

**History of the  
Christ Church Berwick  
Flower Show**

By Brenda Miller

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If the Flower Show held on Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2004 was the hundredth, then the first Flower Show was held in 1905. The church records, however, are missing, and I can find nothing in the South Bourke and Mornington Journal, the nearest thing to a local paper published at that time. But the first edition of the Berwick Shire News, dated Wednesday 8 September 1909, carried the following item of local news: "Flower Show; The Ladies' Guild of Christ Church, Berwick have arranged to hold their Annual Flower Show on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of October. Full particulars will be given in these columns later on". I failed to find the later reference but did find a large advertisement in an edition published in 1912. This gave the following information: "Annual Flower Show, in connection with Christ Church, Berwick, to be held at the local Rechabite Hall on Thursday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1912". The Show was to be open from 3pm until 10.30pm. Admission was 6d, and 3d for children under twelve. An evening musical programme was one of the attractions, and there were many categories for people to enter flowers, cooking, needlework, vegetables etc. The names of the stewards were J. B. Pearson, A. J. Cole, R. A. Henty, W. Wade, H. Davy, W. A'Beckett and R. Kent. The secretary was Miss Barker, sister of the primary school principal, and aunt of Miss Alice Barker, who will be remembered by many of the older parishioners. Mrs Vioussaux, wife of the headmaster of Berwick Grammar School, was the treasurer. The prizes, usually 2/- or 2/6d,

were donated by local citizens. Many letters must have been written soliciting these.

To jump ahead for a moment, Edwin Flack, Australia's first Olympic Gold Medallist, was written to in 1934 asking him to contribute as "you've been so good to us in the past." He responded with a cheque for £1, not a small sum in those days.

In 1913 Miss Barker as secretary of the Guild reported: "In connection with the Annual Flower Show the expenses were £14.7s.0d and the receipts £64.7s.0d". The first reference to the Flower Show in the vestry minutes is on 29 December 1914, in which it is moved that, "A letter of thanks be passed to the Ladies' Guild for their services in connection with the recent Flower Show".

For most of its life the Flower Show has been held in the High Street, in the hall which started its life as the Rechabite Hall, then became the Soldiers' Hall, and is now called the Masonic Hall. It was held on a Thursday in late October or early November. All the necessary trestles and crockery etc. had to be transported from Church Street down to the High Street. During the earlier years this would have been in horse-drawn vehicles as very few people had cars. Berwick was then a small town, with a sprinkling of retired gentry. The Flower Show was a serious social occasion, and people dressed up to attend.

Originally there was one trophy, the Adamson Rose Bowl, presented by the late Mrs C. Adamson, to be held for a year by the competitor obtaining the highest aggregate of points in section A (flowers and shrubs). Then in 1958 Dr and Mrs Noel Stephenson presented the Langmore Trophy, a large silver

tray, bearing the inscription "Given in appreciation of the devotion and interest of Dr P. V. Langmore". This was also to be held for a year, by the winner of the champion rose of the show. Later came the Lilian Smith Memorial Trophy presented by the Ladies' Guild, to be held for 12 months by the winner of class 39 (an arrangement of five rose blooms). Lilian Smith was a much loved member of the congregation who died in 1968. Smaller prizes such as teaspoons were presented for the winners to keep.

The Flower Show continued through the 1920s and 1930s. The Church Annual Report for 1928 tells us that the profit for that year was £83. The vestry minutes of 25 February record on behalf of the Ladies' Guild a vote of thanks to Colonel Williams, "for the very valuable assistance he had given the ladies in preparing the hall for the Annual Flower Show and the American Tea". History does not record any definition of an American Tea. The Church Annual Report dated 31 December 1931 reads, "Considering the depression and the unfavourable season, the Flower Show was as usual very successful". The following motion was also passed: "On the motion of Dr Langmore a vote of thanks be passed to the Ladies' Guild for their service and work in connection with the recent Flower Show which contributed to its success".

During World War Two the Flower Show continued to be held. The proceeds varied between £63.6s.4d in 1939 and £92.8s.5d in 1943. Since Berwick's share of the vicar's stipend was £15.16s.8d a month, or £190 a year, it seems that the profit from the Flower Show helped considerably in keeping the parish solvent. It is also obvious that the vicar's wife, Mrs Panelli, was very active in supporting the Flower Show during this period, as there are several motions like the following:

## Photographs taken at the Hundredth Flower Show



Bishop John Wilson opens the Hundredth Flower Show, while Lilian Dyson waits to cut the ribbon watched by her daughter, granddaughter and great grandson.



Part of the historical display exhibited by the Berwick Garden Club.

## Photographs taken at the Hundredth Flower Show



One of the competitive displays.



Another of the competitive displays.

"That the thanks of the vestry be conveyed to Mrs Panelli and helpers for their valuable work." The Fortieth Annual Flower Show was held in 1944, when Mrs Esther Johnston was an active member of the congregation. That year her daughter Margaret won the first prize in the Under Twelve Handwriting Competition.

The somewhat scandalous story told to me by Bill Hudson probably belongs here. Apparently one year during the 1950s there was an ex-soldiers' smoke night held in the Soldiers' Hall, at which there was much drinking and smoking. The next morning when helpers arrived to prepare the hall for the afternoon, there was a lot of clearing up to do, and the atmosphere was very smoky. Then when one of the ladies tried to play the national anthem, she found the piano unplayable as a glass of beer had been spilt over the keys. Colonel Williams was the RSL president at the time of this incident, and he resigned because of this 'disgraceful behaviour'.

The Reverend Stephen Cherry was the vicar between 1967 and 1977. He confirms that for most of this period the Flower Show was held in what is now called the Masonic Hall, and that the trestles, which had to be carted down from Church Street by helpers, probably including the vicar, were very heavy. He also confirms that the Flower Show was still an important occasion and always opened by some dignitary. In 1966 this dignitary was Mrs Helen Hudson, whose husband was later mayor.

Mr Cherry also kept the only detailed records of the Flower Show I have so far discovered, including cuttings from the Pakenham Gazette. On 17 October 1969 the following was printed: "The Annual Flower Show arranged by the Ladies'

Guild of Christ Church Berwick is one of the longest standing functions in the Berwick area. This year's show is the sixty-fifth, and efforts have been made to provide classes of exhibits to cater for the changing tastes in flowers. Several classes of entry have been introduced for the first time, and the sections for young people have been completely recast". In the Gazette of 22 October 1971, just a week before the show, the following appears: "The Annual Flower Show . . . has been reviving strongly over the last few years. The number of entries last year, 1970, was about twice that in 1968". The following week a headline reads, "Berwick Flower Show a Triumph". A list of the prize winners, which was also printed, is a list of well-known Berwick identities.

His records for 1970, which give the admission fee as twenty cents, include the following confession, "No block advertisements were placed in the Gazette for this Flower Show because the vicar forgot them". He did not forget them the next year!

At the Annual General Meeting of the church held on 19 February 1974 Miss Winifred Elvin moved that the "Vicar and Guild be asked to invite parishioners to form a committee to assist the Guild with flower show arrangements". Saturday was also voted as the most suitable day because Thursday was "traditional but not popular".

In 1974 Frank and Rita Jacobson came to live in Berwick after Frank's retirement. In the same year he and Ron Bell started the Garden Club. For at least fifteen years after this, the Garden Club assisted in a major way. I think that the members did a large proportion of the secretarial work, and also provided much of the equipment, including their trestles,



which replaced the cumbersome and heavy ones which had been used for 70 years.

The first Flower Show to be held in the parish hall in Church Street was the seventy-first, held in 1975. Again from the Gazette, we learn that it was "one of the best". Even so, the profit was only \$21.03. Perhaps one should allow for a certain amount of journalistic exuberance here. More to the point was that the newly-formed Garden Club had held a successful Autumn Flower Show in the church hall earlier in the year, and this encouraged the organisers to use this hall in future, a venue for which they did not have to pay rent.

During the 1980s the Flower Show continued to be held in what is now the old hall in Church Street. It was still a competitive affair, as is evidenced by a note in the Ladies' Guild minutes of 10 September 1986, which reads, "Flower schedules and cards are being printed". Entries had to be lodged in advance, causing considerable secretarial work. In 1985 the official opening was at 2.30pm. There are frequent references in the Ladies' Guild minutes to the work done by the Garden Club. One in 1985 reads, "The Flower Show was successful with the help of the Garden Club, to whose members we are most grateful". A later minute of a meeting held on 14 October 1987 tells us "The Flower Show to be held on the 14<sup>th</sup> November was discussed". Miss Dorothy Jukes, who was then president of the Guild, was to hold a meeting on 16 October with members of the Garden Club and stewards. We are also told that the mayor was to be asked to assist in the presentation of trophies.

But times were changing. Berwick was no longer a small country town, and suburbia was creeping ever closer. There

was a much greater variety of entertainment offering, and flower shows were declining in popularity. There were at least 70 sections for entries, and quite a number received only one or perhaps two entries. In 1989 the future of the Flower Show was discussed again by the Guild, and the suggestion was made that it should no longer be a competitive event, but a festival of flowers. The minutes of the Guild meeting held on 14 February 1990 read, "The Flower Show was discussed, and all felt that [the] Show should go on, but that it should be non-competitive". A letter on the matter was written to the vestry, and a reply received. The relevant vestry minutes do not record what was in it, but there must have been some agreement. The Guild also decided that it should be a two-day affair, Saturday and Sunday, and that the church should be decorated, and some music provided.

Berwick continued to grow, and the little church on the hill was no longer big enough for the increased congregation. With the encouragement of Bishop John Wilson, a great leap of faith was taken, and the decision made to build a new church further down the hill. The new church was dedicated on 30 July 1995, and it was decided to hold the Ninety-first Flower Show in the new church. This in itself was an act of faith, as new carpet had been laid in most areas; but we survived, and so did the carpet, and the Hundredth Flower Show was held in the recently-extended new church. It was still non-competitive, but there were a variety of children's competitions, and three categories for adults. All were for floral arrangements. Those attending were given voting slips and invited to cast their votes.

Recent flower shows have been happy occasions. It is again a one-day event, and the opening time has moved back to 10.30am. This has been very successful, as people come and

Photographs taken at the Hundredth Flower Show



Children's activities.



Further attractions of the Flower Show.

# 80TH (CENTENARY) ANNUAL FLOWER SHOW

IN CONNECTION WITH  
**CHRIST CHURCH, BIRWICK**  
To be held in the **SOLDIERS' MEMORIAL HALL**

On **THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 1st, 1934.**

Open from 2 p.m. to 10.30 p.m. Evening Programmes arranged by Mrs. Thompson and Miss Kay.

Table of Headwork and also Table of Christmas Presents.

Admission—One Shilling. Children (under 12) Sixpence

Stewards: Rev. R. J. Rowan, Rev. A. J. Cole, Messrs. W. G. A'ROBERT, H. F. DAVE,  
J. F. PATRICK AND J. E. MYRICK.

Joint Hon. Secs. MRS. COLE and MISS BARKER.

## SCHEDULE OF PRIZES.

Sec.	Exhibit	Prize		Granted by
<b>Section A—Cut Flowers</b>				
1	12 Varieties	1	0	Mrs. G. L. Wilson
2	6 Varieties	5	0	Mrs. Armytage and Miss Mearns
3	Collection of Flowering Shrubs	5	0	Mrs. Nicholson
4	" " " " " "	3	0	Mr. R. R. Lake
5	" " " " " "	1	0	Mr. Fleck
6	" " " " " "	1	0	Miss Kigg
7	" " " " " "	1	0	Mrs. S. Lacey
8	" " " " " "	1	0	Mrs. Pennefather
9	" " " " " "	1	0	Miss M. Corder
10	" " " " " "	1	0	Miss J. Coates
11	" " " " " "	1	0	Mrs. Griffith
12	" " " " " "	1	0	Mr. E. Kent
13	" " " " " "	1	0	Mrs. King
14	" " " " " "	1	0	Mrs. Daint
15	" " " " " "	1	0	Miss Brooks
16	" " " " " "	1	0	Mrs. Griffith
17	" " " " " "	1	0	Miss Brooks
18	" " " " " "	1	0	Mrs. Francis
19	" " " " " "	1	0	Mrs. King
20	" " " " " "	1	0	Mrs. Stevens
21	" " " " " "	1	0	Mrs. Francis
22	" " " " " "	1	0	Mrs. Gamble
23	" " " " " "	1	0	Mrs. J. B. Hutchinson
<b>Section B—Roses</b>				
23-15	Varieties	7	6	(1) Mrs. Sewell; (2) Miss Bates
24	12	7	0	Mrs. G. L. Wilson
25	9	3	0	Mrs. Adams
26	6	1	0	Mrs. Lane and Mrs. Lovelidge
27	3	1	0	Miss Brooks
28	3 Blooms of One Variety	1	0	Mrs. Pennefather
29	3 Single Flowered (Standard)	1	0	Mrs. S. Casey
30	1 Bloom (Dark)	1	0	Mrs. Kent
31	1 Bloom (Light)	1	0	Mrs. Ware
32	Bowl of Roses	1	0	Mrs. R. M. Brown
33a	Polyantha Roses (not less than 3 var.)	1	0	Mr. Dunsford
	Champion Rose	1	0	Mrs. Nicholson
<b>Section C—Sweet Peas</b>				
34	6 Varieties	1	0	Miss Elythe and Mr. Lake
35	3	1	0	Miss J. Wade
36	Year of Mixed Varieties	1	0	Mrs. G. L. Wilson
		1	0	Mrs. Pennefather
<b>Section D—Carnations</b>				
37	12 Varieties	1	0	Mr. Drake
38	6	1	0	Mr. Fleck
39	3	1	0	Mrs. Lovelidge
	Champion Bloom	1	0	Mrs. Boyd
<b>Section E.</b>				

Part of the schedule of prizes of an earlier Flower Show, the thirtieth. The word "centenary" probably refers to the fact that the first white settlement in Victoria was at Portland Bay by Edward Henty in 1834.

go, enjoy the refreshments, meet their friends, and admire the floral displays. This year there is the second Creative Art Challenge. Local artists have been invited to paint a picture of the church or any part of its surroundings, begun and finished on the day. Sponsors have been sought, and awards will be made after the pictures have been judged.

The Hundredth Flower Show was held on Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2004, and was judged to be a great success. Approximately 400 people attended during the day, and a considerable profit was made, although this was not our primary aim. We were just hoping not to make a loss. The Show was officially opened by Bishop John Wilson, Anglican Bishop of the Southern Region of the Diocese of Melbourne. He was assisted by Mrs Lilian Dyson, the oldest member of the congregation, who cut the ceremonial ribbon.

Our success was only made possible because of the many hours of hard work by all members of the organising committee, and many others, in particular members of the Garden Club, whose historical display was a real high point. Thank you also to those people who lent so many photographs, making possible a continuous slide display. Two hundred copies of the first edition of this history were available for distribution among those attending.

Following this successful day the Flower Show was entered for the Casey Community Event of the Year Award. We were fortunate enough to be declared the winner, due in no small part to the excellence of the entry prepared by Iain Taylor.

Over the past hundred years, many aspects of the Flower Show have changed, but it has continued as part of the community life of Berwick and the church. In the same way Berwick Anglican Church hopes that it can continue to play its part in the community life of Berwick, as it has done for the past one hundred and thirty years.

Brenda Miller

Revised edition, September 2005

Brenda would like to thank all those people who have assisted, either with their reminiscences or photographs.



Members of the Ladies' Guild of Christ Church Berwick take a well-earned break after organising the Flower Show.

[Photo from *The Gazette*, Wednesday 15th November 1989.]



Lilian Dyson cuts the ribbon to open the Hundredth Flower Show, watched by Bishop John Wilson and others.