

# FOCIS

## NEWSLETTER

Registration Number: A0021907W ABN: 78667051020 PO Box 852, COWES VIC 3922

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### INSIDE

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1. President
2. New Committee
3. Dates
4. Treasurer's Report
5. New Committee Member
- 6 Manager's Report
8. Life Members
9. Curator's Report
11. Member Fees and Restoration Report
14. Talk: *Fragments from the Past*
16. *Whispers from the Past*
17. Why does FOCIS matter?

### From the President



I am privileged to take over the leadership of FOCIS after the great service performed by

Graeme over the last few years including the publishing of the Third Edition of *Churchill Island History and Her Story* and large print version. We wish him well in his retirement and hope to see him now and then. We also gratefully acknowledge a Cultural Heritage and Regional Tourism grant from AmaGA of \$2,973 to purchase photographic equipment, to enhance



*Supported by*



Australian Government  
Culture, Heritage and Arts  
Regional Tourism Program

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## Committee

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President:

*David Maunders*

Vice President:

*Terry Holman*

General Secretary:

*Leah Tempany*

Membership

Secretary:

*Tom O'Dea*

Treasurer:

*Tom O'Dea*

PICS Rep:

*Pauline Taylor*

Committee

(restoration):

*Jeff Cole*

Committee

(book sales)

*Don Johnstone*

Newsletter Editor:

*David Maunders*

digital cataloguing of the Churchill Island collection, and a data projector.

I have also accepted the role of newsletter editor.

A report on the AGM and election of officers is included. The other major event for

FOCIS was the performance and video recording of the short play *Whispers from*

*the Past* written by Christine Grayden and myself to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup>

Anniversary of the building of Amess House and planting of the Homestead Tree.

Despite wet and windy weather, a good audience attended both performances. We

were pleased to welcome Kevin Love, chairman of the Phillip Island Nature Park

Board and his wife, along with many of our members and visitors. As well as to the cast

who all gave tremendous performances, our thanks go to the Churchill Island staff

for their help and support, to Peter, Warren (for attaching the banner) Andrea, Kate

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## DATES for your diary:

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### 2022

#### **November 12<sup>th</sup> 1.30pm**

*General Meeting, premiere of "Whispers from the Past" video and a behind the scenes exclusive.*

#### **November 19<sup>th</sup> 10-12pm**

*Working bee - outdoor clean, making Amess era Christmas decorations & BBQ lunch.*

#### **November 26<sup>th</sup>**

*Final copy deadline for Summer Newsletter.*

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### 2023

#### **General Meetings**

*Feb 11th, May 13th, Aug 12th AGM, Nov 18<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm*

#### **Working Bees**

*March 4, 8-10am (post-moth clean)*

*June 10, 10am -12pm*

*October 14, 10-12pm*

Wills, and Helen Masters for inducting everyone as Nature Park volunteers and providing lunch.

We have much to do over the coming year and are in urgent need of members to begin to take over from current office holders who have held posts for many years. People willing to train as General secretary, Membership secretary, webmaster and other positions are urgently sought.

Please contact me at [president@focis.org.au](mailto:president@focis.org.au)

Good wishes, David

*Please note, the AGM minutes are available in full online at <https://focis.org.au>*

## Treasurer's Report



### Financial

The purpose of our recent bank account move from ANZ to Bendigo Bank was to access a local branch with all the features required by the Society, and with better rates. Total net assets grew by \$7,015 in the last 12 months. However without the two grants received in this period, total net assets grew by only \$372, indicating that while we are operating within our means, it is close.

Inflation appears to be a large factor. Book assets are reported as totaling \$6,949.65. The next report will devalue this amount due to a \$3,670 Bass Coast Shire Council grant received but not accounted for here. Book publishing was our largest expense for the year at \$10,086 and, promisingly, book sales of 161 copies between the launch in January and June 30<sup>th</sup> raised \$3,519.50. Further Australian Government funds of \$2,973 was received through an Australian Museums and Galleries Association grant. These funds purchased photographic equipment, to enhance digital cataloguing of the Churchill Island collection, and a data projector in use at this meeting. These purchases were our next largest expense, after the book.

Lockdowns resulted in a total of only \$10 cash from the donations box while tax deductible donations more than doubled to a total of \$3,261 for the year.



### Membership

Memberships were up by 2, while members were up by 11. A theory is that more adult children remain in the family home due to affordability of housing, allowing them to preserve their household membership.

### New Committee Member

We welcome Don Johnstone to the committee as shopkeeper.



Don was born on Phillip Island and his mother was a friend of Sister Margaret Campbell. He spent holiday time on Churchill Island and this year began as a volunteer guide (or visitor experience volunteer). He recounted some of his boyhood memories at the June General Meeting. Don also played George Brown, the journalist (Bruni) in our 150 Commemoration play, *Whispers from the Past*.

## Churchill Island Manager's Report

I'm very pleased to come onboard as the Farm Supervisor for Churchill Island. It's been great to be able to spend some time with many of you and hear about the great initiatives you have been working on. Kate Adams, Visitor Experiences, is now heavily focused with working at the Penguin Parade and I would like to thank her for the great commitment and passion that she has employed previously working on heritage related matters at Churchill Island and our partnership with FOCIS.

Many of you would already know me from working at Churchill Island for the past 6 years. This has been a great way to learn about the operations across the island – from farm management, our heritage collection, and of course providing demonstrations of shearing!

I have come off a family farm south of Horsham (6th generation) running superfine merino sheep and cereal cropping. My interests include Blacksmithing, sports and holidays.

It's been great to have the past six months relatively back to normal in terms of our ability to operate effectively, particularly over the Easter and July school holidays. It's been great to

See our visitor numbers steadily increase as more and more people discover Churchill Island. We are looking forward to an increase in events, particularly weddings, as we move towards the end of the year. I have also been really excited to see all the restoration projects underway, such as the tipping dray, ice-chest, and historic dairy objects in a half cellar and there has also been some activity in Pedro's Shed. It's been cleaned up and we have moved some of the machinery in there to be worked on. I shall be heading to Alexandra shortly to pick up three engines that have been undergoing restoration, two to go on display in Pedro's and one to be reinstalled onto the stationary baler. Our crew at Churchill Island have been working very hard and doing a fantastic job, from farm management to Ground Services to gardening to ticketing and I thank them all for their efforts.

As you are aware, Delaware North have exited the business



as food and beverage providers here, and Create Catering is the new caterer. Peta and I have been in discussions with them about our cafe and look forward to what they can bring to Churchill Island. I wish you all congratulations, the best of luck and

offer our support as FOCIS prepares to celebrate 150 years of Amess House and gardens. In turn, I would also like to sincerely offer my thanks to Graeme Clausen in all the support he has offered us here at Churchill Island and Phillip Island Nature Parks, the wonderful ideas he has brought to fruition, and wish Graeme well in the future following his retirement as President of FOCIS.

Kind Regards, *Pete Officer*

### **New Life Members**

Tom and Ruth O'Dea were elected as life members at the AGM on 17 September. Tom has held the positions of Treasurer, Membership secretary and webmaster since 2011 and although Ruth has for the most part avoided committee membership, she has partnered him in many of the complex as well as routine aspects of these roles. Perhaps their greatest achievement was the award of DRG status to FOCIS (i.e. tax deductibility status) which was only gained after a number of unsuccessful attempts and much research to make the approved changes to the constitution. This has resulted in our declared purpose of Enhancing the Moveable Cultural Heritage of Churchill Island. Tom and Ruth have contributed to many working bees (as pictured.)





## Curator's Report

Firstly, I want to thank Graeme for always being supportive and innovative during his time as President of FOCIS. I sincerely wish him all the best for the future as he passes on the 'baton' and appreciate greatly all he has achieved with you all. It has been exciting to see so many wonderful projects that have added so much to the history of Churchill Island over the past year, and with the celebration of 150 years, the chance to engage with the community in the present through Whispers of the Past. Congratulations to all involved! I understand it has been delightful to have Amess House and the gardens come alive through cast members rehearsing in costume.

Since the last report, I have been away for almost 4 weeks (although 3 days in curator world!) enjoying a road trip to a much warmer Sunshine Coast so I have sadly missed much of the build up to the performance. Before I headed off, we had a very productive meeting with David, Jeff, Helen, Pete and Leah in August. These meetings occur every two months or so and are a chance to share news between Phillip Island Nature Parks and FOCIS with a view to identifying new opportunities and plan out current and upcoming activities. I appreciate very much the commitment and time that everyone puts into these meetings.

One area of upcoming focus that we will be starting to look at is the preservation of our Churchill Island Archives in the Volly Hut in terms of the paper files that we hold. I am sure there are many gems in our files that many of you may already be familiar with, and others yet to discover as we work towards ensuring these documents survive well into the future.

Another area of focus is Christmas! This season, we would like to decorate Amess House to make it look festive. Our horticulturalist, Kate Wills, has been growing holly, rosemary and flowering gum from the garden for use in decorations. At our next working bee on Saturday November 19, we would love your involvement (and expertise!!) in making Victorian style decorations from newspaper or music sheets such as tree ornaments, paper lace, snowflakes, doll chains, paper chains and bonbons. Leah also has been looking at some wonderful ideas and we will provide more information as we work through the details in the lead up. Please stay tuned!

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### **DONATIONS WANTED:**

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- ◆ Calico
  - ◆ Old newspapers
  - ◆ Old sheet music
  - ◆ Vintage Christmas cards
  - ◆ Twine / ribbon
  - ◆ Fake food e.g. fruit, a turkey (!?)
- For the Amess era Christmas Decorations.



As always, thank you for your support and valued contribution to our much-treasured Churchill Island.

Best wishes, Andrea

## Membership Fees

As a result of inflation and for FOCIS' sustainability, membership subscription rates will increase, starting July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023, as follows:

- a. Family Household rate = \$33.00 per year.
- b. Single Adult Household rate = \$22.00 per year.
- c. Concession Household rate = \$17.00 per year.

## Restoration Report

The restoration team has grown, with Clive's return and a new team member, Greg, coming onboard. Greg, a cabinet maker, was put to work immediately to refurbish the Coolgardie safe.



Brian & Jeff have started work on the stump jump plough. Quotes are being sourced to see if portable sandblasting is within budget to strip all the ploughs etc, in preparation for rust and protective treatment.

Tim designed a solution to connect the “new” dray wheels to the axle which involved drilling out the wooden hub & fitting new inserts. The first test wheel is now successfully fitted to the dray and the other hub has been commissioned from Wonthaggi Woodworks. As far as we know, this solution has not been done before and is a credit to Tim’s engineering background and problem-solving skills. The dray is expected to be finished in about a month.

Clive started work on the blue wagon which is now close to collapse and cannot be moved. He has begun the painstaking process of numbering and measuring each part of the top hamper. It is very regrettable that the Wool Wagon was so severely damaged during a recent storm that it is probably not repairable. A little piece of our history disappearing.

Dairy Trail preparations are underway, and we look forward to visitors discovering the many dairy activities performed on the island over the years.

The wooden horse restoration is finished and will be mounted onto a rolling base to allow it to be moved outside for viewing and returned under cover after hours and in bad weather.

Cleaning and maintenance were completed on the Rogers cottage oven. We are considering making a simple stove crane to fit the remaining mounting plate. This would tell more of the

story of how cooking took place there. While in Amess House, Jeff and Sally agreed to consult on the oven as Phyllis Murphy advised this model was fitting.

Nature Parks is now invested in the restoration program, including financially (e.g., sand blasting). Recognition of the valuable work being done by the restoration team is well deserved. Jeff is leading the team as a FOCIS volunteer, while the rest of the team are NP volunteers only...for now.

## STUMPED FOR GIFT IDEAS? ...

FOCIS membership makes an excellent gift for family and friends.

Membership benefits include 12 months of:

- Free entry to Churchill Island
- 25% discount off entry fees into the Koala Conservation Reserve, Penguin Parade & Antarctic Journey
- 20% off retail purchases from gift stores
- 10% off food and beverages (excl. alcohol)
- 10% off indigenous plants at Barb Martin Bush Bank
- Quarterly Issues of the FOCIS Newsletter
- Opportunities to volunteer with others who love Churchill Island!

**Speaker: Sally O'Neill**

***“Fragments of the Past”***

– In celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of  
the building of Amess House –

Sally O'Neill, past PINP Projects Officer was the AGM guest speaker recounting her experiences during the restoration of Amess House in 1999.

Sally framed her comments and experience restoring Amess house as capturing the essence of an era and remembering that this is only one moment in history. Accordingly, she paid respects to the Traditional owners of this land.

Sally described the house at the start as spooky & muddy with a road that flooded during high tide. Funds were provided for a complete restoration, including tracks, signage, collections, and the purchase of land for entrance access. Professor Miles Lewis noted that, “Amess House... demonstrates the beginning of the move towards the use of the Phillip Island and Western Port area as a holiday resort.” Prominent visitors to the house make it important to Victoria's social history, and its remoteness contribute to its historic preservation and cultural integrity.

Phyllis Murphy (AM) was engaged to consult, and the restoration began – should different rooms be restored to represent the different eras of the house? As the layers

were peeled back, the remainders of Amess era treatments steered the project towards a complete Amess era restoration.

Room by room, materials and treatments were uncovered to tell a story. The marble steps were a connection to Amess' construction ventures in Melbourne. The hallway revealed original hessian, nails and paper hangings (early wallpaper) of "sanitary paper" which was applied to heavy wear areas because it was sturdier and allowed regular cleaning. Windows were restored and doors and walls reinstated. Blinds and rugs were made-to-order, and the house sprayed for borer prior to furnishing. Very few household items were left, so furnishings were donated, purchased and many were borrowed from the National Trust. Essentially the purpose of each room was restored... except the gun room!

The island was brought back to life with a grand opening event and the start of the guiding program, followed by the working horse festivals and demonstrations.

Sally closed by issuing a challenge – to find Grant's blockhouse!

Thank you Sally!



## Whispers from the Past

Our performance commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the building of Amess House and planting the Homestead Tree took place on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> September. The previous week was devoted to making a video directed by Terry Melvin assisted by Simon Eddy (sound) and Vince Trease (camera). Laura Brearley took still photos of the filming and live performance (included with thanks).

The weather was wet and windy so we performed in the shearing shed with a large backdrop of the house to provide the context. In spite of the weather, there was a large and appreciative audience. We were pleased to welcome Kevin Love, Chair of the Phillip Island Nature Parks Board and his wife.





The play in six scenes was written by David Maunders and Christine Grayden and directed by David. Cast included Mike Cleeland as Samuel Amess, his wife Pip as Jane Amess, Kate Cleeland as Cora the cook and Margaret Amess, John Eddy as Baron von Mueller, Don Johnstone as George Brown, Chloe Dann as Minnie Lawrence, and Helena Leonardos as Mabel Lawrence and Marjorie Amess.



## **WHY DOES FOCIS MATTER?**

FOCIS is a registered charity and so can apply for grant funds not available to Phillip Island Nature Parks. It is committed to protecting the moveable cultural heritage of Churchill Island. PINP is responsible for the management of the island but also for the Penguin Parade, Nobbies, Koala Conservation reserve and many other parts of Phillip Island. Its contribution to Churchill Island is considerable but it is also conservation focussed rather than history and heritage focussed. FOCIS has provided funds and volunteer labour for the Churchill Island Museum, restoration of historic items and books about the island history. FOCIS has over \$40,000 invested for the fitting out of a new museum. The organisation needs people to invest time in its management. Without them, it will fold, its assets will be incorporated into PINP funds and its advocacy will be lost. Come and join us if you feel that our heritage matters. We need new members for our committee. Contact [secretary@focis.org.au](mailto:secretary@focis.org.au)

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**Friends of Churchill Island Society Inc.**

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We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live.