

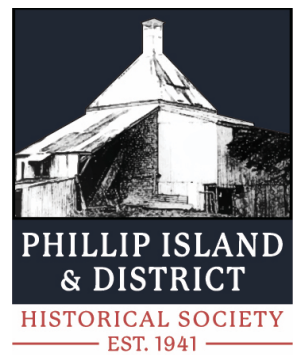
Phillip Island District Historical Society Inc.

Office: 0466 049 755

www.phillipislandhistory.org.au

President: Doug Waugh

Secretary: Pamela Rothfield



## November 2024 Newsletter

It's hard to believe, but this month marks one year since we opened the doors to our museum at Berninnet. Reflecting on all that has happened in these 12 months, it's truly remarkable to see what we've achieved together. From exhibitions and community events to preserving and sharing our island's rich history, the past year has been nothing short of extraordinary. It's a testament to the dedication of our members, volunteers, and supporters.

October was an especially busy and exciting month for us. A major highlight was the installation of our latest exhibition, (right) celebrating the 150th anniversaries of Cowes State School and San Remo State School. This milestone exhibition featured a new large video screen running the history of both schools alongside photographs and memorabilia from Cowes State School. We were thrilled to have the exhibition officially opened by former Principal Peter Paul and current Principal Rod McKenzie, who joined us in marking this special occasion.



Above - Latest exhibition in our museum

In addition, in celebration of October being History Month, we presented our **Heritage Snapshot Festival**, an event featuring eight fascinating presentations that were both informative and engaging. The festival was very well attended (picture below), and the feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive.



One highlight of the festival was our President, Doug Waugh, presenting "A Letter from the Top - Gratitude from the Prime Minister," offering a unique glimpse into a piece of our island's history (summary included in this newsletter). Anne Davie's heartfelt presentation on farming and

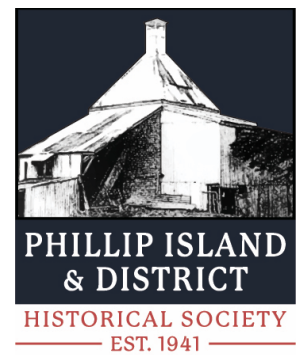
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family life on Phillip Island resonated with the audience, showcasing the rich connections between the land and its people. We extend a big thank you to Russell Cleeland for his captivating account of the eradication of foxes on the island, an achievement we often take for granted. Elly Berryman's nostalgic presentation on a wedding at St. John's Church 75 years ago, complete with the original wedding gown and gifts, delighted the audience. Phil Dressing inspired us with the story of the Vietnam Veterans Museum's development, while Bruce Proctor delivered an insightful postal journey through Phillip Island's history.

The success and enthusiasm around the Heritage Snapshot Festival suggest it may well become a regular feature on our annual calendar—something we can all look forward to!



The Society is delighted to announce the return of our third annual **Gathering of Neighbours**, taking place on Sunday, January 26, at Rhyll Hall and Park. Festivities will begin at 11am, bringing the community together for a day of reflection, respect, and celebration this Australia Day.

This delightful family event promises something for everyone. Enjoy live music, entertaining activities for the kids, food vans, and a complimentary sausage sizzle. For the adults, the Society will also be operating a bar stocked with a selection of wines and beer, adding to the festive atmosphere.

Rhyll Park will come alive with the spirit of community and camaraderie, creating a memorable experience for all. We invite you to join us for this perfect blend of fun and reflection—mark your calendars and be part of the celebration!



Join us for an unforgettable **Christmas dinner** at the historic St. Philip's Parish Hall on Friday 6th December at 6:30pm! This year, we're delighted to feature a festive feast crafted by Phillip Island's renowned chef, Jayne Messendorf. Alongside a delicious meal, we'll be inspired by guest speaker Stephen Davie, who will share his journey with Growing Cambodia, an organization devoted to uplifting rural Cambodian communities through education and health initiatives. The cost is \$50 and

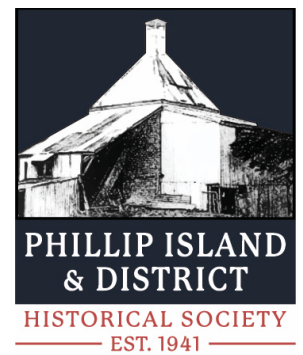
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there is limited capacity - so don't miss this wonderful evening of great food, warm company, and a chance to learn about a cause that's making a world of difference. We hope to see you there!

## **The Power of Online Engagement: How You Can Help Us Grow**

In today's digital world, a strong online presence is essential for connecting with the community and sharing our love for local history. The Phillip Island & District Historical Society is proud to have an excellent website ([www.phillipislandhistory.org.au](http://www.phillipislandhistory.org.au)), an informative Facebook page, (<https://www.facebook.com/pidhs>) and an interesting YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@PhillipIslandHistoricalSociety>). These platforms allow us to share fascinating stories, updates, and events—but we need your help to bring them to life.

Currently, our online channels receive very little traffic. This limits our ability to reach new audiences, showcase our projects, and advocate for the preservation of Phillip Island's history. Imagine the impact we could have if every one of our members clicked "Follow" on our Facebook page and "Subscribe" to our YouTube channel. With your support, we could not only grow our audience but also strengthen our voice in the wider community.

Engagement is key. Every like, comment, and share helps us connect with more people who care about our island's heritage. A larger online community means we can roll out an effective engagement strategy, attract new members, and demonstrate the Society's value to funders and decision-makers.

So, we're asking for a small favour that can make a big difference. Please take a moment to visit our Facebook page and YouTube channel. Click **Follow**, **Subscribe**, and engage with our posts when you can. Your clicks are more than just actions—they're steps toward preserving and sharing the history we all treasure.



A big welcome to **Christine Pascoe, Desley Smith, Russell Cleland** and **Elizabeth Davie** to our Society.

Enjoy

Pamela Rothfield

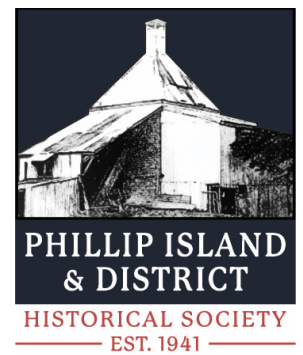
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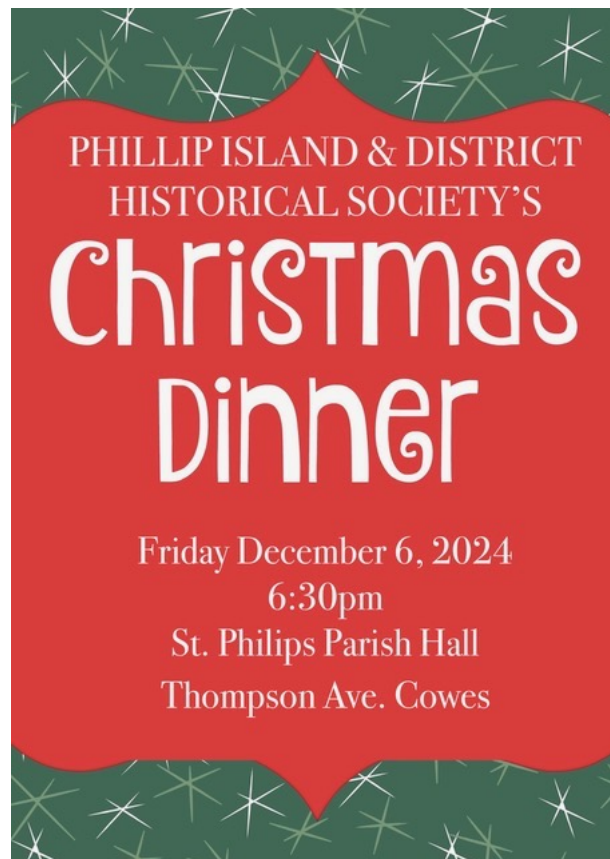
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Don't miss out on our Christmas Dinner!



This year the Phillip Island & District Historical Society Christmas dinner will again take place at the St. Philip's Parish Hall, Thompson Avenue Cowes on Friday December 6, 2024 at 6:30pm. Cost of the dinner is \$50 and its BYO. **Bookings are essential.**

Bookings: <https://www.trybooking.com/events/landing/1319118>

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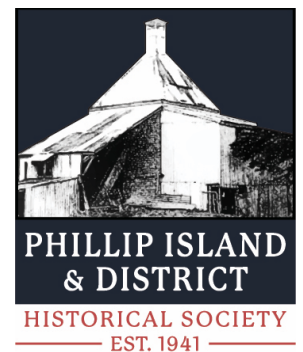
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## Why Your Membership Matters: Help Preserve Phillip Island's Rich History

Did you know that the Phillip Island & District Historical Society relies almost entirely on the support of its members to continue its important work? For just \$30 a year—that's only 57 cents per week — we

help preserve and protect the stories, artefacts, and sites that make our island unique.

Phillip Island is home to over 10,000 permanent residents, many of whom are descendants of the pioneering families who braved primitive conditions to establish their lives here. Their resilience and determination shaped the island's character, and their legacies are woven into the fabric of our history. Beyond these families, countless others share a passion for the rich heritage of this special place, from its first European settlements to its most recent milestones.

But preserving this history isn't something we can do alone. A stronger membership base gives the Historical Society a greater voice in advocating for the protection of our historic sites and securing funding to care for our priceless collection of artefacts, photographs, and documents. With your support, we can continue to tell the stories of the island's past, ensuring they remain accessible for generations to come.

Joining the Historical Society isn't just a subscription; it's a commitment to keeping Phillip Island's history alive. Together, we can honour the past, protect its treasures, and ensure its lessons inspire the future.

Do you know someone who would like to become part of this vital effort. Every membership strengthens our ability to preserve the essence of Phillip Island. Let's make sure the voices of our past are never lost — encourage others to join us today!

**Newsletter written and edited by Pamela Rothfield**

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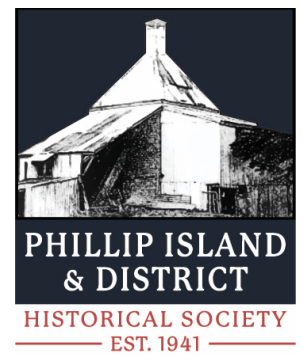
**Don't forget to share our Facebook page:**

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

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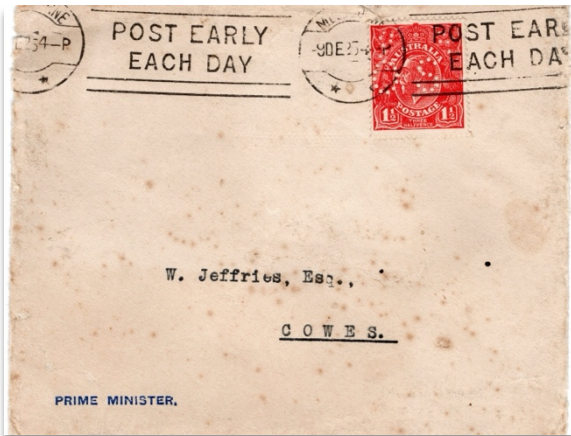
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## A Letter from the Top: Gratitude from the Prime Minister

Presented by Doug Waugh

Cataloguing at the Historical Society is a bit like treasure hunting. Most days, it's about methodically recording and describing donations, assigning registration numbers, and cross-referencing items so future historians can uncover their stories. But every now and then, we strike gold—an item that seems to pulse with history, begging to be explored.

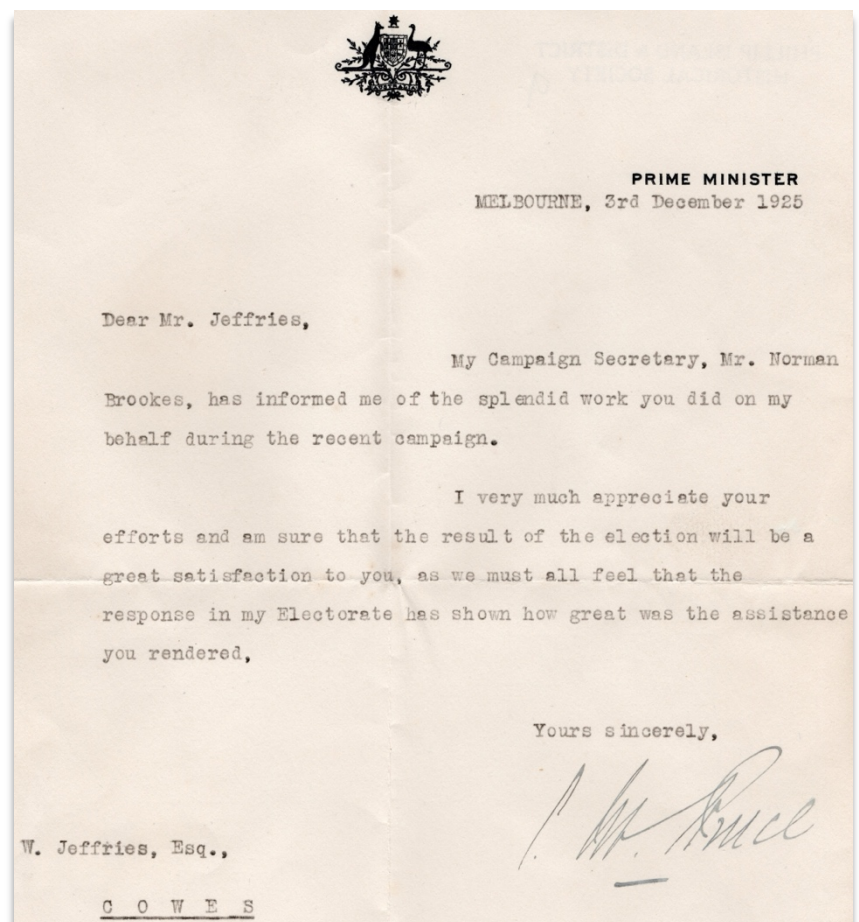


Recently, we found such a gem: an envelope addressed to Mr. W. Jeffries, Esq. (sic.) of Cowes.

The sender? None other than the Prime Minister of Australia at the time, Stanley Melbourne Bruce. Inside, a typewritten letter, dated December 3, 1925, offered thanks for 'splendid work' during Bruce's campaign. The

letter is pristine — light brown with age, neatly folded — and signed in the flowing hand of the Prime Minister himself.

It's a fascinating find, but the question arises: Is this letter just a 'trophy,' or does it hold real significance for Phillip Island's history? To answer that, we need to dive into its context and the stories of the men behind it.



## The Players: Bruce, Brookes, and Jeffrey



**Hon. Stanley M. Bruce, P.M.**

Stanley Melbourne Bruce, Australia's eighth Prime Minister, was a man of contrasts. Born into privilege in 1883, Bruce's family fortunes were shaken during the economic depression of the late 1800s, but his resilience saw him study at Cambridge in London and revive the family's fortune. After enlisting in the British Army during World War I, he returned to Australia a decorated hero, ready to embark on a political career that would make history.

Bruce was Australia's first modern Prime Minister — facing compulsory voting (introduced in 1924) and preferential voting (from 1918). Known for his 'Englishness' which both charmed and irked Australians, Bruce was the first PM unconnected to Australia's pre-Federation colonial governments.



**Norman Brookes**

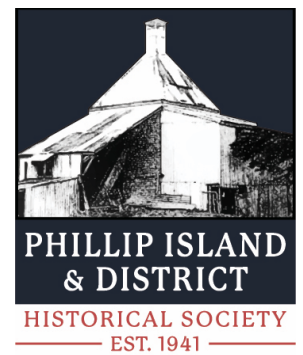
Helping him win the 1925 election was his campaign manager, Norman Everard Brookes — a sporting legend and tennis trailblazer (later Sir Norman Brookes). The first non-Briton to win Wimbledon, Brookes was as admired in the boardroom as he was on the court. By 1925, his tennis career was winding down, but his political and social connections made him an invaluable ally for Bruce.

And then, we come to Phillip Island's own William James Jeffrey. A farmer from Ventnor, Jeffrey was known for his impressive estate, Ventnor Park, and his forward-thinking role in local tourism.

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Arriving on the island in 1914 with his brother Robert, Jeffrey transformed their 1600-acre farm into a model of productivity, cultivating chicory, lucerne, and more while running hundreds of sheep and cattle. But he wasn't just about agriculture —Jeffrey was also a director of the Continental Guest House, which opened in 1923, marking the early stirrings of Phillip Island as a tourism destination.

**left: William Jeffrey (inset) with the Ventnor Football Team**

## Phillip Island in the Roaring Twenties

The 1920s were a time of transformation for Phillip Island. The farms still dominated the landscape, but tourism was starting to blossom. Ferries plied the waters, guest houses welcomed city folk, and even the idea of a bridge to the mainland was gaining traction. Phillip Island might have been geographically isolated, but it was increasingly connected to the outside world.

This letter captures a moment when those connections were tangible. The Prime Minister thanking a local farmer for his efforts in a federal campaign shows just how intertwined the island had become with national events. It's also a reminder that politics, even at its loftiest levels, is personal. Bruce's letter to Jeffries is formal, even stiff—his campaign manager, Norman Brookes, gets more praise than Jeffries—but its very existence ties Phillip Island to the wider story of Australia in the 1920s.

## Why It Matters

So, is this letter a 'trophy' or a historical artifact? The answer lies in its local connection. If this were a letter from Winston Churchill to an Australian PM, it would be fascinating but irrelevant to Phillip Island's story. But a letter to William Jeffrey, written during a transformative decade for the island, is a snapshot of our history.

The 1920s weren't just “roaring” for city folk. On Phillip Island, they marked the dawn of a new era. Farming may have been the “cake,” but tourism was becoming the “icing.” The letter reminds us that while Phillip Island is an island, it's never been insular. Connections to the mainland—and beyond—shaped its evolution into the vibrant community we know today.

So, to our 1925 island, we say: “Get ready. Big things are coming.” And this letter is a perfect window into a community on the cusp of change. •