



Historical Society

EST 1941

March 2023 Newsletter

Welcome to March.



This month is Women's History Month. I am sure it is no surprise to hear that despite the invaluable contribution women have made to our society, whether it be pioneering movements, championing social change or supporting communities as caregivers and healers, they are dramatically underrepresented in recorded

history – with research showing that women make up about 0.5% of 3,500 years of recorded history - equating to about 17.5 years!

“We need to actively look for women's stories and put them back into the historical narrative.”

— Bettany Hughes, historian, author and research fellow of King's College London

It is with this in mind, that I have included a short story on a remarkable Phillip Island woman named Florence Oswin Roberts, also known as Zing to her family and friends. There are many locals on the island today who remember Zing for her passionate support of koalas and her fervent advocacy for the preservation of the island's beautiful natural vegetation.



MEETING NOTICE!

March is also the month of our first General Meeting of the Society for 2023, which will take place at the Phillip Island RSL on Monday 27 March in the ANZAC Room at 12 noon. Lunch can be ordered individually at the Bistro servery and will be served to us in the ANZAC Room. At the meeting our

President Doug Waugh will provide an update on the Cowes Cultural Centre building and our own spaces – both the museum and our research room. Whilst



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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.

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

Cheers

Pam Rothfield



Welcome to new members: **Ross Lloyd** – current President of the Bass Coast Branch of the National Trust and to **Sally Whitehead** resident of Rhyll who along with her husband Derek are keen ‘birders’. Welcome to you both and we hope you may consider a committee position in the future!

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MAKING PUBLIC HISTORIES

A 'National Disgrace': the (long) history of violence against women in Australia

Dr Zora Simic, Dr Alana Piper and Professor Lisa Featherstone



5pm, Thursday 30 March via Zoom

Free and online, bookings: www.historycouncilvic.org.au/national_disgrace



OLD TREASURY
BUILDING



Making Public Histories

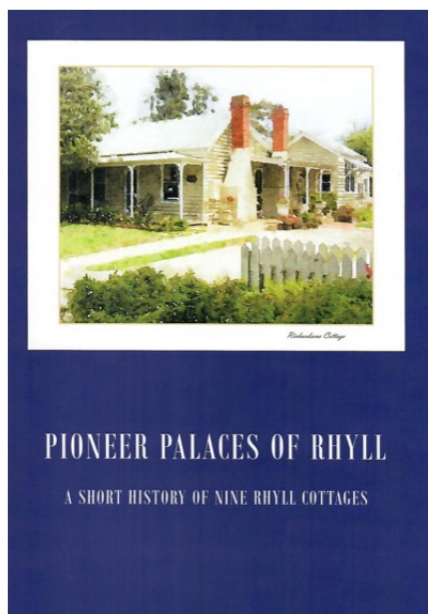
The History Council of Victoria is holding a seminar in which **Dr Zora Simic, Professor Lisa Featherstone and Dr Alana Jayne Piper** will discuss their current research projects charting the history of violence against women in this country.

Free and online, bookings here: www.historycouncilvic.org.au/national_disgrace



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Heritage Festival 2023 - Pioneer Palaces of Rhyll Tour

Brought back by popular demand, PIDHS in partnership with the Bass Coast Branch of the National Trust and supported by the Bass Coast Shire Council will be holding two guided bus tours of the nine remaining historic cottages of Rhyll. There will be a choice of morning or afternoon tours on offer with the former commencing at 9am and the afternoon tour starting at 1pm – both from the Rhyll Mechanics Hall. Both tours are expected to run for about 3 hours and include refreshments at one of the cottages. This year's theme for the

annual Heritage Festival is 'Shared Stories' and the stories of the original residents of these cottages will be shared with the participants. The date is Saturday 29th April and the cost for the tour including a sumptuous morning or afternoon tea is \$35 for non-members and discounted to **\$25 for members**.

Please email: prothfield@mac.com for your reservation. Credit card payments will be required for confirm your booking.

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Windows on history: In Vino Veritas

RHSV collections: Marketing postcards for Closer Settlement, c1908

Bookshop: new books

Books received: titles added to the collection

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria publishes its newsletter ***History News*** regularly throughout the year.

History News contains a veritable trove of information useful to those who have an interest in local history. The link below takes you to an online archive of the RHSV *History News* going back to 2005. Many of the issues are available for download in PDF format.

This is a wonderful resource for those interested in what's going on in RHV.

<https://www.historyvictoria.org.au/publications/history-news/>



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Zing of Broadwater

By Pamela Rothfield

Florence Mary Oswin – called ‘Zing’ - was an outstanding woman who made an invaluable contribution to our local community. She was described as having an exceptional strength of character and intelligence, and was a woman who worked tirelessly for the protection of the Island’s natural assets.

Zing was born in 1875; the second eldest of 8 children, four brothers (one not surviving infancy) and four girls. The family lived in Balnarring where all the children attended the local school, with the exception of Zing who received two years of education in Kew.

In a time when a woman’s contribution to society and business was essentially overshadowed or ignored, Zing was running the Grand Coffee Palace in Melbourne, and then later the Windsor Hotel.



Eustace Roberts

Zing was an acknowledged beauty and had no

shortage of suiters, however by the time she purchased the Broadwater Guesthouse in Cowes in 1912, she had met the love of her life, the very handsome Eustace George Roberts, known as ‘Rajah’ or ‘Bobs’, a naval electrical engineer.

Broadwater, located on Lovers Walk just metres from the north facing beach of east Cowes, was originally built by the Henty family of Portland around 1890 and used as their beautiful seaside residence.

Under Zing’s management supported in the early days by her sister Olive, Broadwater earned the reputation as one of the finest guesthouses around. Famous visitors included renowned artists, authors and sopranos as well as members of the nobility. One such famous visitor was Mary Grant Bruce, author of the children’s Billabong Books, many having been written at



Florence Mary Oswin ‘Zing’



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Broadwater. Bruce's books featured vivid descriptions of the beauty and danger of the Australian bush which included charming colloquial dialogue in her skilful storytelling for which she made her mark as Australia's best-selling children's author for 25 years.



Zing continued to run Broadwater and in 1924 at the age of 49 she became Mrs Florence Oswin-Roberts after marrying her beloved Rajah, who had retired from the Navy. Rajah apparently had a very even temperament and was content to adopt his new role as consort to the 'queen of Broadwater'.

Broadwater's rambling splendour expanded over the years from its original two-and-a-half-acres to six acres, and by 1930 it also boasted two tennis courts. Electrical lighting was generated thanks to Rajah's expertise as an electrical engineer, along with other improvements including many additional rooms, a magnificent 20-metre-long lounge room, a large dining room, games room and bathrooms etc.



Edward, Zing's (female) koala

Zing was a passionate conservationist, with a great love for both flora and fauna and she played a crucial role in the protection of koalas on the island. She was given permission from the Fisheries and Game Department by way of a special permit to keep a baby koala, which she found orphaned in 1937. A provision of the permit was that the koala must always have its liberty, which she did. The female koala, named Edward, lived for 7 years and became so attached to Zing that she hardly left her side. Zing was able to raise much needed funds for koala conservation through Edward, whose celebrity extended to Melbourne and beyond.

After devastating bushfire outbreaks in February 1944 which killed 12 people and destroyed 250 homes in Gippsland and saw half the Phillip Island's Koala Sanctuary destroyed, Zing established a little hospital for injured koalas at Broadwater. The Herald at the time reported how these animals were looked after; "In tiny hessian hammocks in specially



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built sheds, their burns are being treated and bandaged and the bears (sic) are being fed on milk and gum leaves.”

After Edward's death, in June 1944 she was preserved and eventually acquired by the Phillip Island & District Historical Society. Edward will once again be on public exhibition once the new Historical Society's museum to be located in the Cowes Cultural Centre is opened.

The Oswin Roberts Reserve is a testament to the legacy of Florence Oswin Roberts, who gave the 150 acres to the flora, fauna and people of Victoria. The reserve is one of the last remaining remnant bushland areas on Phillip Island, located between Harbison Road and Cowes-Rhyll Road.

Vern Thompson and his wife, who was Zing's niece, took over the management of Broadwater in 1948 allowing Zing to retire at the age of 73. The beautiful property was demolished in June 1965 and fortunately Zing who had passed away 8 years prior, did not have to witness this sad event.

Florence Oswin Roberts or Zing was a woman who deserves special recognition and appreciation for her contribution to Phillip Island.



Remember, the Phillip Island and District Historical Society depends on increasing our membership. A healthy membership ensures that we can continue to catalogue our collection, as well as embark on various projects which preserve and shines a light on our region's history. Spread the word! Single Membership \$30 Family \$40.

Newsletter written and edited by Pamela Rothfield

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