



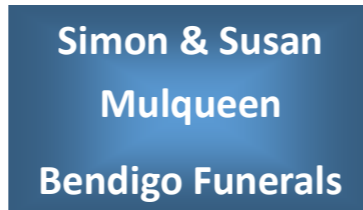
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Celebrating the 150th anniversary of Women's Cricket in Bendigo

150 YEARS

1874–2024

A celebration of women's cricket

Today's match between Bendigo and Ballarat is a commemorative game to mark the 150th anniversary of the first organised spectator game of women's cricket in Australia which was played during the Easter Fair of 1874.

The match was played at Bendigo in Rosalind Park as a charity match to raise funds for the Sandhurst Hospital and Asylum. It was played in front of thousands of people, in a match that the newspapers called unprecedented in Australia.

The match was first suggested by John Rae, headmaster of the Bendigo State School, but it was soon clear the women organised the rest. Barbara Rae, a schoolteacher, and John's daughter, acted as club secretary and advertised for players in the *Bendigo Advertiser* as well as likely coordinating training of the teams.

The Reds were captained by John Rae's wife, Emily, and the Blues captained Barbara, and their uniforms were full length calico dresses, sailor hats and the latest fashion Zouave jackets of different colours for each team. Bloomers were out as they were considered a bit too forward by the general public. Before the game, they trained at the Bendigo United Cricket Club and were tutored by some of Australia's best cricketers of the times.

Barbara Rae was top scorer on the day with 36 not out. She was to be awarded a new bat tied with a blue decorative ribbon and inscribed with gold lettering, but due to societal norms or pressures, declined to attend the ceremony and declined accepting the bat..

After the game the women were hounded by the broader press, their integrity and virtue called into question for their 'deplorable' and 'unseemly' exhibitions. Despite this, the women returned to play again during the 1875 Bendigo Easter Fair, and after receiving the same appalling treatment by some Melbourne and regional newspapers, never played again.

The next notable women's cricket match was held in 1886 in Sydney, where the Fernleas and Siroccos played in front of a thousand-strong crowd. In 1888 Queen Victoria talked about the health benefits of playing cricket for women, which had a positive influence on the sport, and by 1890 in Melbourne, women's cricket clubs had formed, and competitions

were a regular occurrence. In 1891, the first women's match was played between NSW and Victoria in Sydney. In the 1930s, women cricketers represented Australia both in Australia and overseas against England and New Zealand, and in several test matches.

Women's cricket was inconsistent over the next 80 or so years, often because it lacked sponsorship with women often having to fund their own costs to play, unlike the men who were usually fully sponsored.

In March 2020, there was also another enormous achievement in Australian cricket history, when the Australian Women's Cricket team won the T20 Women's World Cup against India at the MCG, playing in front of an almost record-breaking 86,000-strong crowd.

Therefore, the celebration of this first match is a significant milestone. Considering women's sports are still striving for equality in pay, status and sponsorship – especially in what are considered the 'manly' types of sports – these first games represent some of the challenges women have faced and have had to overcome in many areas of society over the last 150 years.

This match is sponsored by the City of Greater Bendigo and the Bendigo Easter Fair Society Committee in recognition of the efforts of the early pioneers and all those who have come after, paving the way for any women who want to have a go.

Thanks must go to the players who have come together to pay homage to the pioneering women cricketers and also to the many volunteers who have worked hard to recognise this tribute today.

Written by Louise Zedda-Sampson, author of *Bowl the Maidens Over: Our First Women Cricketers*, 2021



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