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Our Friend, Lisa Hayden
TRIBUTES FROM THE HEART

The Flower Tram
A MODERN TAKE ON AN OLD PROJECT

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The Floral Tram

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PICTURES BY ANGELA HAYWARD.

It was the year that George VI was king, Judy Garland's "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" was playing on the wireless, Robert Menzies began his marathon stretch as prime minister, Paul Hogan and Germaine Greer were born and, in September, World War II broke out.

It was also the year that the streets of Ballarat were adorned with flowers for the Ballarat Floral Festival – which later became the forerunner to the Ballarat Begonia Festival – and in almost every way, it was a different time.

In 1939, the town had, well, "gone to town" on the effort to celebrate and decorate, with every shop and every business festooned with either real flowers or paper flowers. There were massive bouquets, hanging across the streets, and one local had made a giant windmill to sit on their verandah for the occasion.

Emerging from the Great Depression made Ballarat wanted to celebrate in a way that is very much beyond our comprehension now, but there are original photographs – black-and-white as well as some hand-coloured shots – though there is some disagreement as to what colours they were actually using as the hand-colouring might have been the imagination of the artist involved.

Along with the photos showing the resplendence of the town, there are a few minutes of footage in the National Film Archives that attest to just how big an event it was, especially for its time.

A little-known fact is that the festival was also used as part of the unemployment relief effort, with jobless men being assigned to the box factory at the Ballarat Water Commission, where they used lumber taken from the commission's plantations to make wooden flower boxes for the festival.

One of the finest features of the festival was the floral tram, which was decorated with paper flowers hand-dipped in wax.

To celebrate the 80th anniversary of the floral tram being used in the inaugural Floral Festival, it is being revived for this year's Begonia Festival.

Peter and Pamela Waugh are behind this massive, time-consuming, community-involving and rewarding project.

"The floral tram first appeared in 1938 for the centenary of Ballarat, and we do know that the wives of the tram staff decorated the tram with the paper flowers dipped in the wax. In 1939, the tram was decorated again for the festival, but this time it was by the girls from Lucas and six of them made crepe-paper dresses to match the tram. And it hasn't been done since," Peter says.

The reasons behind the tram only enjoying two decorated outings is really anybody's guess, but Peter suspects that it was probably just forgotten after the Second World War.

In bringing the floral tram back, the Waughs decided on one clear point of difference – after all, times have changed.

"The main difference this time is that we were looking at what we could make the flowers out of and we decided to use recycled plastic bottles and bags," Peter explains.

Working on virtually a zero-dollar budget, Peter and Pamela enlisted help from all corners of the community in the quest to find enough recycled plastic for the job.

"We held public flower-making workshops last year, we ran 12 public workshops with the Tramways Museum and we ran 27 other workshops for community groups – we even did one private workshop at someone's house, and everyone sat around with glasses of wine making flowers. We had flowers from the cubs, kindergartens, Link Up, Ballarat Regional Industries, the Sebastopol Mission, Ballarat North Community House, the Elizabeth Brown Day Care Centre, and the Sing Australia Choir," Peter says.





They even had VicRoads staff on the lookout for roadside bottles that could be used. Local cafés also passed on their plastics and *The Courier* helped out, too, with the collection.

"As well, I was cycling through Vic Park after playing cricket to collect bottles," Peter adds.

Eventually, enough plastics were recycled to make about 5000 flowers – Pam isn't entirely sure on the number now because she gave up counting at 4500.

The flowers have been glued to panels, with the panels then being fixed to a big ol' 1930s Melbourne tram – a process that only took a little convincing to the Tramways Museum.

"Initially, they were a bit sceptical about gluing old rubbish on their tram and now they're sitting there quite stunned at the result; however, it is to their credit that they agreed to let us do it in the first place," Peter says.

In a special twist to the story, the floral tram renewal has included the help of two women whose mothers were Lucas Girls who had made flowers for the original tram in 1939.

"We have photos of their mothers on the 1939 tram in their paper dresses.

The floral tram will no doubt be a major feature at this year's Begonia Festival.

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