

All about Balingup

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2021 the population of Balingup was just 565 and yet we are often asked how we maintain the vibrancy of our small town – the stories below may offer some insight.

In the 1980's people were moving to live on small blocks in the country and needed information about how to make a living while caring for their land, what animals they could have and what their obligations were to their neighbours.

A Future Search/ Small Town Self Help program was held in July 1989, attended by more than 75% of the Balingup population and run by South West Development Commission. One of the topics raised was 'education on farming responsibilities and techniques' and that led to.....

Balingup Small Farm Field Day

In 1991 a dynamic group comprising Diny Monaghan (her idea), Roz Benson, Helen Christensen, Patsie Gubler, Wendy Wilkins, Wendy Ayers, Tina Hawter, Pam & Bill Milby and Luis Rownenhurst organised the first Small Farm Field Day.....the first event was attended by 5000 people and it continued to grow from there!



Profits from the SFFD are returned to the community via a Trust Fund - with nearly \$500,000 being distributed in the last 20 years. This money pays for community building maintenance and all community insurance costs. It has also been used to:

- seed fund other smaller events such as Telling Tales and Art & Craft,
- support community groups such as Balingup Museum and Avenue of Honour.

The Small Farm Field Day is held in April each year.

See www.balingupsmallfarmfieldday.com.au for details.

Balingup Medieval Carnivale



In the mid 1990's, local farmers Bev & Nigel Dixon donated hundreds of tulip bulbs to plant in the town in August each year. Then one day, local artist Roz Benson declared "Hear Ye! Hear Ye! I want to create an amazing free Carnivale to celebrate the creativity of the community" and set about enrolling a team of enthusiastic supporters (in the beginning this was Sean & Sandy Mitchell, Don Wilson, Bob Bracey, Elaine Edwards and Mary Robinson but many others have helped along the way).

The first ten years were funded entirely by Roz - using her own money to create a range of stunning costumes and outlandish props. Roz wanted the event to grow and survive so an entry fee was charged, allowing the Carnivale to grow into a huge two day extravaganza attracting Medieval fighting groups and artists from all over WA.....and around 8,000 people who just like to dress up and watch the performances.

Profits from the Carnivale have supported art and education programs at Balingup Primary School, and skills development and arts workshops, in Balingup.

Carnivale volunteers work all year round, meeting most Sunday afternoons at the Workspace. These volunteers make, store and maintain props for other community groups such as Telling Tales. All welcome!



Always held on the 4th weekend in August.

See www.balingupmedievalcarnivale.com.au for details.

It's all about giving.....



Balingup events are entirely self funded and rarely ask for grants from the government. Both the Small Farm Field Day and Medieval Carnivale are not only self sufficient, but generate profits that are returned to the community. This can only be achieved because of the huge contribution of labour and equipment by volunteers.

Here are some words from one of the town's many 'givers', Roz Benson:

"Balingup is on an ancient song line of power. It draws to itself, people of diverse and outstanding talent and then demands that they fully extend themselves.

Balingup is a traditional Aboriginal birthing place – a place of exciting possibility, where each one of us is offered the stimulating challenge and opportunity to play midwife in the birth and development of community by visioning and working together. Like the acorn, Balingup is small but GIANT OAKS FROM TINY ACORNS GROW!

My dream is of Balingup as a university town of Medieval Artisanry. Even Oxford had to start somewhere! I see not a traditional university but one where different courses are presented for whatever length of time is needed to complete a stage of mastery in subjects like metal work, woodwork, cob and straw bale building, lace making etc - using traditional tools to give independence from electricity.

Balingup offers each of us an opportunity to shape and participate in the creation of a vibrant future and to leave behind us an inspiring legacy.

I have never tried a magic mushroom. Who needs to? Balingup itself is magic". Roz

Roz has played a major part in the designing the unique and quirky artwork for the town – including the SFFD scarecrow and Carnivale jester head.

The art work for so many unique Balingup icons (scarecrows, banners and even Father Christmases!) were all donated with love by Roz to the community.



Telling Tales

In 2010 seed funding from the Small Farm Field Day allowed Helen Christensen, Alison McMullen and Deb Vanallen to create a new event designed specifically for children - Telling Tales in Balingup. Telling Tales is a two day weekend story telling/children's literacy event designed for children and young people aged 4 – 13 years.

Children's authors, illustrators and arts/crafts people facilitate small workshop sessions including book binding, story telling, reading and film making. The event also includes a lunchtime street parade of 'children's book characters', local musical entertainment/busker style



Telling Tales is driven by a committee of volunteers (approximately 6 people) and assisted over the weekend by an additional 50 volunteers.

Art Happens/Art & Craft Affair



Art Happens started as an art exhibition in 2004, organized by Nuala Scott and Helen Christensen. It was held in the Town Hall using SFFD seed funding.

Under the guidance of Peta Knapton, and more recently Bhavni Hindocha, the event has morphed into Balingup Art and Craft Affair - a two-day weekend event with a recycled/ upcycled art fashion parade at the Town Hall, performances by local musicians, market stalls and children's activities.

Australia Day Breakfast



Back in 1994, Bridgetown became the first community to hold an Australia Day breakfast in the South West. Helen Christensen, Bob Bracey, Stuart Clark and Don Atkinson decided it was a great idea and, in 1995 called for friends and family to come together for a BBQ at the Village Green. It's been held every year since.

The event started with funds from the Small Farm Field Day Trust but in recent years has been funded by Balingup Progress Association and the Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup.



Balingup Peace Pergola

The Peace Pergola was constructed in the year of Centenary of Federation (July 2001) by Bob Bracey and a team of volunteers. It was built as a monument to reflect on the many who lost their lives in war.

This project was funded by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Whittakers and local donations.

Balingup Recreation Centre



Balingup & District Sports Association was formed in 1986 when indoor cricket was all the rage. The tennis and bowling clubs gave their private lease to the Shire so a community sporting complex could be built. A committee was formed and a tremendous amount of community effort was put into obtaining grants and fundraising.

Most of the money came from wood raffles and locals say they remember a huge pile of wood near the War Memorial. Community 'chopping sessions' were led by Geoff McMullen, Edgar Hawter, Vicky & Jim Henderson, Irene and Greg Mader. It is also often said that 'people got sick of sausage sizzles and raffles!'

BADSA is an incorporated body that runs the facility as a not-for-profit venture. The Shire owns the building and does major maintenance; BADSA pays an annual rent to the Shire and manages the facility.

Information and Bus Shelter

The information and bus shelter was a joint Shire and Tourism Committee project. Constructed in 2001 with Shire funds, it was opened by Evelyn & George Graham.

The shelter is much appreciated by passengers and schools students heading to Bunbury, Manjimup and beyond.



Village Green Toilets

The Village Green toilet block was designed by local resident John Bailey in response to a comment made by an old lady who was passing through town. The old lady, who looked deeply into his eyes, said “look at me young man, we are animals we must empty the system and then we must fill the system”. Without breaking eye contact she asked “do you understand?”.

John understood! He wanted the toilets to be an interesting feature of the Village Green and this unique design is the result.



Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup provided money for materials but all the work was done by local volunteers. Mushroom Cafe (Dawn Bailey) supplied free meals over the five week build period.

Community Centre Toilets

In 2021, the toilets servicing the Community Centre were on their last legs so the Townscape committee asked the Shire to replace them. The Shire provided \$25,000 for materials. Townscape committee provided the labour and equipment to:

- demolish the old building,
- install new leach drains and
- add a gable roof to make it attractive.



Before



After

Community Centre & Workspace



In 1989 Helen Christensen, Roz Benson, Chris Reynolds and Roger Coulson decided the town needed a place for community groups to meet for free.

Photo left: The volunteers who made it happen in 1989 - Roz Benson, Helen Christensen, Chris Reynolds & Roger Coulson (Jane Manning standing rear)

Working with a grant provided by Department of Employment & Training, this group:

- Organised relocation of the Forestry Department railway station and two other buildings from Grimwade Settlement.
- Supervised construction by builders.
- Refurbished buildings for use as a community centre, workspace and fire shed (using buildings donated by CALM).

Note The fire shed was later demolished and replaced by a brand new building – funded by FESA (DFES).



The workshop was a huge undertaking because it had to be completely dismantled and rebuilt - numbering each of the wooden boards to make sure it would all fit back together again. The workshop is now the Carnivale workspace – where dragons and dreams are manifested!

The community centre is the hub of the town and community groups can use it for free. All insurance, operating costs and repairs are paid for by the Balingup Progress Association (using profits derived from local events).

Village Pedlars & BalingUpcycle



In 1991, Balingup Main Street featured several empty shops. Local resident Margaret Morgan was dismayed and went to the craft group where she said “let’s open a shop to sell our craft and produce”.

16 women agreed, put in \$80 each and Village Pedlars was borne. It is still run entirely on volunteer labour, selling locally made products, and has generated thousands of dollars for people who live in the town and surrounding area.



Fast forward to 2021, Covid pandemic and the empty shops had returned.

Another local, Jackie Massey said “let’s open our own upmarket recycling shop” and yet another group of volunteers stepped up to support her.

Upcycle operates under the umbrella of Progress Association and in its first six months of operation, Upcycle returned \$10,000 profits to the community

Note: This isn't Balingup's first recycling project!. Community volunteers began a recycling depot in 1989 in a small second hand shed. Glass and plastic were put into old donated apple bins and cardboard/ newspapers were put in the shed. This system was in use until the Shire set up a formal recycling system at the Waste Transfer station.....the world finally caught up

Balingup Heritage Museum



Opened in 2012, the Heritage Exhibition tells the story of Balingup between 1855 and 1955. Displays include the history of four significant homesteads, a war exhibition (including a World War 1 uniforms) and individual photographs and stories of the people who made Balingup into the great community it is today.

The Exhibition is located in the Packing Shed in the centre of town and was established by Helen Christensen, Noelene King and Carol Bullard.. Open every day from 8.30am to 4pm .

Aboriginal Heritage Exhibition

Opened in 2022, this Exhibition is a Historical Cultural timeline that includes documentation and information of the ongoing presence of the Bibbulmun (Noongar) people of the South West of Western Australia during the pre-colonial and post-colonial periods.

The presentation comprises written essays, historical photographs, art and traditional artifacts; this includes written and visual information about tool making, fishing, hunting, clothing and

This Exhibition was curated by Sandra Hill, local Wadandi / Pibulmun Elder, Custodian and Artist to be shared with all members of the local and wider communities.



ceremonial practices. It also features an overview of the Aboriginal servicemen and women who fought for our country, the 1905 Aborigines Act and the historic 1969 Referendum that finally gave Aboriginal people across the nation, Australian citizenship.

The exhibit also shows contemporary photographs that celebrate the current Cultural & Traditional activities that are still being carried out by the Wadandi / Pibulmun Elders and Custodians such as caring for Country, Cultural fire practices and observing the Six Noongar Season protocols.

The exhibition is located in the Packing Shed in the centre of town and is open every day from 8.30am to 4pm.

Balingup Townscape Projects

Balingup Townscape Committee has been operating for over 30 years – sometimes as a sub-committee of Progress Association, other times under the auspice of the Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup. Currently they operate under the umbrella of BPA but receive small grant of between \$5,000 and \$15,000 a year from the Shire. Below are just a few of the projects they have been involved in (we'd need a lot more space to show them all!).

Townscape decided to plant deciduous trees to provide a glorious Autumn display of colour. They have planted over 100 trees so far - and the plantings have only survived because one Townscape volunteer (Geoff McMullen) waters them for the first four years - a huge job in itself.

One of their favourites is the crepe myrtle in the main street, chosen because at that time there were power lines in town and we needed something small. It has beautiful flowers and stunning bark.



People often ask why we don't plant natives in the town. This certainly isn't because we don't love natives – it's because deciduous trees are more fire resistant....and have the added benefit of providing stunning Autumn displays.

More Townscape Projects

Alan Rothery Walk. Located near the Balingup Brook, this walk was developed in 1995 by Townscape volunteer Bob Bracey. Bob cleared the route by hand and established an earth path. The bridge was created using two donated flatbed railway undercarriages!

The Shire added the concrete path and second bridge later and is now looking at a complete upgrade of this popular walk. The walk was named after a long serving member of the Balingup Shire Works & Services team.



Balingup Weir & Picnic Table.

Funded by the Shire but constructed by volunteers in 2021, the weir was built to hold more water in Balingup Pool and beautify the area. The picnic table was installed so people could sit and enjoy the view!

Townscape bought four concrete benches out of their Shire grant and local artists, led by Jan Helsham designed and added the mosaics. Jan and the mosaic group also created two stunning mosaics in the Town Hall.....and one in the Anglican Church.



More Townscape Projects



Townscape created three scarecrows (one at each entry to town):

- The scarecrow at the northern end of town was the joint effort of Paul Rowe, Tom Benson and Sean Mitchell.
- Bob Bracey built the one on the Nannup Rd, and
- Wendy Gillham & Jan Rowe created the one at the southern entry.

At some point they were painted (without approval) but plans are in place to return them to their original “rust” colour in 2023.

The scarecrow at the southern end of town will also have limestone blocks installed to improve visibility.



Just one of the many quirky signs designed for the town by Roz Benson. Geese really do cross the highway here, so take care!

Vintage Home Town for Life.

Members of the community were concerned that there were no suitable housing and care options for local seniors and people with disabilities so Balingup CWA organized a meeting to discuss local options.

Balingup Vintage Group (Visionary Integrated Aged Care) was established in November 2001 with the stated Mission *“To provide a ‘home town for life’ through the provision of integrated community based support and services, with an emphasis on needs related to age and disability”*.

There have been many committee members over the years, but the following volunteers played a critical role in getting the project off the ground: Jan Helsham, Kethrine Spence, Edgar Hawter, Trevor Payne & Wendy Ayers. All were instrumental in securing land and funding to drive the project forward.

The first three cottages were built on crown land vested in CWA and donated to the project.

The second group of four cottages were built in 2022/23 on land purchased from the Shire.

This has been a mammoth undertaking as Vintage must also comply with rigorous government legislation.....a big ask for a small, not-for-profit incorporated body.



And let's not forget those beautiful gardens – designed and established by Helen & Sheena Christensen. Even today they are maintained by volunteers.

Golden Valley Tree Park

In 1977, the government stated their intention to establish a pine plantation on farms previously run by the Cleveland and Ayers families. This brought together a diverse group of locals to successfully save the old trees and create a 60 hectare tree park.

The first plantings took place on 5th July 1981 by a group of around 50 locals.



Since then, thousands of trees have been planted in both the Australian and World collections. The Park is jointly managed by DPAW and the community. All plantings and much of the maintenance is carried out by the Tree Park committee and community volunteers.

Some committee members, notably Dr Chrissy Sharp, Andrew Thamo, Wendy Ayers and Peter Hicks were on the original committee and served for over 30 years!

The Park is now the largest arboretum in WA and considered to be Balingup's jewel in the crown.

Free entry - don't miss the chance to visit - especially in Autumn. A small donation to help with upkeep is appreciated. Details are on the Park information boards.

For details see www.goldenvalleytreepark.org.au

Balingup Progress Association

Balingup Progress Association was first formed in 1906 but went into recess for many years. It was resurrected in 1982 when the community needed a voice to oppose planting of pine plantations at Golden Valley. BPA is an incorporated body that administers community related business and ensures insurance is provided for the 19 sub committees that operate under its umbrella.

BPA also oversees maintenance of the community centre and applies for grants on behalf of the community.

Did you know that, in 2003, BPA won \$10,000 as the Western Australian State Winner of the “Can Do Community” awards?

But in all honesty, the answer to the question of why Balingup is such a vibrant community (see page 1) is simple..... we roll up our sleeves and do it ourselves.

Wendy Trow

President Balingup Progress Association

www.balingup.asn.au



Not included in this document? Wendy has captured as much as she can but if you think a story is missing, feel free to write it up and send it (with photo if you have one) to balinguppa@outlook.com.

Origins Centre



Mindfulness means respect, calm, thoughtfulness and action: something we all aspire to encourage. This is the foundation upon which the Origins Centre was established in Balingup in 1983 after the donation of the 10 acres of land from the Lister family. This block was chosen because of the beautiful 500 year old blackbutt tree - a refuge tree.

The Centre aims to offer respite and teaching in a universal and inclusive fashion with principles from historic Buddhist traditions from Myanmar and Tibetan cultures. These ties are still maintained and Origins support a nunnery in Rumtek in Sikkim, India.

In 2001 a monument from Myanmar dating back to the time of Buddha and a World Peace Pagoda were built and are celebrated each year around the December 2nd anniversary.

The Centre is fortunate to have **Lama Karma Chimé Shore** as a teacher. He has studied and taught for over 50 years and received ordination in the Theravada and Vajrayana traditions of Buddhism. Chimé travelled to WA in 1977 with 40 students after establishing the Wangapeka Study and Retreat centre in New Zealand in the early 1970's. His plan was to do a desert retreat but decided to stay in WA. Both centres continue to flourish and many students globally continue to share these teachings.

The Origins Centre has a great sense of history - the amenities and kitchen building uses timber rescued from the Bunbury wharf. The teaching hall was once the old music bandstand from Greylands Hospital (rebuilt using fallen jarrah milled on our block). Burmese teak, donated by the Burmese community in WA, was used to line the ceiling. Windows were commissioned from local glass artist Mathew Goodlet and the dry stone wall was built from Donnybrook stone and built by Charley Bennett.

Origins Centre was established on 1st January 1979 and traditional Mindfulness is the main vehicle of teaching used. The Centre welcomes people for respite, retreat, activities, courses and events. There are private and shared rooms as well as a communal kitchen and living space.

For information, see www.originscentre.org

