

Small Resources BIG IMPACT – The Tom Roberts Festival



The Tom Roberts Festival hosted by Inverell in northern NSW is a ten-day celebration, celebrating the town's close links with the artist known as "the father of Australian landscape painting" and the fact that more than a dozen of his works were painted in the surrounding district.

In 1901, Roberts was commissioned to paint the inaugural sitting of the Australian parliament at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre and his "Opening of Parliament" has been widely used to symbolise the birth of Australia's nationhood during the 2001 Centenary of Federation celebrations.

Roberts' true legacy, however, is the wealth of magnificent landscapes and rural scenes he captured on canvas during his travels around the country. Artworks like "Bailed Up", "The Golden Fleece: Shearing at Newstead" and "Shearing the Rams" are now regarded as priceless treasures because they were among the first to depict the distinctly 'Australian' character of the bush.

In the early 1890s, Roberts made a number of trips to Inverell, staying with close friend Duncan Anderson - great grandfather of Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson. During his extended stays at Anderson's property, "Newstead", Roberts painted a total of 13 works, including his most famous: "Bailed Up", "The Golden Fleece: Shearing at Newstead" and "In a Corner on the Macintyre".

The sites of these three works, plus many of the other scenes depicted in Roberts' Inverell paintings are still much as they were at the time of the artist's visits. A key feature of the Tom Roberts Festival are tours of these sites, allowing art-lovers to stand in the artist's footsteps in places like the shearing shed at "Newstead" and on a bend in the Newstead-Paradise Road where Roberts' depicted the infamous bushranger, Thunderbolt, holding up a Cobb and Co. coach in "Bailed Up".

The Inverell Cultural and Arts Council (Inc), as organisers of the Festival, even arranged for a re-enactment of the hold-up with local personalities taking the key roles of the 'characters' in the painting.

The Festival celebrations began on April 27 with the opening of the Tom Roberts Art Exhibition, featuring original works by Tom sourced from rarely-seen private collections.

Other events included guest lectures on Roberts by leading art historians; historic garden seminar and tour; theatrical production; a Federation Ball; Heritage Trades Training Seminar; Co-Opera production of Mozart's "The Magic Flute"; Australian film screening; artist-in-residence workshops; Federation Street Party; photographic exhibition and a vintage car show and rally.

In total, there were be more than 20 different events running over the ten days, with each one organised by various cultural groups. While the main aim of the Festival is to celebrate the role of artists like Tom Roberts in the birth of our of our nation, the people of Inverell also see it as an opportunity to generate cultural tourism in rural areas. ■

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