Friends of Churchill Island Society Inc

F O C I S

Registration Number: A0021907W ABN: 78667051020 PO Box 852 COWES Vic 3922.

Number 170 Winter 2026 NEWSLETTER

Wumindjika, Welcome! We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live, work and learn, the Bunurong. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

Editor: Christine Grayden. editor@focis.org.au

Membership renewals are now due! *Please renew as soon as possible to ensure your membership cards arrive by July 1.*

DATES – 2026 FOCIS gatherings:

AGM Saturday 8 August 2026, 2-4 p.m. Newhaven community hall, 23 Cleeland St Newhaven. Speaker Mark Anderson, PINP Tourism Manager; Reports, election of office bearers, general business, followed by afternoon tea. All positions are vacant. We especially need a treasurer!

Saturday November 14: 2-4 p.m. Newhaven Community Hall. FOCIS General Meeting followed by public event -details TBA.

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Container Deposit Scheme
FOCIS number C2000035970

Your donations since January have just hit over $300! Thanks to all donors, and special thanks to Churchill Island Café for saving their cans and bottles for FOCIS committee member Don Johnstone to take to the Cowes CDS depot to donate to FOCIS Heritage Fund. Thanks Don!

So, if you can't donate with your membership renewal, you can certainly donate via your container deposit. Please keep our number on hand!

President Mike Cleeland's letter

Dear FOCIS members,

Welcome to winter everyone.

Perhaps lots of our FOCIS members have already headed north for the season because we barely had a quorum for our general meeting last month. Fortunately the business had been taken care of at the committee meeting beforehand, and the combined reports are now available to read on the FOCIS website:

https://focis.org.au/focis-general-meetings/

With several families and staff from the Phillip Island Village School eagerly awaiting the poetry event, members present decided we would go straight into reading poetry - which turned out to be a very entertaining event.

Thanks to all those who contributed, especially the children from the Phillip Island Village School.

The next FOCIS gathering is our Annual General Meeting on Saturday 8th August. This promises to be quite interesting as we have Phillip Island Nature Parks General Manager of Tourism Mark Anderson as a guest speaker. Mark will speak before the AGM, so come along at 2 p.m. to hear him speak about the importance of tourism to attractions like Churchill Island. Mark is happy to answer your questions, so please feel free to consider issues you'd like to discuss with him. This is even more important now that Churchill Island is starting to turn a profit – what will happen next on the island to continue that profitable trend?

Personally I've been enjoying walking the track around Churchill Island in the recent balmy autumn

weather while my wife Pip runs it! Her best time is 15 minutes to complete the circuit.

There's been abundant mushrooms recently but be careful; some of them are the toxic yellow stainers!

A tempting row of fleshy mushrooms in a paddock on Churchill Island after the recent rain. Whoops! They're poisonous 'yellow stainer' (*Agaricus xanthodermus*) an introduced species of mushroom that's now common wherever there's a nice lot of lawn, park or paddock.

Enjoy your winter outings, but be careful what you collect during your ramblings.

Meanwhile, I'd like to encourage members to consider standing for election to the committee at the AGM. In particular, the vital role of Treasurer needs to be filled urgently. Or, you could consider offering to be assistant to the Secretary or assistant to the Treasurer – they would also be extremely helpful.

I look forward to meeting lots of our members at the AGM, to enjoy Mark's talk, welcome some new faces to our committee, and enjoy a chat and cuppa afterwards.

Best wishes, Mike.

Membership Secretary's message

Jenny Leonard

Subscriptions now due please!

Welcome to the new members who've subscribed in the last 3 months. Some of you took FOCIS brochures at our Churchill Island Phillip Island Nature Parks' 'Easter Eggstravaganza' stand, or the May 20 Volunteers Expo at Berninneit, and joined from there. Others joined on the recommendation of friends and family. Good to know our brochure is being used in that way, and also that our members are happy to recommend us!

It's Renewal time for FOCIS members this month for those of you who have 1-year memberships which will expire on 30th June 2026. You should have received an email or renewal letter in the post by now but it is easy to renew via the website:
https://focis.org.au/membership/online-membership-form/

Please renew soon so I can send out your new membership cards before 1st July. Thank you to those who have already renewed your membership subscription.

For members with a 3-year membership you should have received your new membership cards in the mail, in our new format. Now the expiry date is set according to your final year of membership so we don't need to send new cards to you each year.

For both one and three-year subscribers, watch for your new-look membership cards in the post within a week or two of you paying your subscription. The sooner you renew, or join FOCIS, the sooner you can get your membership cards and start using those many membership benefits.

Samples of new membership cards – family for 1 and 3 years, and single for 1 and 3 years.

Please get in touch with me if there are any queries. We hope you continue to enjoy your FOCIS membership and all its benefits!

membership@focis.org.au

Best wishes, Jenny.

Acting Treasurer's Report

Christine Grayden

Our former treasurer Neroli Raff has resigned. Thanks to Neroli for her treasurer work over the last six months.

We are looking for a **new Treasurer** – as soon as possible, or at the August 8 AGM at the latest. Please let acting treasurer/FOCIS secretary Christine Grayden know if you can take on the role. The FOCIS treasurer's role is less arduous than for many other organisations, because the bookkeeping and report generation is done by our bookkeeper Katrina from Dent Bookkeeping.

The Acting Treasurer's report of INCOME AND EXPENSES for period 1.2.2026 – 30.4.2026 is included in the combined GM reports, and can be found here:
https://focis.org.au/focis-general-meetings/

Meanwhile, FOCIS account activity for the year so far has seen deposits from new members subscriptions, the container deposit scheme and some member donations.

We have not made any further donations from our Heritage Fund, having already funded $2,881.00 worth of heritage-related items to the Churchill Island museum since the last financial year. The committee has invited Churchill Island curator Maxine and tourism manager Dan to think about other heritage-related items which will be appropriate for FOCIS to fund in the next financial year. Suggestions from members are also welcome.

Balances as at 31.5.2026:

Operating account 31.5.2026 $7,722.65 compared with 10.3.26 = $8,771.64. The drop this quarter was mainly due to a catch-up transfer of $1,103.69 from the Operating to the Heritage Fund accounts. This money had been paid into the Operating Fund since the August 2025 AGM, but was actually meant for the Heritage Fund. Other expenses were postage, payments to our bookkeeper and advertising.

Heritage Fund balance 31.5.2026 = $5,775.84. 10.3.26 balance = $5,523.65. (+ $252.19)

FOCIS committee member Don Johnston continues to collect the containers from the Churchill Island café, depositing them for FOCIS. The donations box is now located under the back veranda of Amess House, and though somewhat hidden, accumulated $27 cash since Easter.

We also welcome tax-deductible donations to our Heritage Fund, but understand that is not so easy at present. Donations to our Cash Deposit number are more than welcome. C2000035970. Every little counts!

Our **Term deposit** balance is $47,104.92 and is due to mature on 13 December 2026. This is for an 8 month period at 4.40% with Bendigo Bank. Interest earned on the previous term deposit was $1,017.21.

To donate to FOCIS Heritage Fund, please go to:
https://focis.org.au/donation/

For all treasurer enquiries please contact me: treasurer@focis.org.au

Cheers, Christine

Next FOCIS gathering – our AGM

Our Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday August 8, 2026. We'll be gathering in the Newhaven Community Hall, 23 Cleeland Street Newhaven. The AGM starts 2 p.m. with our speaker *Mark Anderson, who is in charge of all things tourism for the Phillip Island Nature Parks, so a very important person indeed!*

For many years FOCIS complained to PINP that there could be no accurate record of how many visitors Churchill Island actually received. The tally gate did not work, and visitors could easily slip from the café through the gate, often not realizing that entry to the park from the Visitor Centre required a paid ticket. Consequently it was very difficult to know just how much money Churchill Island was worth in terms of visitation. The coach tourists paid a lesser entry fee, which also complicated how the tourist dollar value of Churchill Island could realistically be calculated.

With the relocation of the ticketing counter to nearer the main farm-historic precinct entry, and more emphasis on making online bookings and cashless transactions at PINP venues, it is more difficult for visitors to gain free entry – unless they're FOCIS members showing a current membership card of course!

Now we know that Churchill Island is profitable, even if in a small way at the moment. We will not be surprised if another twelve months of the new layout, and more activity days such as

the Easter festival and others which may be planned, will reveal Churchill Island to be indeed a profitable enterprise, as well as a beautiful and intrinsically valuable place.

This is a rare opportunity to find out what's planned for Churchill Island from the horse's mouth, so to speak. So bring along your questions for Mark – he is expecting lots!

Speaking of free entry, complements of your FOCIS membership card – we know that is a huge incentive to join FOCIS. But we also hope that you join because you appreciate the historic and heritage values of Churchill Island and wish to contribute to them.

The best way to strengthen FOCIS in our quest to continue supporting the island's cultural heritage, which goes back many thousands of years, is ***to actively assist on the committee***.

All committee positions are vacant every AGM. We certainly welcome new committee members! Our treasurer had to resign in April, and as secretary I have continued as Acting Treasurer as well. This is definitely not ideal, so we really do need a **new treasurer**. We are a friendly, hard-working committee, supported by our bookkeeper Katrina of Dent Bookkeeping.

FOCIS is a registered small charity reporting to the Australian Charities and Not for profits Commission, ACNC. We receive tax deductible donation/gift status from the Australian Taxation Office for all donations over $2.

New committee members are provided with a welcome pack including:

- Welcome letter;
- history of FOCIS;
- FOCIS brochure;
- copy of the FOCIS constitution - also available to anyone as download pdf from our website here:

https://focis.org.au/about-focis/#Constitution

- List of contacts for all committee members;
- calendar with dates of meetings and events for the year ahead;
- information sheet on the legalities of our group;
- list of relevant websites;
- 2 Churchill Island FOCIS farm animal-themed bookmarks;
- 2 greeting cards with envelopes featuring drawings by Minnie Lawrence, whose 1900 sketchbook is held by the Churchill Island collection.

The committee usually meets four times per year in the convivial home of our president Mike and his wife Pip, overlooking the stunning Swan Bay, just west of Churchill Island. FOCIS also has a Zoom account, and members can be zoomed in to committee meetings if they can't be there in person. Decisions which are needed between meetings are made by email or Zoom.

Please consider joining our committee, and really making a contribution to maintaining the values of Churchill Island.

For enquiries about committee membership, please feel free to contact me:

secretary@focis.org.au or phone/text/leave a message: M 0400 900 612.

Or contact our president Mike Cleeland:

president@focis.org.au or phone/text/leave a message: M 0400 753 783.

George the Cockatoo

Churchill Island feature

By Alice Ward, Churchill Island gardener and farm worker, along with important title of "George's human".

George and I have a very strong bond, which is very important for a cockatoo bred and born in captivity, who would not survive in the wild. I have many photos of George on his adventures. Here's a brief rundown of how George fills in his days.

Every morning George comes out and wanders around the upper parts of the farm and garden, some days helping me in the garden. He will come and find me and help pull out weeds. He loves coming into the veggie garden with me, eating things and digging.

He also loves to climb up onto out work shed and call out to staff as they go about the morning set up. One of the jokes he loves to pull is standing above the door way and threatening to jump down on people!

When I am working - which is full time across my two roles in the garden and the farm - if he feels like it he will come have morning tea with us in the lunch room or the outdoor tables.

George goes back after morning tea into his house as he is not friendly to anyone that isn't me and will chase and bite them. In fact, he finds this game of harassing people very amusing!

When I have farm shifts, sometimes if he lets me know, after the shows finish he will come and have a cup of tea. He knows the difference between my two jobs of garden and farm and likes to come out after shows with me if I'm then working in the farm.

George does not have his wings clipped and if he wished to he could fly away. He has at times gotten a fright and flown into low trees, from which he has needed help getting back down from me in a cherry picker!

George has interacted with wild birds when he is out. However, he prefers they leave him alone as he doesn't have the natural social skills to integrate. If George were to be put into the wild he would die... or find his way home again and demand large amounts of corn to make up for the mistake of 'freeing him' that we made against him!

Here is a picture of the sign we have for George which was done a few years back mentioning he comes out for a walk every morning.

Recently when we featured George and Alice on our Facebook page (here: https://www.facebook.com/FOCISAust/) one of our followers suggested their story would make a wonderful children's book. Definitely worth considering!

George investigates the blacksmith-made outline of a cockatoo on top of his enclosure during his busy daily schedule.

Thanks for these insights Alice. Now we understand George much better!

Moveable Cultural Heritage... what is that?

Churchill Island essay
By Christine Grayden

Years ago, in the process of seeking to enable tax deductible donations to FOCIS, our then treasurer, Life Member Tom O'Dea, found that we needed to qualify within a certain category. The category most appropriate for us was "The promotion of the moveable cultural heritage of Churchill Island". Quite a mouthful! To qualify we had to not just fill in forms, but make a major submission justifying how we were already fulfilling the major criterion for this category.

The process was successful, but required the statement to become our 'Principal Purpose" within our constitution.

So what is "Moveable Cultural Heritage"?

Movable cultural heritage may include artworks and historical, archaeological, numismatic (money and medals), philatelic, science or technology objects. This covers a very wide variety of objects, and although the Churchill Island collection is not large, it does contain examples of most of these categories.

Here is an extract from Churchill Island Curator Report, Maxine Holden's May report. Maxine's full report from May is available from the FOCIS website.

Maxine wrote:

….I have also received some donations of art work and furnishings, which have been approved and acknowledged by the Acquisition Committee. One of note, was a simple 'find' of a portion of broken crockery located on the shores of Churchill Island by a young 15-year-old boy who had the foresight to bring the object to the Visitors Centre. He completed a Donation Form, including the Latitude and Longitude of his 'find' (fantastic stuff) and has been duly recognised for his efforts – this is so pleasing to see, don't you think?

I'd like to comment on two things about the lad's 'find'.

Firstly for context, there are several historical domestic and farming 'rubbish dump' sites around the shoreline of Churchill Island, some of which are very, very old. It was common practice for settlers and later farmers to dump their broken bits and pieces near or over the shoreline cliffs, both on Churchill Island and Phillip Island. In fact a succession of Phillip Island Shire Councils actively operated municipal tip sites on foreshores: at the western end of Church St in Cowes, the Rhyll tip, and a tip site near Pyramid Rock. These sites are closed long ago, and can contain dangerous substances such as asbestos.

The Churchill Island collection had quite a number of these pottery fragment 'finds', which were recorded and stored into archival storage boxes by my museum trainee Sandra Kanis back in about 2015. I'm not sure if they are still in the collection. Mostly these were items that had always been visible, or had been exposed on the surface by rain and wind, and had been located and handed in to the visitor centre desk just as this one had, or they were inadvertently dug up during weed control work or gardening.

Secondly, it was good of the lad to think of donating the object he found, and good of the staff to go through the donation process with him. Who knows? That experience may have sparked a real love of museum studies or historical archaeology in him.

His find of the piece of broken pottery is "Moveable cultural heritage".

The whole of Churchill Island is Crown Land, registered under the Heritage Act 2017, and objects such as these are often among scatters of discarded domestic bits and pieces on sites which are considered archaeological sites. Under the Act, an historical archaeological site is defined as a place which

- Contains buried evidence like an artefact, deposit or feature which is 75 years old or more.
- Provides information about past activity.
- Needs archaeological methods to reveal information about the place.
- Isn't associated only with Aboriginal use.

Historical archaeological sites might include features like:

- building foundations or post holes
- buried items like old bottles, ceramics, clay pipes, toys
- kitchen scraps like bones or shells.

If you come across anything like this, you either leave it alone completely, or record it in some way, including photographs, and report its location and content, but not disturb it.

There does not seem to have ever been any attempt to formally investigate the contents of these sites on either Churchill or Phillip Islands. I know of some pieces removed from Churchill Island, and much material has been removed from Phillip Island sites as souvenirs or to sell.

This is definitely not something to encourage. Apart from being illegal, much of the Churchill Island material is located on or at the base of treacherous coastal cliffs.

Perhaps it is time for FOCIS to push for the engagement of a professional historical archaeologist to conduct a surface survey or controlled excavation to document the Churchill Island domestic scatters? We may learn a great deal about the lives of former residents of Churchill Island from such a survey.

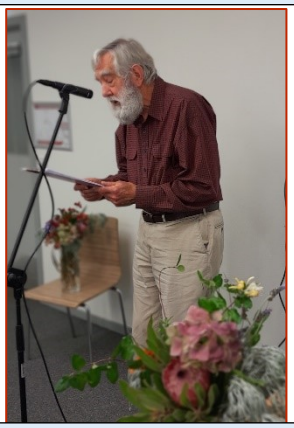
Note that The Aboriginal Heritage Act (2006) Vic provides separate protection for any Aboriginal site. But the same applies – please do not disturb or remove anything from these sites.

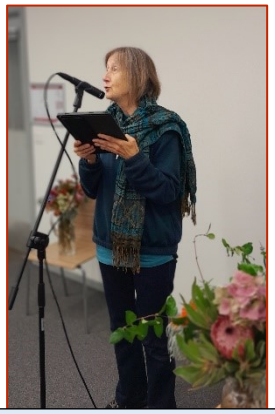
Friends of Churchill Island Society Inc FOCIS - Out and About

PINP Churchill Island 2026 Easter 'Eggstravaganza' – Cathy and Sue at FOCIS stall with PINP CI free vegie seedlings; Mike as Town Crier.

Christine and Linda at National Volunteer Week Expo for FOCIS with PINP CEO Catherine Basterfield; Bass Coast Shire-funded celebratory NVW Dev tea at CI café; Linda at the Expo with Red Cross teddy.

Anzac Day concert. Several FOCIS members performed, and Christine spoke about CI owner Harry Jenkins's WWI war service as an army dentist.





Some of the FOCIS CI May Poetry/short story event readers. A great variety of ages and subject matter!

Friends of Churchill Island Society Inc.
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P.O. Box 852, COWES, Vic 3922

Promoting the moveable cultural heritage of Churchill Island.

You can find FOCIS on website: https://focis.org.au/
YouTube:
https://www.youtube.com/@FriendsofchurchillislandOrgAu
And Facebook:
https://www.facebook.com/FOCISAust/
Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission FOCIS page:
https://www.acnc.gov.au/charity/charities/881ad63e-38af-e811-a960-000d3ad24282/profile

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General Committee:

Don Johnstone: Phillip Island & District Historical Society rep;
Pauline Taylor: Phillip Island Conservation Society rep;
Di Scukovic; Sue Trist and Cathy Jones; Linda Patterson.

Assistants:

David Woodberry is FOCIS volunteer website manager: webmaster@focis.org.au
Stephen Paull helps with FOCIS Facebook.