

# EKKA

# HISTORY

## WHO IS BEHIND THE SHOW?

Founded in 1875, the Royal National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland (RNA) is an independent, not-for-profit member based organisation that has freehold title to the iconic Brisbane Showgrounds.

The organisation's guiding mission is to celebrate and champion the essential role agriculture plays in the everyday lives of Queenslanders.

Governed by 21 elected Councillors, the RNA showcases and rewards the very best of the best in agriculture through the Royal Queensland Show (Ekka) and Royal Queensland Awards (RQA) competitions.

Outside of Ekka, the Brisbane Showgrounds is a venue business which hosts more than 300 events each year including exhibitions, conferences, banquets and music festivals.

## HOW IT STARTED

The RNA has a rich history stemming back to 1875 when a group of colonists joined together to encourage the development of Queensland's primary industries.

Leading members of the colonial society formed the first RNA Council, under the presidency of Governor Sir William Cairns, with most of the 35 members pastoralists and merchants.

The RNA Council immediately committed themselves to organising the very first exhibition for Brisbane - from calling for tenders for the initial building to meeting with the Premier of Queensland to establish a public holiday on opening day.

The result was the Intercolonial Exhibition of 1876 - the largest event to be held in the state up to that point.

The RNA, along with the exhibition, continued to expand and grow in popularity and in 1921, the association was granted the prefix 'Royal' under warrant from His Majesty King George V. Since then, the shortened name 'Ekka' has replaced 'Exhibition' in the Queensland vernacular.

## THE EARLY SHOWS

On August 22, 1876, a crowd of more than 15,000 people made their way by horse, foot or carriage to experience the very first Ekka, at what is now known as the Brisbane Showgrounds.

Some of today's traditions stem back to this first exhibition. Competitions were a cornerstone of the Ekka right from the beginning with 1,700 entries

across 650 classes with people competing for trophies, cash prizes and medals.

Visitors were treated to more than 1,000 exhibits and charged an entry fee of a half-crown, or one shilling if they waited until after the official opening.

The first show depended heavily on the voluntary efforts of RNA Council members, judges and stewards as the RNA did not yet have its own staff, apart from employing nightwatchmen.

Celebrating the colony's achievements, the Intercolonial Exhibition of 1876 was praised as the most significant event in Queensland since its separation from New South Wales.

Since 1876 the Ekka has continued to grow in popularity and size, remaining one of the most anticipated yearly events.

It has been held annually at the Brisbane Showgrounds since its inception except for four instances - in 1919 at the height of the Spanish influenza epidemic, in 1942 during World War II when the grounds were used as a staging depot for troops and most recently in 2020 and 2021 due to the worldwide coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

## STRANGE BUT TRUE

- A key event at the first show in 1876 was a competition for the best sample of 5 tonne of manure, deodorised and prepared in the most economical form of use
- The first ever showbag was a bag of coal
- In the 1920s a flock of 90 sheep were used to maintain the lawns at the Brisbane Showgrounds
- At the first show there was a competition for the fastest walking farm horse
- During the Great Depression new entertainment was introduced including goat races that attracted some 100 competitors in a single show
- There was no Sideshow Alley in 1876, just a lone individual known as the 'lightning calculator,' whose facility with numbers amazed the crowds

Learn more about the Ekka's history at the Show! Check out the Heritage Display in the Channel 7 Pavilion from 9am to 6pm each day. See trophies, vintage showbags, plus a special display celebrating 60 years of the iconic Bertie Beetle chocolate.

## 1876 THE FIRST EXHIBITION

The Intercolonial Exhibition of 1876 was held at Bowen Park with an estimated 15,000-17,000 people attending out of Brisbane's population at the time of just 20,600

## 1877 FIRST EKKA RIDE

The first ride was a merry-go-round in Sideshow Alley\*

## 1879 INTRODUCTION OF QUEENSLAND'S NEWEST TECHNOLOGIES

Ekka patrons were amazed by telephones, microphones, electric lights and even an electric thief detector

## 1889 SHEEPDOG TRIALS HELD FOR THE FIRST TIME

## 1891 DISTRICT EXHIBITS

The first district exhibits contest was held - nine regions competed for a prize pool of £175\*

## 1894 FIRST FIREWORKS DISPLAY IN THE MAIN ARENA

## 1909 JUBILEE SHOW

The 12 day show was the largest agricultural show in Australia that year with more than 7,000 competition entries\*

## 1919 FIRST EKKA CANCELLED DUE TO INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC

## 1920 EDWARD, PRINCE OF WALES VISITS THE EKKA

## 1926 QUEENSLAND COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION MAKES ITS FIRST APPEARANCE

## 1942 SECOND EKKA CANCELLED DUE TO WORLD WAR II

## 1950'S EKKA FOOD TRADITIONS

The now symbolic Ekka fairy floss, butter board sandwiches, strawberry sundaes and dagwood dogs were introduced\*

## 1954 QUEEN ELIZABETH II AND PRINCE PHILLIP VISIT THE EKKA

## 1959 HRH PRINCESS ALEXANDRIA OF KENT VISITS

## 1964 ANIMAL NURSERY AT THE EKKA FIRST INTRODUCED

## 1969 FIRST SKYMASTER FERRIS WHEEL AT EKKA

## 1988 EXPO 88

Ekka achieved its highest attendance with an estimated 800,000 people flooding through the gates\*

## 2000 SIDESHOW ALLEY AND WOODCHOP

Inner city bypass constructed, Sideshow Alley and the Woodchop Arena redeveloped

## 2010 ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL EKKA'S IN HISTORY HELD

The 2010 Ekka saw a 20 per cent increase in crowd numbers

## 2011 GRAMMY AWARD WINNERS WOLFMOTHER CLOSE EKKA'S CONCERT SERIES

## 2012 AUSTRALIAN FIRST

Ekka fans were able to customise their own fireworks on the show's free interactive fireworks iPhone app

## 2012 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AND ACADEMY AWARD-WINNING ACTOR AND PRODUCER GEOFFREY RUSH ATTENDED THE OPENING DAY OF THE EKKA

## 2013 EKKA WINS INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

The Royal Queensland Show took home the prestigious Best in Show title, along with 13 other awards, at the 2013 International Association of Fairs & Expositions (IAFE) Awards

## 2014 MILLION DOLLAR NIGHT SHOW

Australian-first million dollar night show EkkaNITES wowed the crowds each night of show

The Ekka ran over two full weekends for the first time in the show's history

## 2015 THE YEAR OF THE FLYING PIGS

The Racing and Diving Pigs wowed the crowds at Ekka for the very first time, flying through the sky and diving into a pool of water

## 2016 THE RETURN OF THE OLD MUSEUM

After 119 years, The Old Museum came back home to Ekka, housing the Flower and Garden Exhibition and Quilts Across Queensland

## 2017 EKKA'S 140TH ANNIVERSARY

The Ekka celebrates a remarkable milestone - its 140th anniversary

An early children's fireworks display features in EkkaNITES for the first time in recent history

## 2018 INVESTING IN AGRICULTURE

The RNA invested in its charter of championing and celebrating agriculture, building two new event facilities that were used at Ekka for the very first time. The Pavilion was partially used to house beef and dairy cattle, dairy goats and poultry, while Marquee 2 was the new Woodchop Arena

## 2019 NEW PARK FOR DOGS

Alexandria Park, completed in April 2019, became the new home of one of Ekka's largest and most popular competitions - Dogs

## 2020 EKKA CANCELLED FOR ONLY THE THIRD TIME IN HISTORY DUE TO THE GLOBAL COVID-19 PANDEMIC

## 2021 EKKA CANCELLED ONE WEEK BEFORE GATES OPEN, DUE TO THE CONTINUING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

## 2022 THE HISTORIC RETURN OF THE EKKA, ATTENDED BY MORE THAN 345,000 PEOPLE

\*Historical information and statistics sourced from 'Showtime - A History of the Brisbane Exhibition' by Joanne Scott and Ross Laurie, 2008; and RNA Archives.