

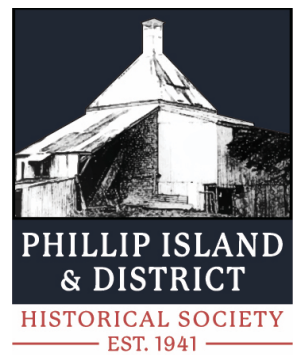
Phillip Island District Historical Society Inc.

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President: Doug Waugh

Secretary: Pamela Rothfield



## October 2024 Newsletter



October is History Month (isn't every month?) and we are thrilled to invite our members to the opening of our very first exhibition since our Museum's launch in November last year.

Our first exhibition celebrates the 150th anniversaries of both Cowes State School and San Remo State School. We've delved into the history of these beloved institutions and would love for all our members to join us for the presentations, a display of memorabilia, and a delightful afternoon tea.

**When:** Friday 18th October at 3pm at the Phillip Island Museum at Berninnet.

In this edition of our newsletter, we've included a history of San Remo State School to coincide with our first exhibition, highlighting its trials and triumphs over the years. A special thanks to Gail Cleeland (née Bagley) for sharing some wonderful stories from her time as a pupil at the school. Don't miss this opportunity to connect with a piece of our local heritage! The displays will be showcased for the next three months, giving all our members ample time to visit and explore the history and memorabilia on display.

### AGM



In September, our Society held its Annual General Meeting, which saw an excellent turnout from our members. The resolution for the Constitutional amendments was unanimously approved, and we're pleased to announce the appointment of the 2025 Management Committee, including two new members, Anne Maree Ferrari and Helen Smith and we thank retiring members Cheryl Overton and Julie Box for their dedicated service to the Society.

Following the meeting, our guest speaker, Barney Meyers, took us on a fascinating journey through time, from 1838 to the 21st century, via his impressive online

platform, *Hidden Melbourne*. Barney was keen to share the link to his website, where members can explore various time-travel locations. The site features a collection of interactive photographic panoramas of Melbourne, including Samuel Jackson's 1841 panoramic sketch and Walter Woodbury's 1855 photographic panorama taken from the tower of the first gasworks. Woodbury's exceptional work was even recognized with a medal at the 1854 Victorian Exhibition in Melbourne. I know there are many members who are eager to enjoying a tour of his incredible work in the comfort of their own homes:

<https://www.hiddenmelbourne.com.au/time-travel/>

We extend our sincere thanks to Barney for his insightful and informative presentation and for the significant work he continues to do, which brings great benefit to the community. We truly appreciate the time and effort he dedicated to sharing his knowledge with us.

## AMaGA Awards



Last month, we were delighted to attend the Victorian Museums and Galleries Awards presentation, where the Phillip Island & District Historical Society Museum was named as one of the five finalists in the best Small Museum category. Although we didn't take home the trophy (RMIT did), we are thrilled to have reached this stage among such distinguished company. The five

finalists were:

- City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection
- Glenelg Shire Council (Portland Maritime Museum)
- Phillip Island Historical Society Museum
- RMIT Culture / RMIT University
- Yarra Ranges Regional Museum

## More Activities this month: Heritage Snapshots – A Festival of 15-Minute Insights

In addition to our exhibition celebrating 150 years of State School education as mentioned above, we're excited to let members know about a special event on **25th October at the Museum: *Heritage Snapshots – A Festival of 15-Minute Insights***, featuring nine speakers, each speaking for no more than 15 minutes. Running from 10am to 12:30pm, with a break for morning tea, the morning promises to deliver a mix of fast and fascinating facts, fun, and even perhaps a touch of fantasy. Titles and presenters are as follows:

**1. *Farming and Family: Anne's Island Journey* - Anne Davie**

Join Anne as she shares her heartfelt journey of farming, family life, and the deep connection to the land on Phillip Island

**2. *Fox Tales* - Russell Cleeland**

Explore the captivating story of how Phillip Island tackled the challenge of fox eradication and its impact on local wildlife and ecosystems

**3. *From Vision to Reality: The Vietnam Veterans Museum* - Phil Dressing**

Discover the inspiring journey of how the National Vietnam Veterans Museum was envisioned and brought to life to honour the sacrifices of veterans.

**4. *Threads of Time, a Wedding at St. John's* - Elly Berryman**

Experience the heartfelt story of a wedding at St. John's Church almost three quarter of a century ago, weaving together memories and traditions that celebrate love through the ages.

**5. *History Delivered: Phillip Island's Postal Journey* - Bruce Procter**

Uncover the rich history of Phillip Island's post offices and the vital role they played in connecting the community through the years.

**6. *Whispers from the Past: Stories Beneath the Island's Graves* - Pam Rothfield**

Delve into the lives and tragedies of those who came before us with the intriguing tales and secrets buried beneath Phillip Island's graves.

**7. *A Letter from the Top: Gratitude from the Prime Minister* - Doug Waugh**

What prompted the Prime Minister to write a letter in 1925 to an island resident, and what significance did it hold.

**8. *Brushstrokes of Nature: The Art and Legacy of Euphemia Henderson* - Maureen Matthews.**

Discover the artistic journey and enduring legacy of Euphemia Henderson (sister-in-law to John McHaffie), whose brushstrokes captured the essence of nature.

**9. *Whispers of Ventnor's Ghost* - Julie Box**

Unravel the legend of the Island Ghost as three young men have multiple encounters with a mysterious white figure — could it be the spirit of a settler with unfinished business.

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## Berninneit's First Birthday celebrations

Berninneit is gearing up to celebrate its first birthday on November 1st. This wonderful space, created for the community, will host a week-long showcase of local arts. Bass Coast Shire Council is especially proud to feature the award-winning Offshore Theatre group, and is offering an exclusive preview of *My Sister Jill*, a brilliant production recently staged by the Melbourne Theatre Company.

*My Sister Jill* is Patricia Cornelius' latest play, with a semi-autobiographical storyline centred on Christine, who idolizes her father and is captivated by his wartime experiences—sentiments not shared by the rest of the family.

Tickets are available at a special birthday price of \$15, which includes a complimentary drink at the bar and celebratory nibbles. Don't miss out—get your tickets to Offshore Theatre's exclusive preview at the link below!

[1st Birthday Celebrations @Berninneit | BC Cultural Venues \(basscoastculturalvenues.com\)](https://basscoastculturalvenues.com)

**New Member** - We're delighted to welcome **Irene Naitoro** to our Historical Society and look forward to a long and rewarding association celebrating our local history together.

Enjoy and I hope to see you at one of our upcoming events.

Pamela Rothfield



**Offshore**  
THEATRE INC.

**MY SISTER JILL**  
Patricia Cornelius  
November 1  
\$15 with drink & nibbles



★★★★★  
"Award winning community theatre, presenting contemporary Australian drama."

# San Remo State School No. 1369: A Journey Through Time

Phillip Island & District Historical Society

By Pamela Rothfield, 2024

San Remo State School No. 1369 holds a significant place in the history of our region, being, along with



San Remo State School

Cowes State School, one of the oldest state schools in the shire, predating even the formation of the Shire of Phillip Island and Woolamai by ten months. Officially opening its doors in February 1874, the school welcomed its first students under the guidance of head teacher R. Deacon. This marked the beginning of a long-standing educational legacy in the community.

The story of San Remo's school actually begins in 1873, when H.E. Thompson, recognizing the need for local education, wrote to the Education Department. With the nearest school being Bass State School, a challenging 8-mile (13 km) trek away, Thompson proposed the establishment of a 'Vested School' in San

Remo to serve the growing population. [A 'Vested School' refers to a school that was established and operated by local communities or religious organizations, with some level of support or recognition from the government. These schools were often initially funded and managed by local groups, but over time, they could become 'vested' in the government, meaning they were taken over, maintained, and funded by the state.



San Remo main street c. 1900

Support for the school grew quickly. On April 16, 1873, Thomas Bergin, a local storekeeper, also penned a letter on behalf of San Remo's parents, urging the construction of a school. The letter, signed by twelve community members, represented 36 children, 24 of whom were of school age. Among the signatories were names like Bergin, Smith, Dwyer, and McLeod—families that were instrumental in shaping the town's early days.

To assess the situation, the Education Department promptly dispatched inspector Robert Craig. His report, dated April 24, 1873, painted a clear picture: San Remo and the surrounding area were home to, according to his calculations, 38 children, with some families living on Phillip Island, separated

from the mainland by water. Inspector Craig recommended a site for the school on a triangular piece of Crown Land, which he deemed ideal for its location and size.

Timothy Edmond McCarthy, from Fitzroy, who was a shareholder in the Western Port Coal Mining Co. operating in San Remo and Kilcunda, offered a partially finished structure (intended to be a public house and general store), to the Education Department for use as a school. However, after careful consideration, it was decided that a new school would be constructed on the Crown Land identified by Inspector Craig, and the school building would be perched on the hill above (east) of what is now the San Remo Police

Station, in the vicinity of the former Ports & Harbour building.

Robert Blakie was awarded the contract to build the school, which was a wooden structure measuring 30 by 18 feet. By February 10, 1874, the school was complete and ready to welcome its first students. Known initially as Griffith's Point State School and given the number 1369, it quickly became a focal point for the community.

The school's early years were not without challenges. Concerns were raised about a nearby mine shaft, leading the Department to suggest that it be filled in or fenced off. Despite these hurdles, the school thrived under the leadership of R. Deacon. In 1878, when Mr. Deacon was forced to find alternative living accommodations, he opted to sleep in the school building until additional rooms were added by the Department.

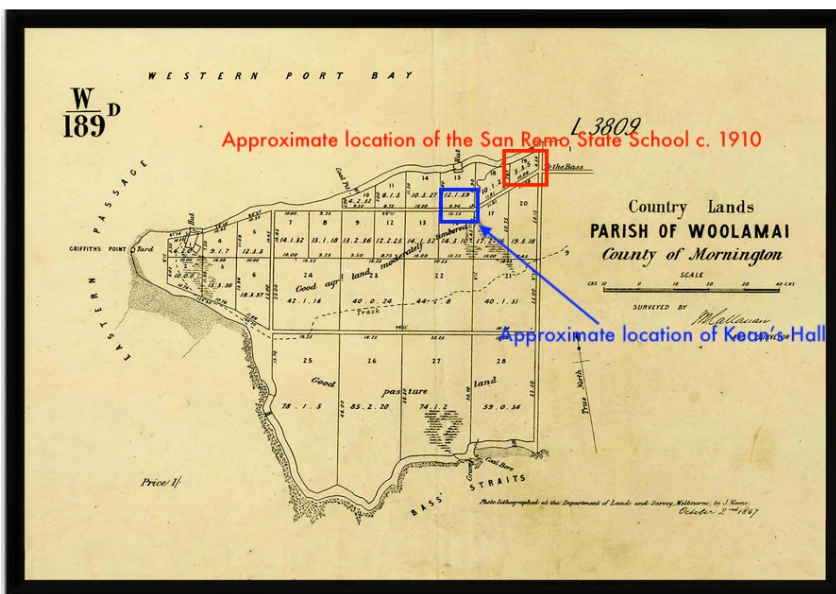
Over the years, the school's name evolved. Originally known as Griffith's Point State School, it was officially changed to San Remo State School on May 27, 1889, but retained the original number 1369. There were the dedicated teachers who shaped its early years, each leaving a lasting impact on the community.

In 1892, declining attendance led the Department to operate both San Remo and Newhaven State Schools on a half-time basis. The head teacher, who resided in San Remo, would teach in the morning before crossing the water to Newhaven for afternoon classes. This arrangement, while practical, placed a financial burden on the teacher, who had to pay 10 shillings per week in ferry fares.

Unfortunately, by 1893, San Remo State School closed, and its students were forced to find their way to Newhaven, across the channel. This situation caused considerable distress in the community, with even Captain Clark of the S.S. Genesta penning heated letters to the Department, though to no avail.

The years between 1893 and 1896 saw the school building built 20 years before by Mr Blakie, relocated and, at one point, an unsuccessful attempt by mainland residents at Bass to purchase it.

In 1896, a new chapter began when a school was re-established in San Remo, this time in the shire hall, which was located in the same approximate areas as the original school building. The Education Department paid rent to the council for the use of the hall until 1918 when the council decided to sell it.



The Department promptly made an offer of £280 for the hall, which was eventually accepted after some negotiation, and the Shire Hall became the school building of the San Remo State School.

In 1946, plans were made to relocate the school building to its present site. However, as the building was being moved, it famously fell off the truck right in front of the post office and was completely destroyed. Some say this "accident" wasn't entirely unintended, as there were those who preferred a brand-new school building.

In the aftermath, from 1946 to 1948, classes were temporarily held in Kean's Hall, located where the car-wash stands today, with Ted Sparks serving as the teacher.

In the 1940s, headmaster Ted Sparks was known for his no-nonsense approach to discipline, but he faced a real challenge when his own daughter found herself in a spat with another girl at school. After enduring one too many rounds of their bickering, Mr. Sparks decided it was time for some unconventional conflict

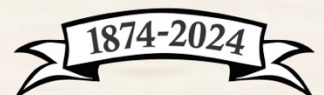
resolution. With a twinkle in his eye, he handed each girl a pair of boxing gloves and suggested they step outside to settle their differences the old-fashioned way! Needless to say, this sort of "solution" would raise more than a few eyebrows today!

By 1950, a new school building was finally delivered. The site was further expanded with an additional building from the Ryanston State School, which had recently been closed.



Kean's Hall, as it was fondly known, wasn't just a classroom for the local school children—its site became something of a treasure trove after its removal in the mid-1950s. The vacant lot where it once stood burst into a sea of jonquils in late winter, and many children fondly remember picking those fragrant flowers and selling them door to door around San Remo to earn a bit of pocket money. Of course, they knew exactly which doors would be the most welcoming!

Be sure to drop by the museum and take in our special exhibits at your convenience!



**Celebrating  
150 years  
of State Education  
on Phillip Island  
and  
San Remo**

**Exhibition starts  
on 18th October  
at 3pm  
Phillip Island Museum  
Berninnet**

**Newsletter written and edited by Pamela Rothfield  
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[www.phillipislandhistory.org.au](http://www.phillipislandhistory.org.au)

**Don't forget to share our Facebook page:  
<https://www.facebook.com/pidhs>**

# Heritage Snapshots

## A Festival of 15-Minute Snapshots

Join us in celebrating History month for a series of captivating 15-minute stories that bring our local history to life!

Immerse yourself in engaging tales, each enhanced by a visual presentation of intriguing images. These short, dynamic talks will transport you to different eras and showcase the rich tapestry of our island heritage.

Don't miss this chance to explore the stories that shaped our community. See you there!

### SUBJECTS - PRESENTER

Farming and Family: Anne's Island Journey - Anne Davie

Fox Tales - Russell Cleeland

From Vision to Reality: The Vietnam Veterans Museum - Phil Dressing

Threads of Time, A Wedding at St. John's - Elly Berryman

History Delivered: Phillip Island's Postal Journey - Bruce Procter

Whispers from the past: Stories Beneath the Island's Graves - Pam Rothfield

A Letter from the Top: Gratitude from the Prime Minister - Doug Waugh

Brushstrokes of Nature: The Art and Legacy of Euphemia Henderson - Maureen Matthews

Whispers of Ventnor's Ghost - Julie Box



Please book via  
[myli.au/events](https://myli.au/events)

Phillip Island Library  
Friday 25th October  
10:00am - 12:30pm