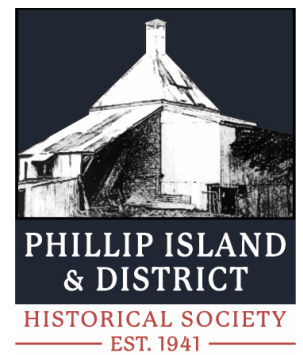


Phillip Island District Historical Society Inc.

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www.phillipislandhistory.org.au

President: Doug Waugh
Secretary: Pamela Rothfield



Welcome to our June newsletter and the start of winter!



Australian and New Zealand Council for fire and emergency services -- Seasonal Bushfire Outlook for winter 2025

As we head into what is forecasted to be an unseasonably warm winter period, after experiencing an unseasonably dry Autumn, we are reminded of the ever-changing nature of our environment. While the weather may be unusual, it gives us the perfect opportunity to embrace the season's quiet beauty and take a moment to reflect on the passing of time - and pray for rain!

In this edition we also reflect the recent death of one of our most esteemed members, John Jansson. A life member of the Society and former President, John's contribution to preserving the history of Phillip Island will never be forgotten. His passion and dedication to our

cause have left an indelible mark on the Society, and we will always remember his legacy. In this edition, we have included the eulogy for John, as a tribute to his remarkable life and service.

This month we celebrate the imminent opening of the new Phillip Island Hospital with a nod to the first hospital on Phillip Island, the beloved Warley Hospital. Over the course of the next month, we will be displaying an assortment of memorabilia, artefacts and stories from Warley Hospital days in our Museum to mark the occasion.

Don't forget that our next general meeting will be held on **Thursday, June 19th, at 12 noon at the Phillip Island RSL**. We are delighted to welcome Mary Whelan, a former clinical physiotherapist and current board member of Bass Coast Health, as our guest speaker. In addition to her impressive career in healthcare, Mary is also a valued members of the Heritage Committee of the Phillip Island Golf Club and a talented banjo player and enjoys a round of golf in her spare time. She will be sharing her insights as she reflects on a century of healthcare on the Island.

Other news:

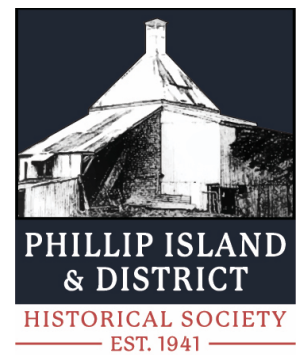
Update on our Chicory Kilns Condition Review. We've encountered a slight setback in the condition report for the remaining 21 historic chicory kilns on the island, as the original consultant had to withdraw due to personal issues. However, we are currently in discussions with a highly regarded heritage architectural consultants, who are considering taking on the project on a 75% pro bono basis.



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We are hopeful that this partnership will move forward, allowing us to continue our efforts to preserve these important historical structures.



We have applied to the Bendigo Bank for a grant to support the purchase of two new laptops, which will assist us in cataloguing and uploading images from our collection to Victorian Collections. With over 3,000 images already uploaded, we still have many more to

go—making this an ongoing project that will continue for years to come.

If you're interested in seeing our cataloguers in action, feel free to visit them on a Wednesday as they work diligently in our research room on the first floor at Berninnet. To arrange a visit, please contact Judy Gittus at j.gittus43@gmail.com to schedule a convenient time.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

We are thrilled to welcome five new members to our Society, and we look forward to sharing our passion for local history with them as we continue to preserve and celebrate the stories of our past. A special welcome to John Buttrose, who is joining our committee to fill a vacant position. John brings with him a wealth of historical knowledge and valuable experience

as the leader of Phillip Island's philosophical discussion group. His expertise and fresh perspective will be a great asset to the Society as we move forward in our mission.

We also extend warm welcomes to Patricia Hodges, who joined the Society last month, and to Eric and Marylu Burt, no strangers to our community and wonderful supporters of the Bass Coast Branch of the National Trust. Additionally, we are pleased to welcome Catherine Wade, a qualified librarian with an extensive skill set in archiving. Catherine's experience with the National Vietnam Veterans Museum will be invaluable to our Society.

Welcome to all, and we look forward to building strong working relationships as we continue to celebrate and protect our local history.

Pamela Rothfield
Secretary



MEETING NOTICE!

Our next General Meeting will take place at the Phillip Island RSL on **Thursday 19th June at 12 noon**. Lunch can be ordered individually at the Bistro servery and the meeting will follow in the ANZAC Room. 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.

Vále John Jansson

1.9.1948 - 25.5.2025



To most residents of Phillip Island—and especially those from the village of Rhyll—the name John Jansson is synonymous with local history, and in particular, our rich maritime past. But to reduce John to just a historian, even an exceptional one, is to miss the full measure of the man.

John was born at Warley Hospital in Cowes on the 1st of September 1948, into one of Phillip Island's long-established families, descended from a proud line of mariners. His parents, Helen and Frank Jansson, instilled in him a deep connection to the sea and love of island life and community service. John had one sibling—his beloved younger brother, Raymond — who remained close to him throughout his life. John's early schooling was at Cowes State School when it was still in Thompson Avenue—on the site where the Cultural Centre stands today. A lifelong friendship with Trevor

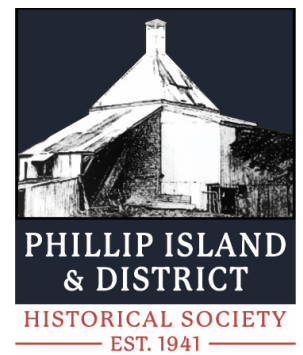
Ware began at those early school desks, and no doubt many of the traits we came to know and love in John—his quiet curiosity, deep intellect, and understated charm—began to take shape there too. Their teacher at the time remarked that the pairing of one quiet, reserved boy with another exuberant and outgoing one might balance them both—and it turned out to be true. The depth of their friendship was perhaps best illustrated in the story Trevor recalls of the early days of starting the supermarket where IGA now stands. “We were really struggling,” he said. “We’d exhausted every possible avenue to raise capital, but we were still short. Then one day, without being asked, John quietly turned up and offered us a loan to cover the shortfall. Thanks to that generous gesture, we were able to open the doors—and we never looked back.”

But, Trevor adds with a laugh, “Don’t worry—he got his own back. When he was building his cottage, he roped me in to dig the footings. They were so deep and solid, you could’ve put up a multi-storey building—not just a modest mudbrick house!

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John went on to Wonthaggi Technical School, where a teacher was once asked if he had ever taught a genius. “Not quite,” the teacher replied, “but the closest was a fellow named John Jansson.” It came as no surprise — John was awarded Dux **every** year he attended the school. For those of us who knew him, the title ‘genius’ may not have seemed to fit at first. He wore his intelligence lightly. You wouldn’t know it from his modesty. But if someone in a conversation happened to get their facts wrong, John would simply smile—never correcting, unless asked—and then he’d quietly offer the truth, always gently, always without ego.

After finishing at Wonthaggi Technical School, John began his studies at Swinburne. He would often travel to Melbourne with a friend Peter Marotto, and was happy to report to his mother, Helen, that they were making excellent time — cruising along at 100 miles per hour. Helen, unsurprisingly, was less enthusiastic and put in a firm request that they ease off the accelerator. John later reassured her that they’d agreed to slow down... to a more reasonable 80 miles per hour. After Swinburne, he went on to graduate from Melbourne University in 1971 with a degree in Civil Engineering. During his studies he worked part-time for the Shire of Dandenong, and after a brief stint at a tin mine in Ardlethan, New South Wales, John returned to Phillip Island. The outback could never hold him the way the Island did.

He was back on the Island by 1972, first working as a civil engineer with the Shire of Bass for a year, and then Phillip Island Shire, before going out on his own as a consultant engineer—a role he continued until his retirement. John’s work left its mark on countless projects, including the Phillip Island Grand Prix Circuit.

While John was not widely known for his sporting prowess, he had his fair share of ventures into physical pursuits. In his younger days, he was a familiar figure swimming in the Rhyll Channel—often daily and even in the depths of winter, undeterred by the cold. At Wonthaggi Tech School, he gave golf a go—though, by his own admission, it was simply the best option among a compulsory lineup of sports he found less appealing. He took up karate during his university years and showed real aptitude for it. But perhaps his proudest sporting affiliation was with Keith Dunstan’s Anti-Football League, of which he was a card-carrying member —wearing his medallion with quiet satisfaction, a playful badge of honour for a man who always walked his own path.

John had a fondness for fine machinery, and his love of speed revealed itself early—most notably on those fast-paced runs to and from university with his friend Peter. That early thrill evolved into a lifelong love affair with Alfa Romeos, beginning just after Uni with a red 1968 model. He once confessed to reaching 160 kilometres per hour on the Rhyll–Newhaven Road in his beloved Alfa — purely for research, of course. Yet for all that, he selected a more sedate Volvo as his daily driving machine — true to the measured, thoughtful man he was.

But John’s true passion—his life’s calling—was history. Long before it became fashionable to preserve the past, John understood its value. In his twenties, when most young men chased parties and novelty, John was quietly capturing the disappearing corners of Phillip Island with his camera. He

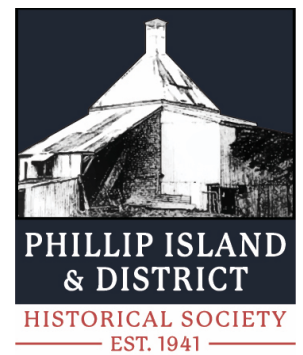
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photographed historic homes, old ferries, weathered buildings—preserving stories before they were lost to time. This legacy of images, along with his remarkable collection of maritime artefacts, stands as a priceless gift to future generations.

Beyond the Island, John loved to travel. He especially enjoyed the Wooden Boat Festival in Hobart and many adventures including in the more remote areas of Australia, shared with Marion, his longtime companion and fellow explorer.

John's devotion to community was unmatched. His list of memberships and contributions reads like a who's who of the Island's organisations: the old Penguin Reserve Board, Young Farmers, the old Water Board, Jaycees, Landcare, Conservation Society, Friends of the Golden Cypress, Rhyll Hall and Parks Committee and Life Member of the National Trust, — and of course, the Rhyll Yacht Club and the Phillip Island Historical Society and Genealogical Society. He also received a Paul Harris Award from the Rotary Club of Phillip Island and San Remo, a fitting recognition of a lifetime of community service.

And then there were the boats. After purchasing the historic goods shed on the Rhyll foreshore from Charlie Richardson in 1975, John made his long-held dream of boatbuilding a reality. His first creation, the *Swan*, was just the beginning — one of many new builds and careful restorations that brought history back to life on the water.

John was also a passionate researcher and author, contributing to several notable publications on both maritime and local history. Of all his works, he was particularly proud of *First Home*, the magnificent book on the iconic Couta Boat. While his historical insights were invaluable, it was the meticulous rigging diagrams that truly bore his personal stamp—drawings informed by a skill he began honing as a teenager, building and rigging model boats. That quiet obsession never left him; he completed his final model boat just two years ago. Another major achievement was his painstaking compilation, over 15 years, of every recorded shipping movement in Western Port since records began—an extraordinary body of work that will become an essential resource for future researchers. His thanks and acknowledgement go to Christine Grayden for her invaluable assistance in bringing this publication to life. Among his passion for research was genealogy. Over decades, John painstakingly traced not only his own family's lineage but also worked to produce a comprehensive Phillip Island family tree, reconnecting long-lost relatives and uncovering forgotten ties. Several of those distant cousins — discovered through John's research — are watching this service via livestream today, a testament to the enduring reach of his work.

John's expertise was also sought beyond the local community. Over a number of years, he played a quiet but important role in assisting marine archaeologists from Flinders University in locating and identifying shipwreck remains off the coast of Phillip Island. His deep knowledge of the local coastline, tides, and historical shipping routes proved invaluable in piecing together the stories of vessels long lost to the sea. It was yet another example of the way John's quiet dedication and detailed research made a lasting impact in the field of maritime history.

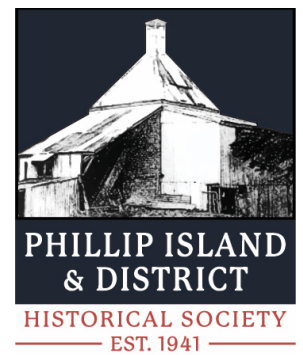
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Not content with just building boats, John also built his own home—a charming mudbrick cottage styled on late 19th-century architecture, complete with a lace-trimmed verandah and handcrafted sash windows, overlooking the 'Nits' at Rhyll. True to form, he followed every regulation, even leasing a portion of land from his parents to satisfy council requirements. Trevor Ware also recalls that one afternoon while working on John's mudbrick production, he urged John to speed up the work — insisting more mud bricks were needed — John, in a rare and uncharacteristic flash of cheekiness, looked up and told him with a smile, to “F... off.” It was so unexpected from someone as mild-mannered as John that they both laughed — and it became one of those treasured stories that perfectly captured their bond.

Due to local regulations which only permitted one kitchen per title, John never installed a kitchen in his mudbrick home. Instead, he simply walked across to his parents' house to cook, keeping life simple, yet deeply connected.

One of the lighter and yet adventurous chapters in John's later life was his involvement with a group affectionately known as *The Four Codgers*—which included John, along with Peter Lawrence, Bill Overton, and Frank Maiolo. Together, they set out to walk the entire perimeter of Phillip Island, not in a single push, but over many months, bit by bit, camera in hand and laughter close behind. The goal was to document the journey with photographs and shared stories, and while the Codgers didn't quite complete the full circuit—managing about 75% of the coastline—the real achievement was in the camaraderie, the joy, and the hilarity that accompanied every step. It was a project full of spirit, and John cherished both the adventure and the mateship it brought.

John Jansson was a man of quiet brilliance, boundless curiosity, and deep love for this island and its stories. He leaves behind a legacy not just of photographs, artefacts, and books, but of finely crafted boats—each one a reflection of his skill, patience, and respect for tradition. His life was a generous gift to his community, and his contributions will continue to ripple through generations to come.

To lose John Jansson feels, quite simply, like the end of an era. His depth of knowledge, quiet integrity, and lifelong dedication to Phillip Island leaves a space that cannot be filled — only honoured. And in a moment of quiet symbolism, on the very morning John left us, a 120-year-old pear tree — long standing like a sentry opposite the Rhyll foreshore — finally fell. As if the landscape itself was marking his departure. John's legacy will live on in the stories he preserved, the boats he built, and in the hearts of all who knew him.

Thank you, John, for everything.