

History & Heritage

Circulating throughout Bendigo, Eaglehawk, Heathcote, Castlemaine,
Maldon, Kyneton, Elmore, Echuca, and Rochester areas
A publication of the National Trust Bendigo & District Branch
March 2026

Australian Heritage Festival Bendigo Events 2026



Next Branch Meeting
Tuesday March 24th 5.30pm
Bendigo Library (enter via Hargreaves Street)
All members and supporters are welcome

Contributions for next month's *History and Heritage* must be [emailed to the Branch](#) before Monday 6th April 2026. Distribution is approximately 2 weeks after that.

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Cover images: Former Law Courts, Pall Mall Bendigo, inset: Bendigo Gasworks. Photos: Bendigo Branch



The watchers on the roof of the Bendigo Law Courts. Image: E Doling. The Bendigo Law Courts are on the Victorian Heritage Register VHR Number H1466.

Cover Story: Australian Heritage Festival events in Bendigo. The National Trust's Australian Heritage Festival will launch on 18th April 2026.

While the Branch newsletter has published a number of stories promoting the month-long event, it is now at the "pointy end". Events have been planned and tickets are now available. Many people and organisations in our region have put hours and hours into preparing for events to highlight specific built heritage assets or notable people who played amazing roles in local history.

Castlemaine, Maldon and Echuca, as well as Bendigo have events listed on the [National Trust website](#). To find all Victorian events planned for the festival, [click here](#).

Bendigo National Trust Branch tours

Two Bendigo events are highlighted in the program especially due to the outstanding heritage values of both sites. However, the Former Bendigo Law Courts and the Bendigo Gasworks appear to have precarious futures. *History & Heritage* has published many stories about both these sites. By booking a tour of either or both the Former Law Courts and Gasworks, you will be showing that there is support for the long-term preservation and adequate interpretation of these two outstanding heritage assets.

Former Bendigo Law Courts tours

30 Pall Mall, Bendigo

Join one of the 18 tours spread over 9 weekends to enjoy the beauty of the building. Limited to 20 guests per tour – [book here](#) to help us save this building.

Pompously Bendigonian - the Former Law Courts

In 1896 a new building opened in Pall Mall. The Law Courts building is one of Bendigo's grandest. With the Post Office next door, they are a tribute to mining wealth. The buildings were called "Pompously Bendigonian" or "the Paris end of Pall Mall."

The law courts served a range of functions, including a Supreme Court, a Wardens Court, Police Courts, Mining Court, Petty Sessions Court and Magistrates Court. Naturally, some of these changed over time. The day after the official opening on 11th February 1896, with Mr Justice Hodges taking his seat on the bench, Dr Quick noted that this was the first occasion on which a judge of the Supreme Court had presided in a new building which centralised all the courts of the city. Prior to this new building, the previous Supreme Court of 1858 (now part of Bendigo Senior Secondary College) perched above the government camp was first used by Judge Skinner of the County Court in 1859. The acoustics were found to be inferior to even "the wretched old hovel" of the previous courthouse nearby made from canvas.

Adults \$10, Concession \$5, Child Free, Family \$15 To see details and book your place on a tour [click here](#).

Bendigo Gasworks tours

The Bendigo Gasworks in Weeroona Avenue Bendigo are the only remaining complete gasworks in Australia, and one of just three complete gasworks surviving in the world. The others are at Fakenham in England and Biggar in Scotland, both of which serve as museums. You don't need to travel across the world to see this one. It is on the Victorian Heritage Register H 0781), and is regarded as an internationally significant example of an entire provincial gasworks by the Institution of Engineers, Aust.



Bendigo former Gasworks, looking up. Photo: Bendigo Branch

The tour showcases the fascinating history of gas in Bendigo. The gasworks ran from their establishment in 1860 until the introduction of natural gas in 1973 when the gasworks became redundant. They remain as they were at the time of closure- a treasure of industrial heritage frozen in time. The tours will be led by experts who can explain the fascinating history of how the gasworks evolved over time, including during World War II, and the function of the surviving equipment, including the retorts, gasholders and exhausters. Learn the stories of the workers and the groundbreaking engineering that enabled the gasworks to operate efficiently.

The gasworks are only open during the Heritage Festival, so please book early to avoid missing out. Please note: This is an industrial site. For OH&S reasons each tour has a strict limit of 20 persons and enclosed shoes with low heels must be worn. No children under 12 years are allowed on the tours. There is no disabled access to parts of the site including the upper retort house. No disabled toilets on site. Each tour to take 1 hour 15 mins. Parking is available in nearby streets.

Prebooking of tours is essential, and no tickets are available at the gate. Cost \$10 per person or \$5 concession or student 12 to 18 years. For more information and to book [click here](#).

National Trust Volunteer Day - Phil Howe (Branch President)

On February 16th I attended a tour of Government House Victoria and LaTrobe Cottage in the Domain Melbourne as part of a Volunteer Day outing arranged by the National Trust of Victoria. There were 19 volunteers present on the day treated to a grand tour of the magnificent Government House by Deborah, the Community Engagement Advisor which also included a walk through the restored kitchen garden. Many of those present followed up with a light lunch and tour of LaTrobe's cottage, or a replica of it except for one building from the original built in 1839 and is claimed to be the oldest room in Melbourne.

These outings are open to anyone who is a registered volunteer of the National Trust, and I highly recommend volunteers take advantage of the opportunity they present for a free look at various heritage locations in Victoria.

The volunteers' tour group in the State Ballroom of Government House. There are similarities to Bendigo Town Hall's interior. Photo: supplied



Gold Camp Castlemaine News - Alice Matthiesson and John Lewis, (Castlemaine Society Inc)

Gold Camp Castlemaine is a heritage campaign to advocate for heritage sensitivity for the Camp Reserve, in Council's plans to update the football netball club facilities.

At present there is a planning application PA077/2025 for a large clubroom and two new netball courts to be placed on new positions on the site, which happen to be the most historically significant portion of the Camp. This will cause permanent destruction on an historic goldfields site in the centre of Castlemaine's premier historic precinct. As proposed, this planning application will disrupt historic views and remove large old remnant redgums. The linkages between the Gold Commissioners Camp elements will be diminished.

A community meeting will be held, and we will give an update in the next *History & Heritage*. To learn more, [click here](#).



Left: The Gold Commissioners Camp during the Gold Rush. Above: The same site today. Below: The planned buildings on the site. Images: supplied



CASSOC (Castlemaine Society Inc) led the way with last year's The Alchemy of Gold Conference which brought together 200 people per day for 3 days of lectures, seminars and field trips about the gold rush. We have repeated some of the lectures for free, at the Northern Arts Hotel and these have been a huge success fully booking out and needing repeat events. Quite shocking their success. Therefore, we have applied for a community grant to see if we can make films for YouTube of these lectures, keeping a permanent public education resource for our community.

Former Lutheran Schoolroom

110 MacKenzie Street, Bendigo - Mike Butcher

Across MacKenzie Street from Girton College stands one of the earliest surviving buildings in Bendigo. It was designed by our most notable early architect, William Vahland, and erected between September¹ and December 1857².

Now painted white and with a lean-to addition, its significance is easily overlooked. Three of the walls appear to be intact but garage doors now replace the steps to the entrance in the MacKenzie Street frontage. Painting the walls has caused some of the sandstone footings and bricks to deteriorate, but the structure appears otherwise sound and suitable for restoration.

It has a special significance as one of the few buildings that can be unequivocally attributed to WC Vahland as sole practitioner and of very early date. He joined in partnership with Robert Getzschmann in January 1858 to build the Bendigo Hospital and Vahland's celebrated career stretched over fifty years.

John Drennan is quoted as saying in his *History of Education in Bendigo 1851-62*, of the schoolroom 'for its time...was a fine school-house, well-equipped and capable of providing accommodation for some fifty-six children.'³

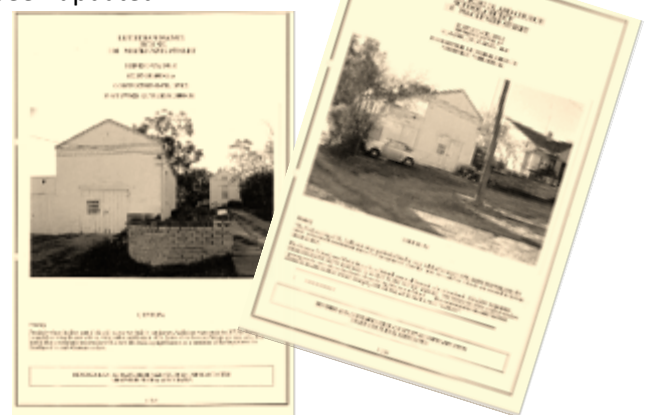
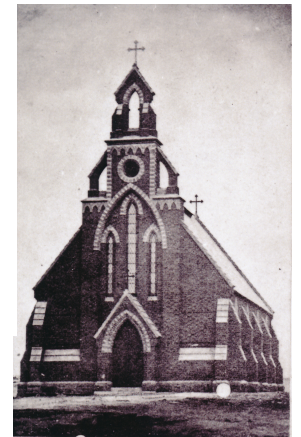
The school was the first building on the Lutheran Church Crown Allotments, followed by The Manse behind it and the Lutheran Church in Rowan Street, which was designed by Vahland and Getzschmann, and opened in 1865⁴. It was destroyed by a fire in 1925, considered to have been caused either by a candle left burning after a church service or arson⁵. The Manse House was given an A grading in the [Bendigo and Eaglehawk Heritage Study significant Sites](#), and strangely, although on the same block, the school room was given a separate A grade listing. Today both are covered by HO 173, but the brief citations from 1993 have not been updated⁶.

The schoolroom is in private ownership. The size and design of the schoolroom, although not large, appear to be such that a good designer could suggest a suitable restoration for a viable purpose. Its central location is an advantage. The cost of such a restoration would be considerable, but with the bicentenary of Vahland's birth in 1828 coming up, it is worthy of consideration as a suitable project. Removing the paint without damaging the bricks and mortar would be a beginning.

1. Tenders called: *Bendigo Advertiser*, 3 September 1857.
2. School opened, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 25 December 1857.
3. Schulz, Robert, School, in Frank Cusack (ed), *Bendigo: the German Chapter*, Bendigo, The German Heritage Society, 1998. p. 102.
4. *Bendigo Independent*, 27 July 1865.
5. Lutheran Church Gutted, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 11 August 1925.
6. Graeme Butler and Associates, *Bendigo and Eaglehawk Heritage Study: Significant Sites*, 1993, p. 4-266 (School) and 4-267 (Manse).



Top: Vahland's Lutheran School post-1865; Above: As it is today Images: supplied; Right: Lutheran Church, Rowan Street (now gone) by Vahland and Getzschmann 1865, Source: Dennis O'Hoy; Below: Entries in the 1993 Heritage Study (see link in text)



Two events from The Bendigo Historical Society for the Australian Heritage Festival:

Saturday April 18th 10am - 12pm **Bendigo Church Organs with Thomas Heywood**



Join the internationally acclaimed organ virtuoso Thomas Heywood on a tour of three historic churches and their pipe organs including: Beginning at **St Kilian's Church**, the German-built organ bought in 1871 by the legendary Bendigo priest, Henry Backhaus; then to **St Andrew's Uniting Church** - the 1882 Alfred Fuller organ installed in the present church building in 1930. Finally the tour will re-visit the Grand Organ in **Sacred Heart Cathedral**, built by the leading British firm of Bishop & Son in 1904.

Walk or drive between venues. A program with directions and start times will be available at the first church - St Kilian's. Proceeds from the walk will be shared between BHS and Bendigo Fine Music People's Piano Appeal. Meet at St Kilian's 161 McCrae Street, Bendigo. [Click here to book](#). See Thomas's article below regarding pipe organ history in Bendigo.

Sunday May 17th 11am - 12.30pm **Book launch *Monumental Days* by David Cooney**



Join author David Cooney for the launch of his significant book on the Bendigo Cemetery. *Monumental Days* is a two-volume history of Bendigo Cemetery, a story of human endeavour that is not without drama or scandal. Spanning 165 years, it depicts the struggles planners, sextons and cemetery trusts faced in meeting the changing religious, political, economic and aesthetic expectations of the wider society. The work includes stories of those buried or memorialised at the cemetery, the legacy of Bendigo's highly acclaimed stonemasons and the funeral rites and rituals of the time.

David Cooney was born and educated in Bendigo and after graduating from university, worked as a reporter and sub-editor, beginning at the *Bendigo Advertiser*. He has had a life-long interest in history. Launch will be in the Chapel at Bendigo Cemetery 70 Carpenter St, Quarry Hill. [Click here to book](#).

A history of Bendigo's pipe organs - Thomas Heywood

Australia has an impressive collection of pipe organs in Concert Halls, Town Halls, Public Halls, Theatres, Universities, Schools, Cathedrals and Churches - some even in private residences!

There is an ever-growing and unique heritage of over 2,500 pipe organs in Australia and New Zealand. This invaluable musical inheritance is worth well over a billion dollars in purely monetary terms and is priceless in terms of replacement value. After all, pipe organs are the largest and most valuable musical instruments in the world. The fact that these monumental and, in many cases, irreplaceable instruments are the single largest and most valuable 'objects' owned by the authorities on behalf of their local communities is a fact that should not be lost on any of us who appreciate culture, history and music.



Thomas at the organ console. Photo: Adam Carswell, *Bendigo Times* 2026

The first pipe organs were heard in Australia 200 years ago and since the early 19th century many fine instruments have been imported to the continent. Australia's first pipe organ for public use was formally opened in May 1825 in Hobart. Over the last two centuries, the history of the pipe organ in Australia has mirrored the development of the instrument in the UK, Europe and North America. An Australian organ building industry developed from the middle of the 19th century and remains active to this day. The music performed on these magnificent instruments by generations of Australian organists has been enjoyed by millions of Australians.

Pipe organs are the oldest keyboard instruments known to humankind, dating from 2,300 years ago. Since the earliest times, pipe organs have been seen as status symbols for the communities in which they are housed, be it ancient Rome, the grand town halls of the Victorian era, the mansions of the American industrialists of the 20th century, or cathedrals and churches throughout the world since the introduction of pipe organs into churches: no less a person than Charlemagne has been frequently credited with the pipe organ's establishment within western European church music 1200 years ago.

Bendigo's inheritance

The vast wealth generated by the Bendigo goldfields made it possible for the founders of modern Bendigo to plan for a long and prosperous future. Bendigo's first pipe organs were consequently installed in 1867, 16 years after the discovery of gold had unearthed the vast wealth enabling our city's leaders to embark on grand building plans, led by the great William Vahland, to transform the once dusty mining town into the 'Vienna of the South'.



Left: Alfred Fuller 1845 - 1923
Right: George Fincham 1828 - 1910. Images: Organ Historical Trust of Australia.

The replacement value of Greater Bendigo's unique pipe organ heritage amounts to an extraordinary \$26m, and the following is a brief chronological history of this remarkable inheritance.

The two great Melbourne-based 19th century organ builders: George 'Grandfather' Fincham - who established the art of organ building in Victoria in 1862, and his competitor Alfred Fuller, who opened his factory in 1880. Both played leading roles in the provision of pipe organs for greater Bendigo between 1867 and 1910.

Bendigo is also home to two instruments of international significance - the Grand Organ in Sacred Heart Cathedral, built by the leading British firm of Bishop & Son in 1904 for Australia's third largest cathedral (after St Patrick's Melbourne and St Mary's Sydney), and the German-built organ bought in 1871 by the legendary Bendigo priest, musician and property investor, Henry Backhaus, for St Kilian's Church. The St Kilian's organ, although in need of repair, is of international significance as an exceptionally rare piece of surviving cultural heritage, as so much of Germany's pipe organ heritage was destroyed in the two world wars. Unlike the pipework in so many beautifully made instruments in Germany, the St Kilian's organ pipes were not melted down for bullets.

The Forest Street Uniting Church organ is Bendigo's oldest surviving pipe organ still in its original location, built by George Fincham in 1867, and is sited behind a magnificent Gothic organ case possibly designed by Vahland himself. The Forest Street organ, with a replacement value of over \$2.5m, has been lovingly maintained and rebuilt several times.



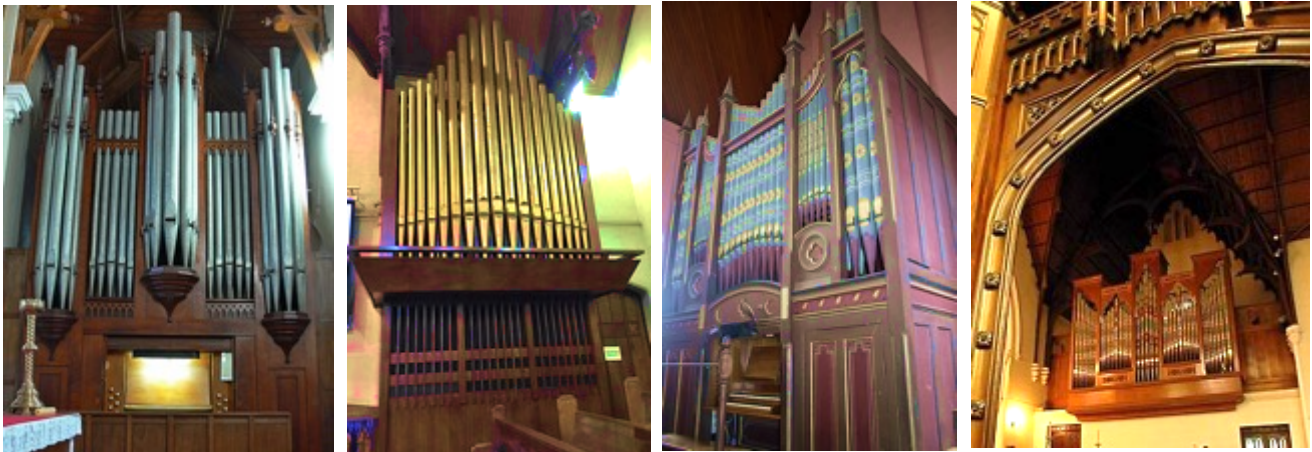
This 11th-century organ was played for the first time in 800 years after restoration. It is on display in Saint Savior's Monastery of Jerusalem's Old City. Photo: Mahmoud Illean, AP News



Top: The Grand Organ, Sacred Heart Cathedral, Bendigo; Above left: St. Kilian's organ, Bendigo. Photos: Organ Historical Trust of Australia. Above right: Forest Street Uniting Church organ, Bendigo. Photo: Australian National Academy of Music.

The St Kilian's organ was built in 1871 by the Paderborn-based organ building firm of Randebrook for the previous stone-built St Kilian's Church and was installed in the present weatherboard building in 1888 by George Fincham. With a replacement value of around \$2m, the St Kilian's organ was not a cheap purchase for Henry Backhaus.

The next instrument to arrive in greater Bendigo was for Inglewood in 1878. Ordered by Joseph Tivey, the well-known local businessman whose mansion recently featured on Restoration Australia, the 1878 organ built by George Fincham is another remarkable survivor - it remains in completely original condition, other than the addition of electric blowing! For a musical instrument nearly 150 years old to be still working so well, in such a beautiful building, shows the quality of the craftsmanship practised in colonial Victoria. With a replacement value of around \$2m, the pipe organ at St Augustine's Anglican Church is a remarkable living gift to the town.



Left to right: St Augustine's Anglican Church Inglewood, St Andrew's Uniting Church Bendigo, Long Gully Uniting Church, St Paul's Anglican Cathedral, Bendigo. Photos: Organ Historical Trust of Australia

The race was on in the 1880s, when three new pipe organs were ordered - all built by Alfred Fuller, Fincham's competitor.

The Long Gully Uniting Church Organ, with a replacement value of around \$2m, is - like the instrument in Inglewood - a remarkable survivor, although restored in the 1980s. The beautiful casework, and prominent location at the front of this amazingly large and spacious building, shows the pride with which the Long Gully community wished to exhibit their aspirational purchase in 1882. Not to be outdone, St Andrew's Uniting Church, also in 1882, ordered another instrument from Alfred Fuller for the former church building, which was moved into the present church building in 1930. Rebuilt and enlarged in 1959, the St Andrew's organ also has a replacement value of around \$2m.

The largest organ to come to Bendigo in the 1880s was for St Paul's Church (now Anglican Cathedral) in 1883. This was one of Alfred Fuller's larger showpiece instruments, with a beautiful case, and has since been moved from the rear to the front of the building and extensively rebuilt including some pipework from the 1868 Hill organ in St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney. The replacement value of the instrument, soon to be completed by Australian Pipe Organs of Melbourne, is around \$4m.

The boom years of the 1880s continued with the purchase of an instrument by George Fincham for Christ Church Castlemaine in 1888, complete with splendidly decorated facade pipework and, in the depression years of the 1890s, Maldon even managed to order a new instrument from George Fincham who had, by this time, gone into partnership with Arthur Hobday as Fincham & Hobday. This instrument also survives in remarkably original condition and has a replacement value of \$1m.

The largest instrument in greater Bendigo, and the grandest musical instrument in regional Australia, is the Grand Organ in Sacred Heart Cathedral. With a replacement value of around \$6m, this is an outstanding cultural and musical asset of international significance. On completion in the factory in London in 1905, the leading musicians in London were invited to a 'factory concert' and were reported as pronouncing that "it was the best instrument to be manufactured during recent years."

In 1910, George Fincham & Son built a new instrument in the Edwardian style for Castlemaine Uniting Church, and this fine and robust-sounding instrument was rebuilt in 1984 by the Melbourne firm of S.J. Laurie.

After the installation of any pipe organ, in addition to regular maintenance, minor or major rebuilding is usually required about every 50-70 years. This has been the case with the fine pipe organs of greater Bendigo (with the exception of Inglewood!), and the 1950s were a busy time for rebuilding organs - Sacred Heart in 1951, Forest Street Uniting Church and Christ Church Castlemaine in 1953, St Paul's in 1957, St Andrew's in 1959. Rebuilding and maintenance work also occurred through the rest of the 20th century. These contracts were also worth millions in current market value, and the commitment of Bendigonians to their rich inheritance of pipe organs now extends over 150 years.

The first new pipe organ to arrive in greater Bendigo for over 115 years - since 1910 - is the George 'Grandfather' Fincham organ in the Lauriston Chapel at Langley Estate.



The Langley organ was built in Melbourne 150 years ago in 1875 for the grand ballroom of 'Findon' in Kew - the mansion owned by the legendary 19th-century Australian banker and politician, the Hon. Henry 'Money' Miller. However, the instrument was never installed in Miller's mansion and, instead, remained in Fincham's Richmond organ factory as an exhibition instrument where it was regularly demonstrated and used for practice by a teenaged Dame Nellie Melba, who was having organ lessons at the time. 150 years later, with a replacement value of \$1.8m, the instrument has been restored and enhanced by Daniel Bittner and his team at Australian Pipe Organs in Melbourne, and this magnificent pipe organ now sounds as good as it looks! And the spectacular gold on the facade pipes is returning home as, believe it or not, the gold leaf sourced in 1875 came from the Bendigo goldfields! And - amazingly - the organ case at Inglewood was based on the Langley organ case when it was housed in Fincham's factory as an exhibition instrument.

Left: Thomas Heywood and the pipe organ in the Lauriston Chapel at Langley Estate. Photo: Enzo Tomasiello *Bendigo Advertiser*.

There have been a handful of other smaller pipe organs in Bendigo that have come and gone, including an organ at Fortuna Villa in 1901, and instruments in other churches and private homes from Eaglehawk to Golden Square, but the surviving heritage of 11 pipe organs in greater Bendigo, including the latest addition at Langley, is treasured, respected and appreciated by the current generation of Bendigonians.

The concert organ tradition is a unique musical tradition in which large pipe organs, usually given the epithet 'grand' due to their physical size and musical stature, are showcased through the performance of the finest classical and romantic music, including special arrangements of music originally written for other instruments (including full symphony orchestras), all playable on 'The King of Instruments'!

The Operatic Servant Girl: An excellent evening's entertainment by Charles Robert Thatcher 1861

Sunday May 3rd at 3.00 pm at Langley Estate

Hidden away in the State Library of Victoria is the text of a little burlesque – a “Duologue” titled *The Operatic Servant Gal* dated August 1861, and written by Charles Robert Thatcher, a British entertainer who arrived at the Bendigo Goldfields in 1852. Described as a large, genial man, the “inimitable Thatcher” established a reputation as an immensely popular entertainer. The humorous texts of his ballads are largely set to music from Verdi's operas *La Traviata* and *Il Trovatore*. The roles will be played by local identities Peter Hunt, baritone and Matilda Wilby as the young servant girl. They will be accompanied by Peter Butler on the pianoforte. Merlyn Quaiife, who has been resident in Junortoun since 2013 will coordinate the event. [Book here](#) for tickets.



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 next month's *History & Heritage* is **Monday 6th April 2026**. Distribution is approximately 2 weeks after that. Send to the [Bendigo Branch here](#).

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.

Next Branch meeting, Tuesday March 24th at Bendigo Library 5.30pm

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

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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.

