

2023 | No 160  
Summer

# FOCIS

## NEWSLETTER

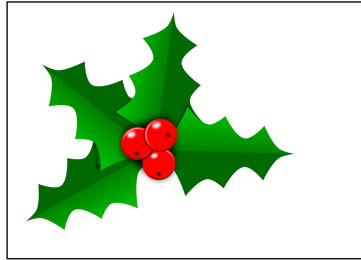
Registration Number: A0021907W ABN: 78667051020 PO Box 852, COWES VIC 3922

### DATES

**December 23, 2023**

11 am and 1 pm

*Christmas 1899. Short Play and Christmas Carols*



*A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all our members.*

### 2024

**Saturday 3 February 1.30**

General Meeting

Speaker Kate Adams

**Saturday March 2, 8-10**

Working Bee

**Saturday May 4, 1.30**

General Meeting

**Saturday June 15, 8-10**

Working Bee

**Saturday August 10, 1.30**

A.G.M.

**Saturday October 5, 8-10**

Working Bee

**Saturday November 9, 1.30**

General Meeting

### BUSH DANCE SUCCESS

The Bush Dance held on Sunday 5 November in the Shearing Shed was enjoyed by 45 adults and 17 children, aged 5 to 85. Christine Grayden reported:

John and I got over to Churchill Island for the Friends of Churchill Island Society bush dance, which was such a lovely event! John danced numerous dances with a few partners, and lots of the dancers had big smiles on their faces, despite many being challenged with the completely unfamiliar dance



moves. Ages ranged from 5 to 85, and a good time was had by all. The Blackberry Jam Bush Band were fantastic! The banjo player talked to us during a

break and said they'd been playing together for these bush dances for 30 years - and it showed. So smooth and competent. All the dances were well called, and we even had a lovely saw music piece played for us by the accordion player during one break. So good to catch up with friends there too. Hard to get photos with all the action going on, plus the shearing shed 'dance floor' was packed.



## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

Our general meeting on 18 November had a very small attendance but we discussed the Arthur Evans film together.

It has been a busy time for FOCIS since our AGM. We had a well-attended working bee on October 14 organised by Don who provided a stock of brooms, gloves, dustpans etc which enabled us to work effectively. Don has provided secure locations to ensure these are still available next time. He brought a vacuum and blower to try to clean out the machinery shed. An excellent morning tea was enjoyed by all afterwards.

We are awaiting a decision on the submission we made to the Victorian Community History Awards 2023 for 'Whispers from the past' – play and video. We submitted for the History Interpretation Award. Christine Grayden and I worked together on the submission, and we owe it to Christine for alerting us to the awards. A decision is expected in January.

We offered performances of the Phoenix Singers and Island Harmony Choir, conducted by Cecily for Community Day on 10 September. A FOCIS information table greeted visitors all day and there was good interest. Charlie partnered a visiting horse to offer wagon rides and I filled in for an hour helping visitors into the wagon.

The major event in the last few months has been the Bush Dance which took place on 5 November. The feedback from those who attended was overwhelmingly positive though as a fund raiser, it failed, and we made a small loss. However, as an activity to enhance the cultural heritage of Churchill Island, it was an outstanding success. I wish to thank the FOCIS committee and three of their partners who put in many hours before and on the day in publicising the event, managing tickets and entry, putting up signs, first aid, organising the band and many other tasks. I feel that the committee pulled together as a team and has much to be proud of.

Our final event for the year is the Carol Singing plus accompanying drama. Building on the success of 'Whispers from the Past' I have written a short drama to introduce the carols set in 1899. This features Samuel Amess, son of the builder, his wife Margaret and sister Maggie. There is again a cook and also two visitors to the island. Cecily plays a time travelling choir leader.

The event is scheduled for two performances on Saturday 23 December and rehearsals have commenced. We are pleased to have Kate, Pip and Mike Cleeland, who starred in 'Whispers from the Past' taking roles. Cecily, of course is leading the Phoenix Singers.

Our regular catch-up meeting with Nature Park has been postponed until after the general meeting. Items for discussion included: Reflection on the Bush dance and possible repeat at Easter; Discussion of FOCIS events in relation to PINP management; Inclusion of FOCIS events on MyImpact and other volunteer issues; Museum reaccreditation and FOCIS support; Christmas 1899 Carols and performance 23 December

Finally, a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all our members.

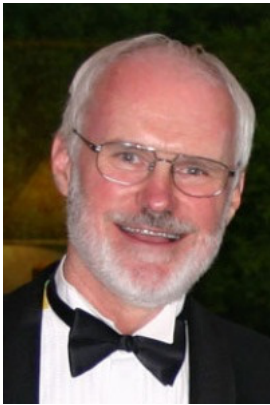
David Maunders, President.

## **IN MEMORIAM WILF DUNGAN**

We were sad to hear of the passing of Wilf Dungan, Honorary member of FOCIS, on 11 November. Wilf donated his collection of woodworking tools and implements, which was formed into the display next to the forge by Christine Grayden and Jeff Cole. He also donated \$1000 for setting up the display and a further \$2000 to FOCIS. He was a strong supporter of Churchill Island and FOCIS. He had lived in residential care for some years and suffered from Parkinson's.

Farewell Wilf. Thanks for your support.

## TREASURER'S REPORT



Tom reported that total nett assets had increased by the modest amount of \$136 to \$14,869 as at 31 October. Investments for the museum fund had reached \$41,982.63.

Memberships have fallen by 38 to 104 paying memberships giving a total of 197 paying members a fall of 71. These seemed to be recent enrolments rather than long term members. Membership had no effect on the financial situation.

The auditor has approved the 2022-23 accounts.

The full statement of accounts can be viewed on the FOCIS website, [focis.org.au](http://focis.org.au)

## CURATOR'S REPORT



It was really wonderful to attend the Churchill Island Bush Dance with my family over a few Sundays ago. We had a great time and it was lovely to experience the dancing and atmosphere at Churchill Island. Congratulations to all involved in putting on such a great event!

It's been a busy few months, particularly following on from the successful training workshops with Erina McCann from AMaGA Victoria and our Churchill Island volunteers. As I previously reported, Churchill Island was successful in

gaining a place on the Collections and Community Resilience Projects where we received wonderful hands-on training.

We are continuing to assess and rehouse the Amess Lace collection as per the conservation advice from the conservation workshop. I am also working on uploading photographs to Victorian Collections of the 100 objects we digitised over the course of five days in July and August.



We also supported AMaGA Victoria and our region by hosting a Public Digitisation Day on 2 August with the Wonthaggi and District Historical Society and Woolamai Beach Life Saving Club in attendance. It was great to see past FOCIS



President Graeme Clauscen attending for Woolamai Beach and meet Bob Tyler from Wonthaggi – both organisations holding fantastic collections to digitise.

I also had the opportunity to meet with the National Vietnam Veterans Museum to have a look at their archive facilities and talk with them about their efforts to digitise their extensive collection.

I attended the Victorian Collections Day at Buda Castlemaine on 12 September where there was engaging information on a range of topics from digital storytelling to copyright information, and the opportunity to gain ideas from a 'Historic House and Garden' setting.

Closer to home, we are looking forward to hearing the outcome in January of the FOCIS supported application to the Copland Foundation Grant for conservation work to restore the Minnie Lawrence Sketchbook. I have also been able to catch up with members of the restoration team to say hello and see the great work they are undertaking. I am working on developing a permanent sign to give visitors information about the tipping dray restoration project.

Thank you very much to Don and all those that gave their time at the last Working Bee, and indeed all the Working Bees this year. It is very valued and greatly appreciated by all at Churchill Island and does not go unnoticed. Good luck with the upcoming performances to be held near Christmas (the tree is up in Amess House!) and I wish you and all your families the very best over the coming months.

Best wishes, Andrea

Churchill Island, we averaged 320 visitors daily over the September holidays, which has been extremely pleasing! The wagon rides and farm demonstrations were a great success, and we look forward to offering more opportunities over the next holidays. I'm particularly pleased that Alice and Chloe are preparing to get their horse driving licenses. Charlie is doing very well and is loving his new environment. He and Nellie make a great match in pulling the wagon, particularly now that Nellie has finished her training.

The restoration team are progressing well with their projects. What was a safety hazard with the slow deterioration of the gun carriage has become an opportunity to display all the fantastic skills of the volunteers. The Crump Spreader is also progressing nicely and we would welcome it if anyone has any contacts or information about the history of Crump Manufacturing pre-1926 as a major fire destroyed their factory and all their records.

Community Day was also a great success with over 4300 people registering for tickets. The day was well supported and a fantastic opportunity for locals to enjoy Churchill Island and experience everything we have on offer.

Special thanks to FOCIS for the highly enjoyable Churchill Island Bush Dance – it was a great success and we hope to be able to offer another event at Easter.

I wish you all the very best in the lead up to the Christmas and Festive Season.

## FARM REPORT



It is an exciting time leading into our summer peak period with increasing international and domestic visitor numbers. Over the September school holidays we experienced near-perfect weather that saw sell-outs across 10 consecutive nights at the Penguin Parade (with an average of 2,200 visitors a night) and strong numbers at our other sites. At

## RESTORATION REPORT

The gun carriage rebuild is progressing satisfactorily by Brian and Greg, allowing for difficulties in obtaining materials. Building a new platform is under way.

Gun furniture and smaller items are mostly finished except for the dummy flintlock firing mechanism which was not on the cannon as we knew it but was original equipment. This is unlikely to be finished when the cannon is remounted.

Tim is well along with the restoration of the 1920s seeder and the woodwork has had its first coat of paint since it was new.

Peter made a request for a list of the timber components necessary for rebuilding the blue wheat wagon. The wagon has to be stabilised on a frame before it can be worked on.

I have made some enquiries as to the retrieval from the back area of the scoop that the Jerries brother used to dig the dam. An offer has been made to fit it up for use and maybe plough an area where it can be demonstrated.

The stump jump plough has not progressed any further... yet.

Acquisition of signage, as usual, is a slow process.

Jeff Cole.

## FINAL EVENT FOR 2023

Our final event for this year will be

### *Christmas at Churchill Island 1899*

Drawing on the success of our play *Whispers from the Past* presented last year, this will be a short dramatic performance introducing carols by the Phoenix Singers. Characters include Samuel Amess, son of the builder, his wife, Margaret, and sister Maggie. We are pleased to have the services of Mike, Pip and Kate Cleeland who performed so well in *Whispers*.

**The date is Saturday December 23, 11am and 1pm in the Shearing Shed.**

**Entry is free to Churchill Island ticker holders and totally free to FOCIS members and PINP volunteers.**



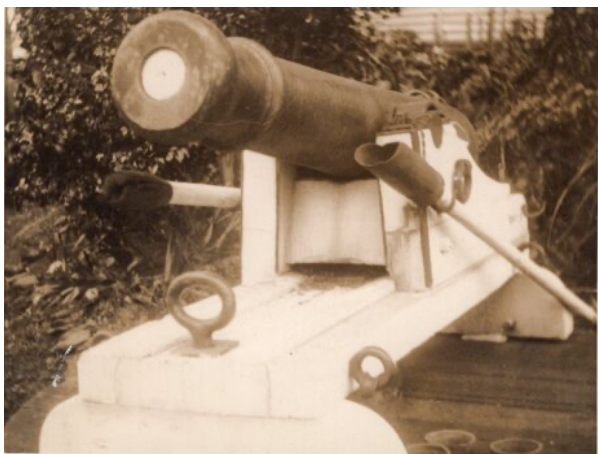
Phoenix Singers on Community Day.

## THE CANNON: SUMMARY OF RESEARCH.

*With the restoration of the cannon well under way, it may be of interest to our readers to reprint some of the research summary on the cannon. A longer paper on the cannon, its myths and realities, can be found on our website, [focis.org.au](http://focis.org.au).*

### The Myth

*The cannon came from the CSS Shenandoah, a warship of the Confederate States in the American Civil War. During the ships' stay in Melbourne in 1865, the cannon was presented to Samuel Amess in gratitude for his role in the hospitality offered to the officers. After Amess built the house on Churchill Island, the cannon was located there.*



This version of events was part of the Amess family history "handed down by word of mouth" (Ian Amess, letter to Robert Marmion, 15 March 1982, VCT Cannon File part 1). It was known to the private owners and to the Victorian Conservation Trust when it became responsible for Churchill Island in 1977.

### The Research.

Shortly after the purchase of the island, the VCT arranged for the restoration of the cannon by the Flinders Naval Base, when it is assumed that the break in the barrel and its repair occurred (letters of 10,20 October 1977, VCT Cannon File part 1).

From this time until 1983, the VCT, largely through its Executive Director Colonel Ian Wilton and his Assistant Director, Ross Lawson, undertook extensive correspondence to identify the history of the cannon.

They were certainly spurred on by the American Civil War Round Table of Australia, whose members had undertaken extensive research into the *Shenandoah* and the cannon and concluded that the cannon could not possibly be from the *Shenandoah* (Report of 1979; Letter of 17/8/1981, VCT Cannon File part 1). The VCT was reluctant to accept this. The ACWRTA accused the VCT of misleading the people of Victoria by claiming that the cannon came from the *Shenandoah* and of being more concerned with losing a tourist drawcard and having to withdraw brochures than putting the record straight 4 February, 1982, VCT Cannon File part 1).

The Victorian Conservation Trust tried hard to find out the origin of the cannon. In 1982, its officers approached every expert they could identify in Australia, the UK and the USA and commissioned their own local expert, Tony Dunlap, to report on the origins of the cannon. The cannon was weighed, measured and photographed. Identifying marks F RECK, 38, 860 were interpreted. F Reck was assumed by many to be the founder and an attempt to identify the foundry through historians of the Reck family in the USA proved fruitless. In addition, 38, was accepted as the piece number (though some thought it might be 1838 as date of manufacture) and 860 thought to be the weight (more or less confirmed by weighing) but some thought it might be 1860. Experts agreed on very little other than the piece was not of British manufacture. Let us consider the views of the major contributors.

The American Civil War Round Table researchers Duff and Marmion concluded that the cannon was one of the four six pounders left behind when the Westernport Settlement was abandoned in 1827 (sic) (Report of 17/August 1981, VCT archive – Cannon Part 1). This was the establishment of Fort Dumaresq on the cliff at Rhyll, established from fear of the French and the Corinella settlement. This theory was rejected by Ray Fielding, Curator of Arms at the Melbourne Science Museum. He argued that firstly all guns were returned to Sydney when the settlement was abandoned in 1828 and secondly that six pounder cast iron guns in British service were six or eight feet long and weighed 17 or 22 hundredweight, larger than the Churchill Island cannon (letter of 18 March 1982, VCT archive – Cannon Part 1). This was also the conclusion of Dunlap in his report (Report, 1982, Appendix G).

Tony Dunlap. Dunlap, a local armament expert, was commissioned to investigate the origin of the cannon. His report (1982 in CI Archives), according to the VCT, was inconclusive (perhaps not reaching their hoped-for conclusions) and argued that the cannon was of Confederate origin. Dunlap confined his research to cannons from North America and reached his conclusion because arms production in the South was somewhat chaotic and they he could not find any other answer. Fielding suggested that it was more reasonable to conclude that the cannon was produced in America in the mid 19th century. It is interesting to note that American experts do not suggest an American origin. Confederate origin does not strengthen the *Shenandoah* connection as her arms were supplied from Britain.

Ray Fielding, Curator of Arms at the Melbourne Science Museum, concluded that the gun was “consistent with the type found on merchant vessels of the period, the breeching loop above the cascabel knob is an indication that it was made as a ship’s gun”.

Edwin Olmstead, an American expert on muzzleloaders, contributed several letters. They are long and confusing, though in one he states: “I have neither seen nor heard of any piece even remotely resembling that at Churchill Island...” At one point he suggested it might be a hoax. (Letter of 2 July 1982, VCT archive – Cannon Part 1).

William C Wright, Historical Archaeologist, Department of Archives and History, State of Mississippi. Wright argued that the tube was Prussian and the F Reck signified the reign of Frederick IV, 860 was the date of casting and that the “cheeks and trunion caps are definitely of European origin” (Letter of 22 October 1982, VCT archive – Cannon Part 3).

No arms manufacturer F Reck has been found, in fact the only company by that name appears to be F. Reck & Co, an equipment and food supplier for ships and emigrants, founded by Friedrich Reck

on 15 September 1848 in Bremen. On 1 January 1854 he moved into the shipping business, adding ‘private insurer’ at the same time. By 1863 his fleet consisted of eight sailing ships. So the question might be asked as to whether this gun may have come from one of his ships or provided to a ship under his insurance. There certainly was a gun etc manufacturer named Reck which appears in various collectors’ forums. The Imperial War Museum in England has at least one Reck revolver.

Sam Happe, curator of the Churchill Island Museum 2020-2021 provided information to the historic gun registry and found several references to a proposed modification to fit a swivel gun on the bow of the *Shenandoah*. Several papers of the time reported plans to mount swivel guns forward. It is possible that Captain Waddell obtained the cannon in Melbourne with the intent to fit it but found it impossible to get it on board. He then gave it to Cleeland. There is no evidence for this, it is pure conjecture. The cannon was also significantly obsolete in comparison to the *Shenandoah*’s other armament.

It seems likely that the gun came from a merchant ship. Ross Lawson suggested that it might have come from Captain Corbett’s supply ship (the *Laurel* or the *John Fraser*?) and as it was outdated, to be used for barter. (Letter of 26 April, VCT archive – Cannon Part 1 1982).

To confuse matters more, Carroll Schulz said that he had been told that there were two cannon and that a larger one had been taken to Melbourne. When fired by Dr Jenkins, it “lobbed a ball on French Island” (letter Ian Wilton, 19 February 1982).

Research undertaken by Churchill Island restorer Jeff Cole, indicates that mid-century 6 lb cannon were much smaller and essentially signal guns. He drew comparison with the Saker used in India.

Friends of Churchill Island Society Inc.

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**FOCIS**

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