

# Trust overcomes apathy to lift tourism

In common with most areas when first venturing into the fascinating field of tourism, doubt, indecision, inadequate finance, frustration and general apathy loomed as stumbling blocks to developing the necessary support to get the Bendigo Trust off the ground.

But the perseverance and dedication that deserved success won through, and today Bendigo has become a nationally-known name in Australian tourism.

In less than four years the Bendigo Trust has bought, part-restored and opened to visitors the old Central Deborah Gold Mine, retained and developed into an imaginative attraction representative of Bendigo's most unique tramway system, restored the North Bendigo Chinese Joss House and set the scene for greater community interest and participa-

tion in future tourist projects in the region.

From its humble and tentative start from a loaned office in an old bank the trust came of age with the announcement of a stunning tourist village and complex to portray vividly one of the more colorful colonial happenings, the Chinese influence on Victorian goldfields.

The \$500,000 project, which will be a living complex where Chinese goods, handicrafts and foods will be available, will be called "Dal Gum San," Chinese for "Big

Gold Mountain" and their name for the Bendigo goldfields.

Work on the project will start later this year.

The Bendigo Trust grew to its present stature from a Bendigo City Council action when, in December 1970, they bought the Central Deborah Gold Mine. The mine and its equipment, the last to work the Bendigo field, had lain derelict since 1954 and was in danger of being demolished.

Under Mayoral instigation, a committee to restore the Central Deborah was established. But one of their first duties was to establish themselves.

From the first few meetings, committee members were convinced that greater stability and success could be achieved if the trust divorced itself from the council and was properly constituted as a company limited by guarantee.

Before their constitution was drawn up and presented, the trust was given its first challenge — retention of portion of Bendigo's unique tramway system, then threatened with abandonment and disposal.

The City Council supported the trust members' proposal and the then Minister for Tourism, Mr. Vance Dickie, after receiving the detailed proposal, came to Bendigo to see at first hand what was involved.

"Loud in his praise" was the verdict.

Three months later, Mr. Dickie convened a meeting of local members of Parliament with the government ministers controlling the SEC, CRB and tourism — the three areas the project covered.

On April 16, 1972, Bendigo trams passed into limbo, while their fate — and much of the future of the Bendigo Trust — was considered by the government.

As the tramway closure deadline approached, the trust tested public support for their efforts.

Radio, television and Press appeals obtained 5000 signatures in support of the trust's proposals. This support was made known to the Parliament.

The long-awaited breakthrough came on September 12 when news was received that the government had approved the tourist tram route from the Central Deborah mine at Golden Square to the Chinese Joss House at North Bendigo for a trial period of two years.

With renewed dedication, the tram committee worked nights, days and weekends to get four trams restored and repainted in vintage color schemes for the opening.

And it was a proud Bendigo that stepped out on December 9, 1972, to see the Victorian Premier, Mr. Hamer, officially open the Bendigo Vintage "Talking" Tramway System.

Near the end of their

trial period, the "talking can be — to the golden trams" have exceeded expectations in attracting and entertaining visitors, and are showing a small but welcome dividend on their operations.

If the tram committee efforts tended to overshadow other areas of development by the trust, that was unfortunate. The Bendigo Trust was progressing in many aspects behind the scenes.

During 1972, restoration of the Central Deborah Mine, continued under the enthusiastic and inspired efforts of chairman, Mr. Jack Bright.

The huge old "Thompson" compressor was bought for \$3000 and plans were immediately drawn up to restore it to working condition as well as allocating \$4500 to a special fund for that.

The poppet legs were painted for \$2000.

A special building to house the large working model of the mine, engine and crushing battery, loaned by the Kelly family of Bendigo, was erected.

Safety fences, displays and a souvenir shop sprang up on the site, and attendances rose.

Of the thousands of visitors each year, more than 90 per cent came from other than Bendigo, indicating both how Bendigo has come of age in the tourist world and how important tourists are — and

## Bendigo wins tram battle

● For nearly half a century, Bendigo's major street transport was its tramway system.

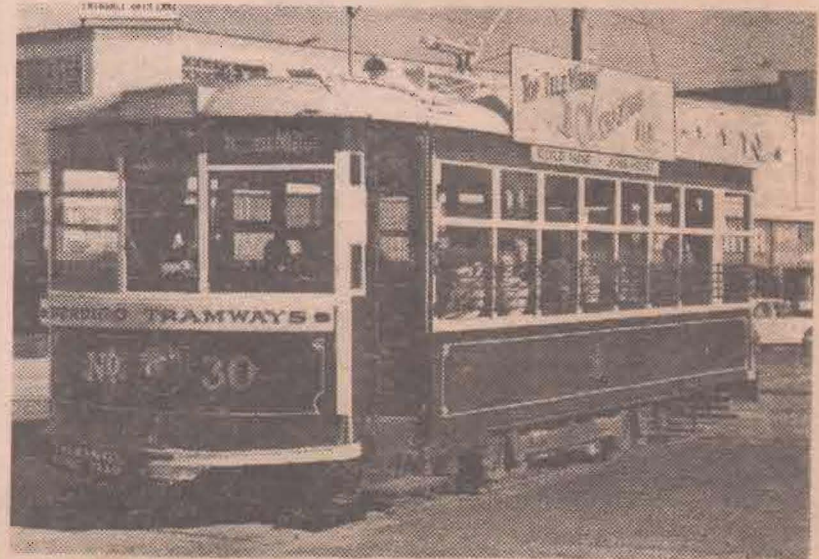
When finally replaced by modern buses in 1972, Bendigo's trams were a segment of transport history without equal in the world.

Four of its trams — the Birneys — were the last survivors of a once

extensive fleet in the world, and therefore, of great appeal to transport historians.

Today, these ancient trams still service Bendigo, carrying tourists and explaining much about Bendigo's past.

They now run every day between the Central Deborah Gold Mine, in Golden Square, to the Chinese Joss House, at North Bendigo.



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