



Kewpie and more

The new Heritage Pavilion showcasing the history of the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW (RAS) was the surprise hit of this year's Show. As crowds surged in and out, conversations burred. This was the happy sound of families exchanging memories.

When the lights were switched on at a media preview of the new Heritage Pavilion a wall-length display of showbags was revealed. And a funny thing happened. As if drawn by magnets, the audience lined up in front of the display cases by age, captivated by a showbag from their own childhood. Proof that when it's personal, history's pull is powerful.

For Karen Finch, the manager of the RAS Heritage Centre, it was an exciting moment. The first hint that she and her staff might achieve their goal, sharing the RAS's diverse collection in a way that would engage people of all ages and levels of interest.

"It was time for Heritage to have a special place in the Showground, especially with the RAS bicentenary coming up in 2022," says Karen. "But entrusted with a whole pavilion? That

was a ridiculously large challenge. But who could refuse?"

The glittering perpetual trophy display has long been an eye-catcher at the Show and the extra space afforded by the Wynne Pavilion (previously home to the Cat competition) meant many more treasures could be shown. Including the caleche. Displayed in public for the first time since the move from Moore Park, this nineteenth century horse-drawn carriage (pronounced cal-aysh) is used on official

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OPPOSITE: THE CALECHE TAKES ITS PLACE AMONGST THE MEMORIES
TOP LEFT: SHOWBAGS DISPLAYED IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER.
BOTTOM LEFT: 1961 DODGEM CAR COURTESY OF DARREN AND KATHLEEN MILLER.
PERPETUAL TROPHIES ON DISPLAY

occasions. It's most famous passengers have been Royals, making it a popular backdrop for photo-snapping Showgoers.

At the other extreme, and attracting just as much interest, was a 1961 Dodgem car. Bumper kicking was not allowed, but many an admiring bloke leant in for a closer look at the manufacturer's plate and the quality of the refurb.

Activities aimed at children turned out to be popular with all generations. Women friends argued good-naturedly over fashions in a photo-matching game. Parents and grandparents joined children to design showbags on chalkboards. The 'Make your own Heritage Kewpie Doll' activity was so popular the first batch of stock ran out in three days. The RAS Heritage Centre worked with a commercial exhibitor on the concept, which is set to travel to other Royal Shows. In this new DIY form, the old Show icon has found fresh relevance. Kewpie's future is assured.

But it wasn't all for the kids. Steam engines, vintage Show posters and cabinets full of curiosities all had their gawkers.

Serious history buffs were catered for with a Reading Room corner, detailing the RAS's

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archives and research services. Heritage Centre staff were on hand to answer general questions, or note more complex inquiries for follow-up later. They listened as people recalled Show highlights with a few visitors even identifying themselves in photos on display.

Overhearing the enthusiasm with which twenty-somethings talk about showbags from their 'youth' or grandparents reminiscing about favourites was a treat for Heritage staff. Who knew the Polly Waffle was still so sadly missed...

"The emotion that people attach to certain parts of the Show is constantly fascinating," says Karen Finch. "And seeing the busyness, the hubbub throughout the Pavilion, well, it's history at its most social."

While the public space was lively, there was plenty going on out the back too. Not only does the Heritage Centre

deliver the perpetual trophies for presentation, they coordinate and deliver all other prizes too. Getting the right items to the right place at the right time takes meticulous planning and strong legs. Staff put in many miles pushing their trolley-loads of prizes to every corner of the ground. On return journeys the perpetual trophies come back. Winners only hold their trophy for a few minutes of triumph and photo opportunities. But once back on display they can access the full story behind the trophy, and the name of every previous winner. To that list, their own name will be duly added.

Whether it's cups of silver and gold, or sentimental trinkets, the history of agricultural competition lives on. Not only does the Heritage Centre safeguard it, but we all play a part with the memories we pass down. In the Heritage Pavilion we finally have a place to tell those stories. ■