



The Frances Binnie Pavilion has housed the Arts & Crafts section since the Show relocated to Sydney Olympic Park. With the section off to new digs next year, it's fitting to remember the woman behind the name. For over thirty years she was...

Patron of the patient arts

WORDS: VICKI HASTRICH

She was calm in a crisis. She was exacting, passionate and generous to a fault. She was Mrs Frances de Vernet Angus Binnie and the gene for organisation was in her blood. Born in 1913 into the Angus clan, Frances grew up on the family dairy farm at Rooty Hill. She was big sister by a year to her much loved brother, Jim Angus, who was to follow in his father and grandfather's footsteps to become a Councillor and Vice-President of the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW (RAS). Co-opted by Jim to steward in the Arts & Crafts section in 1952, Frances became a member and long-standing chair of the Ladies Auxiliary until her retirement in 1984. The Auxiliary's primary task was to coordinate the complex documentation and display aspects of competition.

Frances presided over a period of change which saw the section broaden to represent wider interests and be more inclusive. The

gender barrier was broken after the war when returned servicemen were encouraged to exhibit crafts they had learnt as therapy during convalescence. As a result, men were increasingly welcomed as competitors. Classes for children were also introduced.

Transparency and consistency in judging improved. Veteran cooking judge Norma Allen remembers securing an invitation to judge in Sydney after an encounter with Frances Binnie at the Singleton Show. (Binnie lived in the area on the property 'Merrilong' with her husband Alec.) Frances had observed Norma disqualifying a damper. "Mrs Allen, congratulations," she said. "I have been wanting that to happen for a long time." The damper had been cooked – against the rules – in a tin.

Being an excellent cook herself, and a great knitter, stood Frances in good stead. If a judge failed to turn up she could step in at a moment's

notice, bringing true knowledge and experience to the role. She had a personal preference for anything antique or delicate but loved all work expertly done and it was her idea to gather the best of the best together for display in a Standard of Excellence case. Not long after her death in 1991, the Frances Binnie Memorial Perpetual Trophy was instituted to honour the most meritorious craft exhibit in the case. Daughter, Ann Irwin, who donated and first presented the award in 1993, says her mother was devoted to the RAS.

In a more homely way, Frances is remembered today by all who cook her sultana cake recipe, which has been included in the RAS cookbook published last year, *Blue Ribbon Recipes: Prize Winning Recipes from the Sydney Royal Easter Show*.

Frances Binnie, respected and admired – a name forever linked to arts and crafts. ■

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Left: Jim Angus and Frances Binnie at the Sydney Royal Easter Show in 1973