

# On Broadway

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Dandenong Poultry Pavilion,  
August 2014  
*Society  
Collection*

Feature Article



*Centenary of the Oakleigh District Poultry  
Society 1914-2014*  
*H. G. Gobbi ©*

On Saturday 2 August 2014 I was privileged to attend the Oakleigh District Poultry Society's Annual Show in the poultry pavilion of the Dandenong Showgrounds where rows of caged soft and hard feather birds and waterfowl were judged by a panel drawn from across Australia. It was also the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Poultry Society. I'm happy to record that for the significant occasion the Society chose to decorate the poultry pavilion with the time-honoured Oakleigh colours of purple and gold, apparent in streamers, ribbons and rosettes on cages.

After the judging awards were presented at a centenary luncheon held in the administration building of the Dandenong Showgrounds located in Greaves Reserve. Members, life members and visitors were welcomed by President Brett Batchelor who has held membership since age twelve following his late father Ronald G. Batchelor, who himself joined as a young man.

Longest serving member and current committeeman Don Simpson spoke fondly of his eight decades as a bird fancier and later membership with the Society. Don was followed by patron Maureen Smollen who noted changes over time and that some birds exhibited now as rare, were in earlier decades once popular. Each of four judges – Graeme Hopf, Graeme Sharpe, Malcolm Fuller and Jason O'Loughlin – spoke of the calibre of the birds presented and of the significance of such a long established Society.

The Society's story began in the Drummond Street Mechanics Institute, Oakleigh's much valued former Town Hall that has been a social and cultural hub for even longer than the existence of the Poultry Society. The hall's more usual traffic in 1914 was in hosting public meetings, classes, lodges, clubs and dances and during wartime it became a venue to send off or welcome home troops. Hosting annual poultry shows of the Society was unremarkable in an area much concentrated on agriculture.

Cr Arthur Knight, founding member of the Market Gardeners & Fruit Growers Association and its long-term manager and secretary and in 1914 mayor of the Town of Oakleigh, was elected first president of what was originally named the Oakleigh Dog and Poultry Society. According to Don Simpson the Society was granted a shed at the back of the Institute in which to store its equipment for meetings and which had to be retrieved and returned to suit. Formed only a month before the onset of World War 1, the Society made a tentative start until holding its first show in the Mechanics Institute in 1916.

At the time the district was heavily engaged in poultry farming and the Show drew entries from throughout the State. In 1919 attendance at the fourth annual showing of poultry and pigeons of the Oakleigh and District Poultry Society was said to be 'excellent throughout the day and the Show remained open until 10 o'clock at night'.<sup>i</sup>

By its tenth year in June, 1924 the Show was held over two days on a Friday and Saturday. Breeders and fanciers vied for an Oakleigh Cup for best bird in Show exhibited by a member. It was won by Fisher and Perry's barred Plymouth Rock cockerel. Other cup prizes were awarded: the Francis Cup for best utility exhibit went to W. Durban's Black Orpington cockerel; the Nicholas Cup, for best young bird exhibited by a member was awarded to S. E. Andrew's Silver Wyandotte. Blue ribbons were awarded as follows: Rhode

Islands, A. Tucker; Orpingtons, A. Jackson; Plymouth Rocks, Fisher and Perry; light breed, J. Shepherd; utility exhibit, Mrs. Durban; duck, A. I. Nichol; old English game, W. Buck; Indian, Symonds and Sharp.<sup>ii</sup>

Over time restrictions were placed on the club's hire of the Town Hall. In 1942 the Society could still take live birds in to meetings, but wringing their necks or dressing and plucking them, even for demonstration purposes, was emphatically denied.<sup>iii</sup>

For decades poultry breeders and fanciers met and showed their birds at Oakleigh. As Oakleigh itself urbanised, use of its Town Hall became more restrictive. As well, the Society became a victim of its own success and unable to cater for the 1000 or so birds entered for showing. Late in 1968 the Poultry Society voted to move 'their meetings, bird nights and shows to the poultry pavilion at the Dandenong Showgrounds' where its headquarters remain today.<sup>iv</sup> The newly built pavilion not only attracted the Oakleigh society but a record number of entries for the 1968 Dandenong Show.<sup>v</sup>

Well known at the poultry pavilion at the Dandenong Showgrounds is Don Simpson formerly of Noble Park. Now 90 years of age Don has entered birds in the Dandenong Show for decades and commented in 2013: "I had Rhode Island Reds, bantams, moderns and lots of different colours. I judged several times and used to help put up the pens. The entries used to fill the other hall (pavilion) as well". Last year the bird entries comprised just two rows of cages". We used to have 40 breeders within four kilometres in Dandenong. Now there is only one. Breeding and the interest in breeding is not around now".<sup>vi</sup>

Ultimately poultry breeders and fanciers were pressured by the loss of open space and urbanisation and local government by-laws limiting the number of birds that could be

kept. Many such Societies diminished. While a long way from the glory days when breeders were untroubled by regulations a business plan to ensure that Victoria's poultry clubs may have a more assured future, is in place. It is being driven by Lou Sigmund, chairman of the Poultry Stud Breeders & Exhibitors Victoria, who attended the anniversary show and warmly congratulated the Oakleigh District Poultry Society on its milestone.

H. G. Gobbi

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<sup>i</sup> *The Argus*, 17 June 1919, p. 20

<sup>ii</sup> *The Argus*, 23 June 1924, p. 6

<sup>iii</sup> H. G. Gobbi, *Taking its Place: a History of Oakleigh*, p. 219

<sup>iv</sup> Minutes of ODPS Annual and Ordinary meeting, 12 November 1968

<sup>v</sup> *Dandenong Journal*, 7 November 1968, supplement p. 6

<sup>vi</sup> Article: *A show for the whole family*, <http://dandenong.starcommunity.com.au/journal/2013-11-11/a-show-for-the-whole-family>  
Posted on 11 November 2013