Vic) Bendigo & District Branch [click here](#)

Phone: President, Peter Cox 0447 473 674 or mail: c/- 57 Green Street, California Gully 3556.

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Next Branch Meeting: Tuesday May 27th 5.30pm

Bendigo Library (enter via Hargreaves Street)

All members and supporters are welcome to attend.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria and recognize the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; and to Elders past, present and future

