



Barwon Park in Winchelsea, Victoria

Parrwang – Fifty Years in Magpie Land

"If I may say so, it so vital to retain key heritage sites and provide opportunities for community engagement."

H.R.H King Charles in his message for the recent publication, *Barwon Park: People and Place*.

Published by the National Trust in 2023 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Barwon Park Mansion's completion in 1871, the book highlights the importance of preserving heritage. In 2024, the National Trust marks 50 years of custodianship of Barwon Park, built on the traditional lands of the Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar people.

His Majesty's comment is especially pertinent to Barwon Park, as it was the local community that saved the mansion from deterioration in the 1970s and 80s. Dr. Peter Smith rallied volunteers, forming the Barwon Park Promoters, to restore the building. Volunteers held functions to raise funds, including lavish balls and performances, and even baked scones—62 pounds of flour in a single weekend in 1980!

But why should the broader public care about historical buildings like Barwon Park? There are five key reasons: education, environment, culture, community, and commerce. Barwon Park demonstrates how dedication to heritage can yield these benefits, especially in a world increasingly dominated by technology. At Barwon Park, history comes alive—not just through objects and exhibits, but by walking through its rooms and grounds, where all levels of society are represented. The mansion's bluestone, stables, cellar, and grand interiors allow visitors to connect with the past in a direct, physical way.

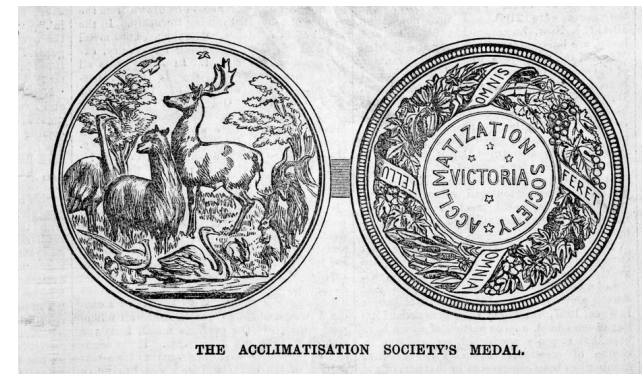
When Stephen and Edith Batson purchased the property in 1912, it became a family home. They adapted it for their 10 children and seasonal workers, with the billiard room becoming shearers' quarters. The Batson family's values resonate today, as Sid Batson recycled materials and embraced self-sufficiency. Though his reasons for bequeathing the property to the National Trust are unclear, Sid would likely support the environmental benefits of preserving heritage buildings—sustainable materials, reduced landfill, and adaptive reuse. Barwon Park's 124 hectares now provide a green buffer zone, a refuge for both residents and wildlife.

The partnership between Barwon Water and the National Trust has been vital in sustaining the farm operations around the Barwon Park Mansion. In March 2023, a 1.8 km pipeline began delivering 80 million litres of recycled water annually, showcasing Barwon Water's sustainability focus and helping to ward off the environmental challenges of the past.

Barwon Park's history is intertwined with Victorian values and British influences. The Mansion itself was built after Prince Alfred's visit to Barwon Park in 1867, when Elizabeth Austin felt their single-storey homestead wasn't grand enough for a royal stay. Construction began shortly after the family's return from England, marking the rise of luxurious homesteads in Victoria's Western District.



Elizabeth Austin



Barwon Park stables, by @by__georgia



Mansion nearing completion 1871

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To celebrate the Mansion's completion, a grand ball was held with 170 guests. However, Thomas Austin died just six months later, and Prince Alfred never stayed at the Mansion on his subsequent visit. The Austins were devout and influential, contributing to the local Anglican Church, with Thomas's passion for horse racing earning him the title "Father of the Turf."

Elizabeth Austin's philanthropy, including her leadership in founding the Austin Hospital, is another of her enduring legacies. Her commitment to the local community mirrors the Batsons' involvement, who supported local businesses and events at the Mansion.

Barwon Park's cultural, educational, and environmental significance is vast. Economically, it remains a key attraction in Winchelsea, drawing 3,000 visitors annually, with larger exhibitions attracting tens of thousands. It's a sought-after venue for weddings and events, with recent films, Barwon Mansion (2022) and Daisy (2024), showcasing its grandeur.

Barwon Park's preservation has been made possible by volunteers and benefactors, including federal grants and contributions from local foundations. Strong community engagement remains essential in protecting and promoting this historic site. Congratulations to all who have been part of this important work.

Linda Carr
Member, NTAV Geelong Branch

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