

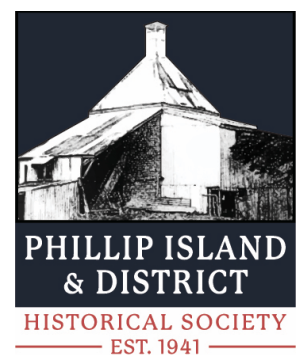
Phillip Island District Historical Society Inc.

Office: 0466 049 755

www.phillipislandhistory.org.au

President: Doug Waugh

Secretary: Pamela Rothfield



Welcome to our November Newsletter



It's hard to believe that more than a month has flown by since our September AGM. You'll find a short recap later in this edition, including President Doug's address, which - after some thought - he titled 'Beginnings'. Doug's talk encouraged us to think about the early days of settlement and

how customs and attitudes have changed over time, touching on everything from the accents of our forebears to the colours brides once chose for their wedding gowns.

We were also pleased to welcome field archaeologist Matt Deigan and Team Leader Luke Gunton from Biosis, who shared an update on our Chicory Kiln Project. Their presentation offered a fascinating glimpse into the progress so far, with the final report to be delivered by Gary Vines at our November Christmas break-up.

Our new committee was elected during the AGM, and you'll find the full list included in this newsletter. A reminder too that our Christmas/End of Year lunch will be held on Thursday 27 November at the RSL, commencing at 12 noon. Please RSVP to Judy Gittus (j.gittus43@gmail.com) so we can confirm numbers.

In other news, the Society has been working with Bass Coast Shire Council to explore the introduction of interpretive signage for historic landmarks. The first stage will focus on Cowes, with the hope that it will serve as a template for the wider Bass Coast Shire, allowing more of our significant places to be recognised and shared.

There's much to look forward to in 2026! We'll begin the year with our Gathering of Neighbours on Monday 26 January at Rhyll Hall and Park—a wonderful opportunity for our community to come together, enjoy good company, and celebrate the special place we call home. You'll find more details in the following pages.

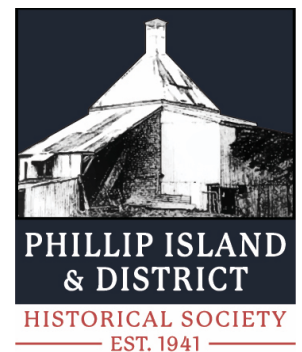
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In autumn, we'll take part in the National Trust's Heritage Festival from 18 April to 18 May, celebrating this year's theme, 'Change'. Our exhibition will explore how our island has evolved through time, pairing striking historical images with their modern-day counterparts - a thoughtful look at what has changed and what remains.

Enjoy

Pam Rothfield

Secretary

National Trust Tree of the Year



We're delighted to share that our magnificent avenue of golden cypress has been shortlisted by the National Trust as Victoria's Tree of the Year! Over the past month, we've been encouraging as many members of our community as possible to cast their votes for this glorious avenue, in the hope of securing the top honour.

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Gathering of Neighbours



The Society is eagerly looking forward to the return of our fourth annual Gathering of Neighbours, to be held on Monday 26 January at Rhyll Hall and Park. The festivities will begin at 11.30 am, bringing our community together for a day of reflection, respect, and celebration this Australia Day.

This much-loved family event offers something for everyone — live music, plenty of fun activities for the children, food vans, and a complimentary sausage sizzle. For the adults, the Society will be running a bar with a selection of local wines and beers to enjoy while soaking up the atmosphere.

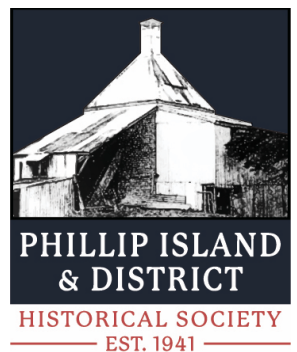
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Rhyll Park will once again come alive with the warmth of friendship and community spirit. We hope you'll join us for this perfect blend of fun and reflection — a day to celebrate our shared home and the people who make it special.

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.

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We are delighted to announce the **Management Committee** for 2025/2026

President: Doug Waugh

Vice President: Jason Cameron

Secretary: Pamela Rothfield

Treasurer: Judy Gittus

Committee Members: Anne Davie, Bruce Procter, Marian Wallace, John Buttrose

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Christmas /End of Year Lunch 2025

We have confirmed the date for our Christmas function this year.

The get together will take place on

Thursday 27th November at Phillip Island RSL

at 12pm

Please RSVP to Judy Gittus at: j.gittus43@gmail.com



‘Beginnings’ — An Address by President Doug Waugh

Doug began his talk by sharing that he had first thought to call the afternoon’s entertainment “Walkin’ with Old Stuff,” but after some reflection, decided on the more melodic title “Beginnings.” It was, he explained, a fitting way to explore the early days of life on the Island through the lens of the objects and documents preserved in our collection.

Doug invited us to think about how the people who shaped our island’s story might be understood and appreciated on their own terms. While, as he modestly noted, his exploration could only touch the surface of a rich past, his intention was always one of respect and curiosity rather than parody.

He began with a perfect example of a “beginning” — the wedding dress (right) that has long been on display in our museum. Remarkably well preserved and now around 150 years old, the gown prompted lively discussion among members of the Society when it was first exhibited. “Shouldn’t a wedding dress be white?” some asked.



Doug offered two possibilities. First, that following the death of her beloved Albert, Queen Victoria wore widow’s black for the rest of her life, and that brides across the Empire followed suit in sympathy. The second, and more likely explanation, was that while Queen Victoria had popularised the white wedding gown, the trend did not immediately take hold everywhere. For many brides, their wedding dress was simply their best dress.

Doug concluded that the latter theory seems to hold true — when Queen Victoria’s son, Edward VII, married Alexandra two years after Prince Albert’s death, the bride wore white, and the Queen herself attended the ceremony.

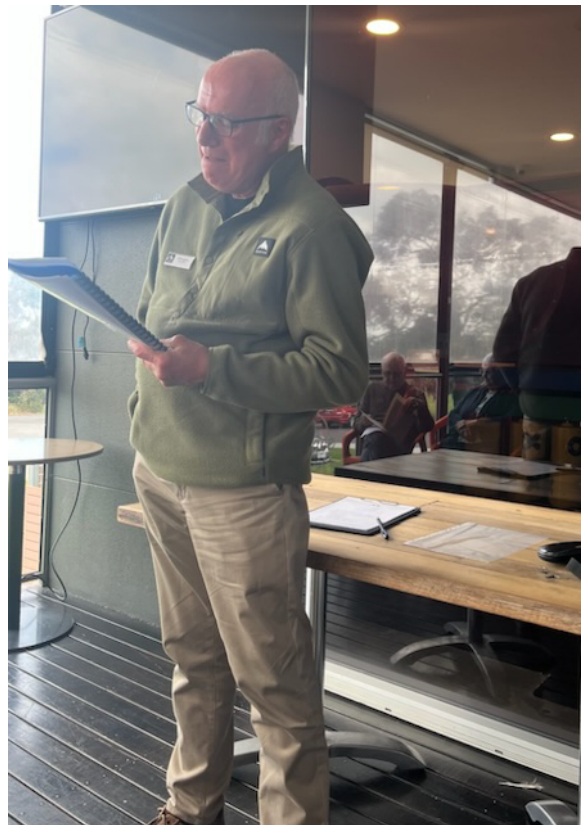
Doug then turned his attention to another fascinating item — the birth certificate of Georgianna McHaffie.

“This is an interesting document,” he began. “Georgianna was born in 1830 on the island of Guernsey to Henry and Mary Jane Henderson. But hold on — something curious here — it’s written in French!”

That small detail, Doug mused, opened up an intriguing thought: might Georgianna have spoken with a trace of a French accent? “Accents tell us so much,” he reflected. “John McHaffie, of course, was a Scot — so what did he sound like?”

Drawing a playful comparison, Doug noted that Scottish actor David Tennant and John McHaffie both hailed from near Edinburgh. “With a very long bow,” he joked, “I’m suggesting they may have shared a manner of speaking. Both, I’m sure, could read Robbie Burns without sounding ridiculous!”

He went on to imagine the mix of voices that would have echoed across 19th-century Phillip Island — Georgianna perhaps with her lilting Guernsey French, John with his broad Scottish tones, and their close friend Baron von Mueller bringing a touch of European flair. “There must have been quite the range of accents in colonial Victoria,” Doug observed.



The next document Doug produced came from a cache of McHaffie family papers — a lease payment receipt for the McHaffies’ Phillip Island property, apparently paid late and “under protest” to the Commissioner of Land Surveys. With a twinkle in his eye, Doug asked the audience, “Now, is a Scot careful with money?”

Doug then moved on to another intriguing document — the court case of McHaffie v Clarke, concerning a breach of contract. “This is an important historical record,” he explained, “as it gives us a glimpse of both the economic value of Phillip Island at the time and a sense of John McHaffie’s character.”

In the proceedings, the island’s value was estimated at £30,000, which included more than 20,000 sheep — a substantial enterprise for its day. Doug noted that the court report made for lively reading and couldn’t resist adding a wry observation: “Paul Keating once said it’s never wise to get between a state premier and a pot of money. The same could be said for a fired-up Scot and a pot of money!” Happily for McHaffie, the court agreed — he won the case and was awarded £3,000 in damages.

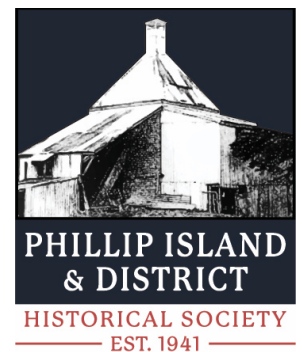
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From there, Doug turned his attention to the Acclimatisation Society, of which John McHaffie was a life member. The Society's lofty aim was to "improve and perfect" Victoria in the European image, introducing such species as deer, boar, rabbits, foxes, oak trees, and of course, the McHaffies' 20,000 sheep.

While we might view these efforts rather differently today, Doug reminded us that the McHaffies were among the most influential settlers in Phillip Island's history. Their vision transformed the landscape — reshaping it to resemble the pastoral scenery of "home." Fortunately, by the late twentieth century, attitudes began to shift toward a more balanced and sustainable approach to land care.

Finally, Doug returned to his theme — "Beginnings." He reminded us that the roots of our own organisation stretch back more than eighty years. The original Phillip Island and Westernport Historical Society was formed in 1942, later revived in 1967 as the Phillip Island and District Historical Society we know today.

Among the treasured documents preserved from those early days are meeting notes, lists of founding members, records of the Society's aims, and even the first bank deposit slip — all small but significant reminders of how our shared passion for preserving history began.

"These," Doug reflected, "are our beginnings — the foundations of the Society itself, built by people who understood the importance of keeping stories alive."

Doug's presentation was a thoughtful and entertaining journey through the artefacts and stories that shaped Phillip Island's early years — and, fittingly, a reflection on our own beginnings as a Society. His talk reminded us that every document, every object, and every effort to preserve them adds another layer to the story we continue to tell today.

Newsletter written and edited by Pamela Rothfield

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www.phillipislandhistory.org.au

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