

# EKKA HISTORY

## About the Ekka

The Ekka is Queensland's largest and most loved annual event, attracting some 400,000 people.

Run by the RNA for 9 days in August and staged at its original birthplace, the Brisbane Showgrounds, the Ekka brings the country and city together for a true celebration of agriculture.

The Ekka showcases the best of Queensland, attracting more than 20,000 competition entries from woodchop to quilts, 10,000 animals from beef cattle to cats and dogs, world-class live entertainment, award-winning food and wine, carnival rides and showbags, family shopping, educational activities and much more.

The iconic show has been running since 1876 and is full of traditions, a unique atmosphere and childhood memories which have been passed down through generations of families.

## 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

## History on Show!

Learn more about Ekka at Ekka by visiting our Heritage Display, featuring trophies and vintage showbags, in the Channel 7 Pavilion from 9am to 7pm each day.



## **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*

## **2023** *One of the most successful years in recent RNA history*

More than 400,000 people through the gates and more than 21,000 competition entries received.