



Historical Society

EST 1941

November 2023 Newsletter

Welcome to our latest Newsletter.



On Thursday, November 2, 2023, the eagerly awaited opening of Cowes' new Cultural Centre, named *Berninneit*, marks a significant milestone as it opens its doors to the public for the first time. Notably, this date holds symbolic importance for Phillip Island, coinciding with the date of the historic land sales ballot which took place in Mornington back in 1868.

This auspicious alignment bodes well for the centre's future. Our museum, located to the east of the library, boasts an interior which has been meticulously crafted, with a selection of our wonderful artefacts supported by exciting digital displays, (with some minor refinements still in the works). I wholeheartedly encourage everyone to explore the museum

and immerse themselves in the exhibits that we've endeavoured to bring to life.



Bunerong woman Jillian West and her nephew, who performed the Welcome to Country at the opening of *Berninneit*.

Berninneit offers an array of amenities, including a 250 seat cinema and theatre, a splendid library, gallery spaces, and expansive conference facilities, along with meeting rooms. This building represents the fourth iteration of a public hall since the European settlement on the island, and constructed to Passivhaus Standards, it stands as a testament to our island's progress at a substantial cost of over \$30 million.

With the reopening of the museum, we now have the opportunity to once again generate revenue through entrance donations, facilitated by our (to be installed) 'tap and go' donation kiosk. After three years of packing, unpacking, designing, and creating, we eagerly anticipate our members and the public relishing this magnificent space, as the committee inches closer to solving our storage challenges and the completion of the unpacking process.

In the spirit of this momentous occasion, I've included a narrative chronicling the history of the four Public Halls of Cowes, dating back to their inception in 1884, a fitting

homage to the grand opening of *Berninneit*.

In this newsletter I have also included a report detailing the process undertaken by our amazing craftsman Frank Maiolo from Rhyll who has meticulously restored the original officer's mess table (or saloon table) from the ill-fated Speke, which met its tragic end on the south coast of Phillip



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Island in 1906. This remarkable undertaking was entirely voluntary, and we extend our heartfelt gratitude to Frank for his invaluable contribution.

Additionally, I would also like to remind everyone of our upcoming Christmas dinner, an eagerly anticipated occasion that gives us the opportunity to celebrate the festive season along with the significant milestone in our Society's development. This dinner is set for Friday December 8, 2023, to take place at St. Philips Parish Hall. Kindly inform Judy Gittus of your intention to attend by December 1st. Your participation will be greatly appreciated. More details below.

Finally a very happy big 'O' birthday wish to our treasure (and treasurer) Judy Gittus on November 11 – a day to remember!

Enjoy

Pamela Rothfield

New members:

We're delighted to introduce two new members to our Society. First, we have **Stephen Fullarton**, a familiar face with a deep connection to the island. Steve, a long-time island resident who was born here many decades ago (too numerous to mention!), has a rich history of service on both the Phillip Island Shire Council and the Bass Coast Shire Council. He also brings his expertise as an architect and designer to our community, residing in Cowes with his lovely wife Kerry.

Our second new member is **Barney Meyer**, who splits his time between Rhyll and Melbourne. Barney is a digital technologist and professional panoramic photographer. If you're curious about his breathtaking work, I encourage you to visit hiddenmelbourne.com.au. We're hopeful that we can persuade Barney to share his insights at one of our meetings next year.

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Christmas Dinner 2023

We have confirmed the date for our Christmas function this year. The get together will take place on

Friday 8th December at St Philip Parish Hall

6pm for a 6:30pm start.

The dinner will be catered for by our Island's amazing chef, Jayne Messendorf.

We are hopeful of offering some live music for this year's end of year function as well. The dinner will cost \$45 per head and we would ask that drinks are BYO. Please RSVP to Judy Gittus at: j.gittus43@gmail.com

As usual there will be a special Xmas hamper door prize and it promises to be a wonderful night to celebrate the achievements of our Society throughout the year.



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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND ORAL HISTORY: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

21 November 2023, 12 noon

2023 Bernard Bailyn Lecture in North American History

Online - Free

World leading authority on oral history and technology Professor Doug Boyd, Director of the Louie B. Nunn Centre for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries, will present La Trobe University's Bernard Bailyn Lecture in North American History.

Doug Boyd envisioned, designed and implemented the open source and free OHMS system (Oral History Metadata Synchronizer), which synchronizes text with audio and video online. In 2019 he received a Fulbright Scholars Research Grant to collaborate with the National Library of Australia on innovative access to online oral history.

Boyd is the co-editor (with Mary A. Larson) of the book "Oral History and Digital Humanities: Voice, Access, and Engagement" published by Palgrave MacMillan in 2014. He authors the blog Digital Omnium: Oral History, Archives, and Digital Technology and is the author of numerous articles pertaining to oral history, archives and digital technologies.

[Click here](#) to register.

Newsletter written and edited by Pamela Rothfield

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The Work of a Craftsman

Restoring this original artefact



A Debt of Gratitude

The Phillip Island and District Historical Society, along with the broader community of Phillip Island, extend their heartfelt gratitude to Frank Maiolo of Rhyll for his painstaking and meticulous efforts in restoring the original saloon table salvaged from the ship *The Speke*. This vessel tragically met its fate near Kitty Miller Bay in 1906. The collection of photographs that follows chronicles the remarkable journey of restoration undertaken by Frank Maiolo, a totally voluntary labour of love that spanned two years in its entirety.

Throughout the restoration process, Frank adhered to traditional practices, utilising materials reminiscent of those employed in the ship's initial construction.

Hide Glue was the adhesive of choice for all assemblies and repairs, while Linseed oil and beeswax were skilfully applied to achieve the final finish.

One of the first jobs for Frank was to see if he could remove over 100 years of age and grime without damaging the original timbers.

He tested one of the legs, using oxalic acid and acetone.



The acetone was needed to make sure that he had a good glue base in the mortices for attaching the frame.



The legs before (left) and after (above) the cleaning process.

Some of the components had severe cracks which had to be stabilised before careful, but aggressive, cleaning could be done.



Above: Frank painstakingly cleaned and stabilised all the legs, then he had to manufacture new inner aprons and commence the arduous task of the glueing-up (below).



Below: Frank then commenced the assembly, carefully securing the legs and frame.



The next job was to source appropriate timber and make the new top.

Below: It took 7 planks to make the new top but as he started to level the surface Frank was concerned that the colour might be too different from the legs and apron.



He continued sanding and cleaning until the true colours were revealed and Frank was content that the timber was perfect.



Below: Before fixing the new top on to the base, Frank had to manufacture a missing apron on one end of the table. He used the same timber as he had used for the top - a perfect match.



Below: And here is the final product ready for some beeswax and its new home in the new Cultural Centre in Cowes.



Thank you Frank

The Four Public Halls

1884 - the First Public Hall



1884 The Inaugural Shire Hall – Cowes Mechanics Institute

In the early months of 1881, an ambitious endeavour took root with the establishment of the Cowes Free Library Building Fund. Three dedicated but now anonymous islanders initiated this noble cause, aiming to create a library hall for the benefit of the public. The local community warmly embraced this idea.

During April 1881, the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Mr. Dodgshun, graced Cowes with his presence during the Easter break. He attended the annual regatta and a concert organized to raise funds for the Cowes Free Library Building and the Presbyterian Church, with profits to be divided equally. This concert took place in the schoolroom in Cowes, but due to space limitations, around 50 people had to be turned away. At the event's conclusion, the Mayor expressed his delight in supporting such a commendable cause and was

genuinely surprised by the large turnout of visitors to Phillip Island.

Fundraising for the Library Building Fund continued, but the turning point came in 1882 with the generous donation of a block of land on Chapel Street by Solomon West. In 1883, local builder Mr. Blakie was awarded the contract to construct the building, which was to measure 40 feet by 20 feet (12m x 6m) and stood at 13 feet (4m) high.

The building opened its doors to the public during Easter in 1884, with two concerts marking the occasion. For nearly four decades, the hall remained a steadfast community resource on Phillip Island, experiencing minimal alterations.

In 1923, at the behest of Mr. Alex McLardy, the hall committee's secretary, a significant expansion was undertaken, costing a substantial sum of £1,400. This extension increased the hall's size, adding a cloakroom, a supper room, and

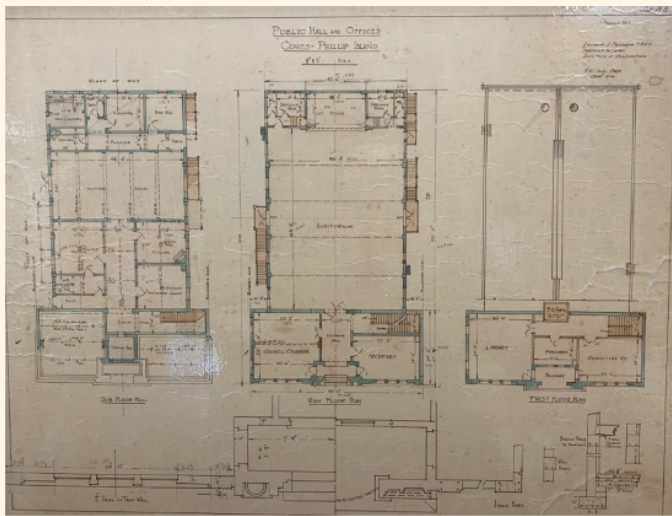
clubrooms for the local branch of the Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia, who contributed £650 towards the extension costs. By 1926, the hall became known as the Mechanics' and Soldiers Hall and served as a picture theatre. In 1928, following Phillip Island's independence from the Shire of Phillip Island and Woolamai to form its own Phillip Island Council, the hall transformed into the Shire Office and Council Chambers, possibly housing the local court as well.

This inaugural Cowes Shire Hall continued to serve the community until its unfortunate demise on the night of March 16, 1933. A fire, believed by many to have been intentionally set, destroyed the hall within an hour, along with all shire records and library books. The estimated value of the hall was £3,000, and luckily it was fully insured.

1934

The Second Public Hall and Shire Office

Barely three weeks after the devastating fire of 1933, the hall's trustees organized a public meeting to discuss the construction of a new building. During this meeting, a proposal to solicit competitive plans for the new structure was adopted. Chairman Cr. Sambell suggested acquiring a new site, which sparked opposition, as many believed the existing site offered ample space for a larger building. Despite resistance, Cr. Sambell's vision prevailed, leading to the purchase of a new site on the east side of Main Street, now Thompson Avenue, where the new Shire Hall opened in December 1934.



This second Shire Hall was a box-like building spanning three levels with sub-floor, main floor and first floor, and had street-facing windows featuring an entrance in the middle of the building. The library, initially situated on the first floor, was later relocated downstairs. The spacious Council Chambers which were described as commodious, originally occupied the main floor

Within the building, there was also a ballroom accommodating up to 200 people and a picture theatre. The front right-hand side of the building displayed a Notice Board promoting upcoming films. The Cowes Law Court was also housed in this building.



A sudden collapse of the back wall on May 9, 1968, exposed the cinema to daylight, necessitating repairs costing \$1,500. A new Shire Offices building was then built in 1978 and this second Shire Hall building continued to be used as a library and cinema until it was eventually demolished in 1985.



1978

The Third Public Hall and Shire Office



The Cowes Civic Centre and Shire Offices, inaugurated on December 1, 1978, graced the corner of Church Street and Thompson Avenue. This development featured an auditorium and meeting rooms. In 1985, the adjacent Heritage Centre was constructed, housing the library and the Historical Society.

Upon the opening of the Heritage Centre, the old Shire Hall was demolished.

With the Shire amalgamations of 1994, which saw the end of the Phillip Island Shire as it was merged into the Bass Coast Shire, the Shire operations moved to Wonthaggi. Consequently, the Cowes Civic Centre and Shire Offices underwent alterations, reducing the number of offices and expanding the size of the hall and auditorium.

2023

Fourth Public Hall and Cultural Centre, *Berninneit*

This third public hall and Shire offices met its demise in early 2020 to pave the way for the construction of the new Cowes Cultural Centre, later named *Berninneit*, - our fourth Public Hall, which opened its doors to the public on November 2, 2023, at a cost of \$31 million. This magnificent development offers a state of the art theatre and cinema catering for 250 patrons, a conference centre able to accommodate up to 400 dinner guests, a superb public library, gallery spaces and an outstanding local history museum. In addition to offices and research facilities for the historical society.

