

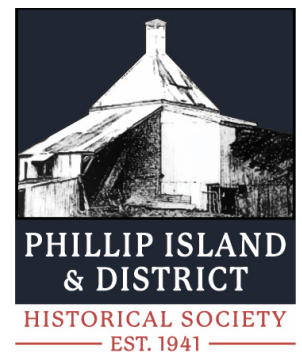
Phillip Island District Historical Society Inc.

Office: 0466 049 755

www.phillipislandhistory.org.au

President: Doug Waugh

Secretary: Pamela Rothfield



Welcome to our August Newsletter



W.E. Thompson (thought to be far left) at the opening of the Warley Bush Nursing Hospital in January 1924

We're delighted to invite all our members to visit the Museum and take in our latest exhibition—Warley Hospital: A Community Legacy. This display pays tribute to a much-loved institution that served Phillip Island for over a century. With the imminent opening of the new Phillip Island Community Hospital, the exhibition offers a timely opportunity to reflect on the remarkable evolution of healthcare on Phillip Island over the past 100 years. We're especially grateful to the Wonthaggi Historical Society for the generous loan of several key artefacts that help bring the story of Warley to life.

Looking ahead, please mark your calendars for our next General Meeting—also our **Annual General Meeting**—taking place at 12 noon on **Thursday, 11 September at the Phillip Island RSL**. We warmly encourage all members to attend.

We're especially pleased to announce that Gary Vines, Senior Archaeologist with Biosis, will be our guest speaker. With over 30 years of experience in heritage and archaeology, Gary is leading the charge on our Chicory Kiln Condition Review. He will be joined by Matt Deigan, a field archaeologist also involved in the project. Together, they'll offer fascinating insights into the work being done to assess and preserve these iconic structures. It promises to be an engaging and informative session—we hope to see you there!

We're also thrilled to report a tech upgrade for our cataloguing team, made possible through a generous grant from the Bendigo Bank. Two new laptops are now in use, supporting the vital task of documenting and preserving our ever-growing collection. If you've ever wondered what goes on behind the scenes—or would

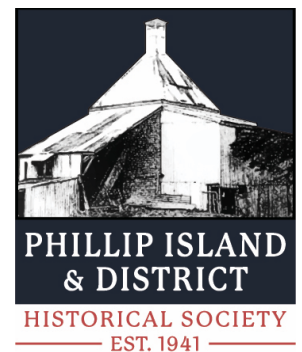
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like to lend a hand—please feel free to reach out to Judy Gittus at j.gittus43@gmail.com to arrange a visit. She'll be happy to introduce you to the process.

As always, it's a pleasure to welcome new members to our Society. This month, we're delighted to have Geoff Moed join our ranks. Geoff is certainly no stranger to the island, having founded A Maze'N Things over 30 years ago, developing the park into an extraordinarily successful attraction. We also extend a warm welcome to Marian and Ken Wallace, with Marian already proving to be a wonderful asset to our cataloguing team.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Finally, we've recently taken a moment to reflect on the wealth of talent among our 135 members. At our last Committee meeting, we spoke about the need for more hands to help with exhibition curation, research, writing, and other creative endeavours. If you've got a passion for local history - or simply a bit of time to spare - we'd love to hear from you.

August is Family History Month, and it's a timely reminder that family history and local history are inseparable - woven together in the stories of the people who helped shape our community. This month, we share the story of William E. and Lucy Thompson - a couple whose deep roots on Phillip Island were defined by a lifetime of extraordinary generosity.

I look forward to seeing many of our members at our AGM on Thursday 11th September.

Cheers

Pamela Rothfield

Secretary

Have You Ever Considered Joining the Committee?



Behind every exhibition, event, and newsletter is a small but passionate group of volunteers steering the Society and Museum forward. Our Committee plays a vital role—not only in preserving the past, but in shaping what comes next.

We meet just once a month, so the commitment is far from onerous. And it's not all about minutes and motions - it's about being part of something lively, creative, and genuinely rewarding. There's plenty of room for fun, fresh ideas, hands-on involvement, and yes, a good cuppa. Whether you're drawn to curating exhibitions, planning events, lending a hand behind the scenes, or simply sharing your ideas, your contribution can make a real difference.

We keep our meetings short, focused, and enjoyable - because we know no one loves a long meeting.

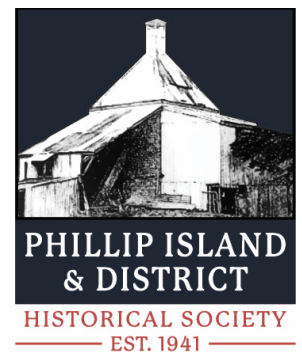
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Our members have a wealth of skills, experience, and imagination, and we'd love to harness that energy. If you've ever thought about getting more involved - or just want to dip a toe in - come and have a friendly chat. There's no pressure, just an open invitation to join a team that keeps the Society vibrant, relevant, and full of possibilities.

If you are interested, let's meet for a coffee: prothfield@gmail.com

National Trust Tree of the Year – What Would You Choose?



The National Trust has put out a call for nominations for its 2025 Tree of the Year, and we've found ourselves with a delightful dilemma. Which of Phillip Island's iconic trees should we put forward?

Do we nominate the magnificent Golden Cypress trees lining both sides of Thompson Avenue—planted over a century ago by schoolchildren and residents under the guidance of W.E. Thompson—or the equally impressive Moreton Bay Fig, whose roots (quite literally)

trace back to the famed botanist Ferdinand von Mueller?

Both trees are rich in history, beauty, and community significance—making the decision all the harder! Whichever tree we ultimately nominate, it's a wonderful opportunity to highlight and celebrate the living heritage in our own backyard.

We'll keep you posted—and if you have a favourite, we'd love to hear from you.

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Our AGM will take place at the Phillip Island RSL on Thursday 11th September at 12 noon. Lunch can be ordered individually at the Bistro servery and the meeting will follow on the Terrace. 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.

William E. and Lucy Thompson – Phillip Island's Super Citizens

By Pamela Rothfield



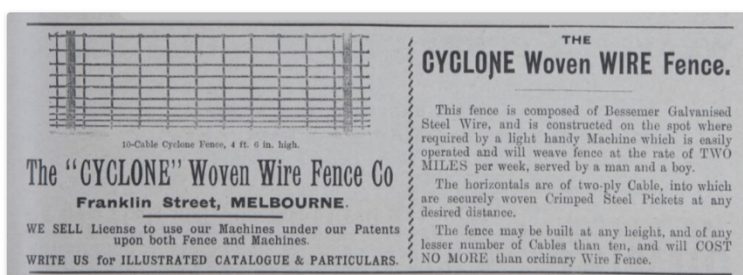
William E Thompson (right) with a group of school children planting Golden Cypress in the Main Street of Cowes.

When you arrive in Cowes, it's hard for anyone to miss the magnificent row of Golden Cypress trees that frame the town's main street. This beautiful, tree-lined entrance isn't just a striking feature of our town - it's a living legacy of William Eastwood Thompson and his wife Lucy, a couple whose generosity, vision, and commitment to Phillip Island left a legacy still felt more than a century later.

This month, August, is Family History Month, and fittingly, we turn our attention to William E. Thompson's remarkable story - a tale of entrepreneurial success, deep community spirit, and decades of quiet generosity.

Born in 1868 in Brighton, William was the son of James Thompson and Ruth Eastwood. His connection to Phillip Island began in 1889, when at the age of 21, he joined his father and friends on a shooting trip to help manage the island's hare population. That first visit sparked a lifelong bond with the island.

William was a founding director of the Cyclone Woven Wire Fence Company, a business he established in partnership with Leonard Chambers in the late 1890s. The company introduced woven wire fencing to Australia and quickly grew into a household name, producing everything from farm gates to suburban fences.



The Australian Pastoralists' Review, 15th May 1899 page XXXI

However, his business career began in a rather unexpected way - not with fences, but with bees. In the early 1890s, he and his business partner Leonard Chambers began manufacturing beekeepers' hives and accessories. They even imported and distributed queen bees in an effort to improve Australia's bee stock.

But a small ad in an American beekeeping journal would soon change everything.

Chambers spotted a manually operated machine that could weave wire fencing directly onto posts. Recognising the potential, they secured the Australian rights to the Cyclone woven wire fence from the United States and established the Cyclone Woven Wire Fence Company in 1898.

What began as a modest operation grew into one of Australia's most recognisable rural brands. Cyclone fencing became a staple across farms, towns, and even military installations during wartime - proof that big ideas can grow from the humblest beginnings.



The Melbourne Times and Rodney Advertiser (Heathcote, Vic), 20th February 1908 page 2.

By 1912, William had built a family home in Cowes - "Talofa", in Chapel Street - where he settled with his wife Lucy and daughters Lucy Ruth and Mary Ida (Molly). Both daughters would go on to marry into well-known island families (Sambell and Dixon), further entwining the Thompson family into the fabric of the community.

William and Lucy Thompson weren't just residents of Phillip Island - they were pillars of the community. Their contributions spanned nearly four decades, during which they supported virtually every corner of island life.

- In 1912, W.E. Thompson proposed planting trees along Cowes' main street. He personally supplied the Golden Cypress saplings and tree guards, and the community came together - schoolchildren, families, volunteers - to create what would

become one of the most iconic avenues in regional Victoria.

- In 1923, Lucy championed the need for local medical care, prompting William to purchase and gift a property, 'Buena Vista', in Warley Avenue to the local community to serve as a hospital, which it did for over 80 years.
- They supported the Cowes sports oval, the local school, the Red Cross, and even the electric power station in Cowes.
- They contributed to the erection of the Rhyll cairn and gave generously to the St John's Uniting Church, where they were known as a steady hand and quiet benefactors.

In 1928, Thompson was elected to the first council of the newly formed Shire of Phillip Island. Just three years later, his wife Lucy joined him on council - an unusual but welcome sight in the early 1930s.

Their public service didn't end there. The Thompsons were devout Presbyterians and, on several occasions, volunteered as missionaries in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) - spending up to six months at a time helping to build a manse and hospital in Vila. This commitment to global and local service was a hallmark of their shared life.

The business flourished despite the hardships of the Great Depression and two world wars, eventually becoming a publicly listed company in 1947. Thompson's role as a director kept him busy, but never too busy to give back.

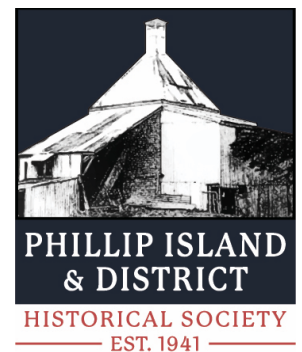
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In 1937, in one of the few public acknowledgements of William and Lucy's many acts of generosity, the community gathered to name the town's main street Thompson Avenue - a rare and heartfelt honour bestowed while the couple were still alive.

When William E. Thompson passed away in 1952 at the age of 84, he left an estate valued at over £164,000 (a substantial fortune at the time). His will directed funds to two hospitals and six religious missions, in keeping with the quiet, consistent generosity that had marked his entire life.

His obituary described him as someone whose "kindness to the community and needy people everywhere will never be fully known." The then - Shire President, Cr A. Jones, summed it up simply: *"We might well remember Mr W.E. Thompson as a super citizen. It is very unlikely we will see his like again."*

Each time we reflect on the legacy of the majestic cypress trees lining Thompson Avenue or the wonderful past warmth of Warley Hospital, we see echoes of William and Lucy Thompson's dedication to service, community spirit, and quiet generosity. Even today, William Thompson's generosity continues to make a difference. Through the William Eastwood Thompson Charitable Trust, his legacy lives on, with between \$100,000 and \$200,000 distributed annually to a range of charities. More than seventy years after his passing, the causes he cared about are still benefiting from his foresight and goodwill.

So, during this Family History Month, we honour William Eastwood Thompson and Lucy Thompson - not just as the name on a street sign, but as true super citizens whose story continues to shape Phillip Island today.

Membership Matters



Do you know someone who shares a love of Phillip Island's history? Every new member helps us protect, share, and celebrate the stories that make our community unique.

Invite a friend to join the Society—together, we can ensure our island's past is preserved for generations to come.

Newsletter written and edited by Pamela Rothfield

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