

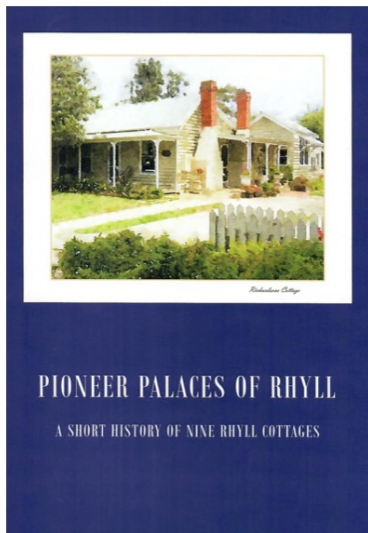


Historical Society

EST 1941

April/May 2023 Newsletter

Welcome to our latest Newsletter.



The theme of this year's National Trust's Australian Heritage Festival, which runs in Victoria from April 18 until May 18, is Shared Stories. As is normally the case, The Phillip Island & District Historical Society and the Bass Coast Branch of the National Trust joined forces to offer our local community an event to celebrate this Festival, which was two bus tours of the Pioneer Palaces of Rhyll, where the stories of the original inhabitants of these nine remaining historic cottages, was shared.

Tickets for both the morning and afternoon tours sold out within days of their release, which prompted us to arrange for a larger bus – this too sold out within two days. Unfortunately, due to the limitation of access to the cottages, we were not able to increase the capacity of the bus any more than a 33-seater – so we had a waitlist of some 18 people, who missed out on the event. But as luck would have it, on the morning of the tour, we were greeted with the bigger bus in the fleet – a 57-seater - due to mechanical

issues with the smaller bus – we had no choice but to adapt – just as our pioneers would have done! This included harnessing the use of smaller vehicles to be available to ferry those who were unable to walk the long (and wet) driveways to see properties.



The afternoon tour outside Captain Lock's cottage.



Historical Society

EST 1941



Enjoying a delicious afternoon tea during the Pioneer Palace Tours

Everything went off remarkable well – and we all enjoyed a wonderful day. Both morning and afternoon tea was served at one of the properties, complete with fine china teacup sets and extraordinary array of delicacies including the mandatory scones, jam and cream.

A big thank you to all those who helped on the day and to the Bass Coast Shire for the support in securing the bus.

For those interested in participating in other tours offered by the National Trust for the remainder of the Heritage Festival, click on this link to find out more:

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/ahf/vic/>



History Book Launch. A book I have been eagerly awaiting, namely “Once Upon an Island...” a collection of stories from the early days of Phillip Island, is to be officially launched this **Friday May 5** at the Uniting Church in Chapel Street Cowes. This beautiful hard bound book, which includes stunning historic photography is published by the Phillip Island and San Remo Advertiser. It contains wonderful stories, photographs and memories which is sure to enthrall all those who are interested

in local history of Phillip Island. All members and friends of the Historical Society are invited to celebrate the launch of this new book and enjoy an afternoon tea on Friday. It starts at 2pm and goes until 4pm – so don't miss out.



We are delighted to welcome new members to the Society.

Barbara Caulfield and her partner **Marcus** are in the throes of moving to San Remo as they finish building their new home. Barbara and Marcus have a real interest in the local history of this area, and we look forward to getting to know them at our General Meeting catch ups.



Historical Society

EST 1941

We also welcome **Ann and Alan Tindale**. Ann was born in London, brought up in Canterbury and as an adult lived in Surrey. She and Alan emigrated a few years ago – and now call Cowes their home. We welcome you both and also look forward to a continued acquaintance at Historical Society events.

Last month we held our first General Meeting for the year at the RSL which was very well attended. This is always a great opportunity for a social gathering, getting to know other members and hearing the latest happenings from the committee. At the last meeting we heard from Doug about the progress on the new Cultural Centre, complete with slide show and were also treated with a preview of the first digital story produced by the Society about The Speke shipwreck. This video will be exhibited in the new museum, which is scheduled to open in October this year. Stay tuned. Minutes for the meeting are uploaded on to our website.

I look forward to seeing as many members as possible at our next meeting.

Cheers

Pam Rothfield

o000o

Book launch

You are cordially invited to help celebrate the launch of "*Once upon an island . . .*" a collection of stories compiled by the Phillip Island and San Remo Advertiser celebrating Phillip Island's unique history.

Venue: St John's Uniting Church, Cowes

Address: 86 Chapel Street

Date: Friday, May 5, 2023

Time: 2pm to 4pm

Afternoon tea will be served

RSVP by May 3: email anne@pisra.com.au or phone or text 0409 216 033.



CHICORY
PUBLISHING

All members are invited to the ***Once Upon an Island*** book launch on Friday 5 May.

o000o



Historical Society

EST 1941

The next meeting of the Society is on **Thursday June 15, 2023**. This meeting will again take place at the Phillip Island RSL at 12 noon at the Bistro for a bit of socialising, and lunch, which can be ordered at the servery. We shall then proceed to the ANZAC Room for our meeting. Whilst RSVP is not essential – it would be good to have an idea of numbers who can attend. Please RSVP to Judy Gittus on: jgittus43@gmail.com or call Judy on 0417 390 885.

**MEETING NOTICE!****New website.**

The Phillip Island and District Historical Society is delighted to announce the launch of its new website. The address is: www.phillipislandhistory.org.au. This new website gives us plenty of scope to expand into the future with the possibility of digital exhibitions etc. Why not jump online and have an explore of what we've achieved to date. Thanks to Jason Cameron for the amazing job he has done on the website and the production of our digital stories.



Historical Society

EST 1941

The Strawberry Farm at Rhyll

By Pamela Rothfield

There are many today who still remember the Strawberry Farm at Rhyll, despite the fact that it closed operation more than 60 years ago.

The beginnings of the Strawberry Farm took place in the summer of 1921, when the tourist industry on Phillip Island was starting to boom. The growing popularity of automobile travel probably played a role in this increase in visitors, making the trip to the Island more accessible, even though cars had to be ferried across from San Remo to Newhaven first by a two-car punt, as the construction of the first bridge between San Remo and Newhaven was almost another 20 years away – in 1940. This increase in tourism also gave rise to an increase in guesthouse accommodation in Cowes.

So, the demand for tourist attractions increased in earnest. Trips to see the little penguins and koalas; the attraction of the mutton birds (Shearwaters) and the magnificence of the roaring seas at the Nobbies, which offered a tea house, were all favourites. Golf was also available, and the beaches, of course, were a major draw.



John 'Jack' Underdown

This was the backdrop in which John 'Jack' Underdown, a chicory farmer at Rhyll, and his wife Sophia decided that they too had the potential of generating an income from attracting tourists to their property in Rhyll overlooking the beautiful Rhyll Inlet (The Nits), by offering fresh strawberries served with cream.



Sophia Underdown

Jack and Sophie were originally from South Australia. They moved to Rhyll in the early 1890s to join other family members already living there. At first, they lived in a simple farmhouse on west side of the Rhyll-Newhaven Road, comprising some 46 acres, which they rented from landholder, John Cleeland. However, in 1907 they purchased 2 acres on the north section of the bluff at Rhyll, where they built their home, which they named *Motpena*. Jack and Sophia had only one surviving child, a boy, Oswald, 'Ozzie' born in Rhyll in 1897.

Motpena was named after a cattle station on the east side of Lake Torrens in South Australia. It is possible that Jack worked on the station in his younger days.

Ozzie continued to help his father farming chicory until about 1918 when Ozzie bought a boat, which he used for oystering – a less back-breaking work than chicory farming. The oystering industry in Rhyll, which started around 1910 saw almost forty boats engaged in



Historical Society

EST 1941

the activity. It is estimated over a million oysters were dredged from the bottom of the bay near Rhyll during the years in which the industry flourished.

FRUITS IN SEASON.
Mr. Jack Underdown's strawberry farm at Rhyll has been a very popular visiting spot for residents and guests at Cowes. The strawberry yield has exceeded 6 cwt. in the first crop, and motor cars have run out daily, filled with lovers of this luscious fruit, who are liberally treated to huge dishes of the berries, plenty of cream and biscuits.

Item in the Frankston & Somerville
Standard December 1921

In 1921, Jack also possibly tiring of the strain of chicory farming at the age of almost 60, decided to plant a crop of strawberries offering them to guest house visitors, served with cream. His first harvest yielded him with over 305kgs of the delicious fruit.

A local who worked in the Strawberry Farm in the 1930s and 40s recalls, with fondness, the hoards who used to come out to Rhyll to enjoy their

generous serving of fresh strawberries, which had

been picked by Ozzie that morning, and cream. Customers were served in what is described as an annex built on the west side of the house, and some were also served on the front veranda, with an estimated capacity of between 20 and 30 customers at any one time.

The strawberries grew at the rear (south side) of the property on both sides of the driveway.



The Underdown's Strawberry Farm, 'Motpena'. The strawberries were served in the annex on the right hand side of the house.



Historical Society

EST 1941

To book a table, proprietors of the guesthouses in Cowes would ask the Cowes telephone exchange to be put through to the unique telephone number, 'Rhyll 1' for the Strawberry Farm. Then a large car with 3 bench seats – with a capacity for 8 passengers, driven by either Bern Denham, Herbert Watchorn or Bert West would be reserved to take the visitors out to Rhyll.



Jack and Sophia both died in 1924, but Ozzie (shown left) continued to operate the Strawberry Farm well into the 1950s diversifying to selling the strawberry plants, which were advertised as 'Strong Royal Sovereign Plants' at 22 shillings per hundred.

The Royal Sovereign has a softer texture than most modern varieties of strawberries. The flesh is bright orange-pink to scarlet and is high in juice and very sweet in taste.

In the late 1950s, Ozzie sold the farm and moved with his wife, Ethel, to Seaview Street in Newhaven, where he lived until his death in 1973.

Motpena is still standing today and was the ninth cottage visited on our Pioneer Palaces Tour last weekend.



Don't forget that the Phillip Island and District Historical Society depends on increasing our membership for its secure future. A healthy membership ensures that we can continue to catalogue our collection, as well as embark on various projects which preserves and shines a light on our region's history. Spread the word! Single Membership \$30 Family \$40.

Newsletter written and edited by Pamela Rothfield

Copyright © 2023 PIDHS. All rights reserved.

Website: www.phillipislandhistory.org.au

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pidhs>

Email: prothfield@gmail.com