

# Reflections

Newsletter of the  
Phillip Island and District  
Genealogical Society Inc.

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## COMMITTEE 2023 - 2024

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## CHRISTMAS CLOSURE:

CLOSURE: Friday 15 December, 4 pm.

RE OPEN: Tuesday 16 January 2024, 10 am.

## FROM THE EDITOR OF 'REFLECTIONS'

This is my final edition of 'Reflections'. After 106 editions I have decided it is time to retire, and Sue Viney will be taking over as editor from February 2024.

I would like to thank all those members who have sent me articles and photos over the years. I couldn't have done it without you.

Jan Andrews



Best wishes for a very  
merry Christmas  
and a safe and happy  
(and genealogically successful)  
2024

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## MESMERISED

Jean Dunstan

What inspires someone to venture into the search of family history? In my case it was a series of things, my children's questions relating to the family background, my own curiosity and my inheritance of a large carton full of photographs (mainly unlabelled) of, I guessed, family and friends and an assortment of letters and other documents.

So where to start? My initial efforts were rather ad hoc. I joined Ancestry.com, entered some names and followed the green leaf hints. This was confusing because some of the hints were contradictory. I then made some google searches , this gave me more unsubstantiated and confusing information. It was at this stage I sought help . Phillip Island And District Genealogy Society was suggested as a possible source of assistance.

I joined the group and was given just the direction I needed. By following their guidance and using their on line programs I was able to find birth and death registration records which had other valuable information as well. It opened a whole new world for me, I was hooked.

I started by following my maternal line back as I had a photo of four generations - me, my mother, her father and his father.

From my personal relationship with my mother and to an extent her father I knew much of the history of these two ancestors. When it came to my great grandfather William there were some anecdotal memories but nothing I could substantiate. I applied for his death record from Victorian Department Of Births Deaths And Marriages. From this I was able to establish his date and place of death, his age at that time, where he had died and was buried, where he was born, the names of both his parents and his siblings.

An introduction to Trove enabled me to do further research and discover that he had been employed as Chief Officer in the department of Wills and Probate with The Public Records Office of Victoria for 45 years. Oh what an asset he would be for me today!

Then by following the paper trail back even further I found the records relating to Williams fathers Death records which gave me information regarding his place of birth and the names of his parents, James and Emma.

James was born in South Pool, Devon, England and migrated to Geelong Victoria with his brother Nicolas. They were both registered as shoe makers. William set up business in Geelong and Nicolas eventually moved to Ballarat.

Moving further back in time I sought information on James and his family prior to his immigration. The English Census forms from 1841 indicated that he had lived in Kingsbridge Devon with his parents William and Martha and was a shoemaker. By The time of the 1851 census he was still living in Kingsbridge but in a house in Ebrington street with his wife Emma , his daughter Frances and their Servant Susannah , he occupation was listed as Professor of Mesmerism.

### NO WONDER I HAD BEEN SO MESMERISED BY THE WHOLE PROCESS!

In this investigative process it seems that one revelation leads on to more questions. Why did James leave England? and why did he not continue his chosen field of mesmerism as it seemed to provide him with a comfortable way of life in Kingsbridge. The challenge continues

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## FREE INTERNET SITES

Greta Green marriage database

<http://www.achievements.co.uk/services/gretna/index.php>

Aerial Photo Explorer

<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/collections/aerial-photos/>

School profiles. Includes registers, index of pupils etc. On going

<https://www.vic.gov.au/150-years-public-education-victoria-school-profiles>

Cork past and present (GSV blog)

<https://gsv.org.au/corklibrary>

England and Wales wills and probate

<https://www.gov.uk/search-will-probate>

Grantville history

[www.grantvillehistory.com.au](http://www.grantvillehistory.com.au)

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**7 October: Trove, with Heather Arnold**


Heather Arnold, President of the Koo Wee Rup Swamp Historical Society, spoke enthusiastically to a group of approximately 27 people on the joys of using Trove. She explained the types of resources available e.g., newspapers, magazines, gazettes, and diaries. Heather entertained us with information and photos from the local area she had chosen at random using the search techniques. Surprisingly, some items related to members of the audience e.g., the birth notice of Laurie Dixon and photos of relatives of Julie Box!

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### **Scottish naming traditions**

The first son was named after his paternal grandfather

The second son was named after his maternal grandfather

The third son was named after his father

The first daughter was named after her maternal grandmother

The second daughter was named after her paternal grandmother

The third daughter was named after her mother

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## The Worst Storm in Victoria's History

Pamela Rothfield

Phillip Island and District Historical Society

Approaching her 100th birthday, Lorna Collins, formerly McFee, stands as one of the last living witnesses from Phillip Island who vividly recalls the most devastating storm in Victoria's history back in 1934. This catastrophic event claimed 35 lives, and Lorna herself is a living testament to that fateful day.

Reflecting on the calamity, Lorna, now on the brink of her centenary, shares, "Even though I was just a 10-year-old child at the time, I remember that day as if it were yesterday." The storm, unparalleled in her experience, unfolded while she was at school in the Rhyll Hall on Thursday afternoon, day's end. "The wind was ferocious, and the cacophony was deafening," she describes. "Debris and rain hammered against the tin roof of the school. Our teacher, Miss Major, was concerned about our safety as we made our way home in such treacherous weather. She was relieved when several parents arrived with overcoats to escort the children.

Lorna's eyes light up with nostalgia as she recounts her father, Percy McFee, waiting outside the Rhyll Hall with Paddy, their horse, and the sheltered dray equipped with raincoats. Together, they navigated the harrowing 500-metre journey home, with the wind flinging branches in every direction. "Once we finally arrived home, we felt an immense sense of relief, even though we were still fearful because our house was surrounded by towering gum trees," she reminisces. The relentless wind and rain made peaceful slumber impossible for anyone in the household that night.

As morning broke on Friday, terror filled Lorna as she realized the storm had only grown fiercer. "We were grateful when my parents decided that we should stay home from school that Friday. We were genuinely terrified as the gale-force winds howled, shaking the very foundation of our wooden farmhouse. Trees were uprooted, and rainwater found its way into our home,: she recalls, with a shudder running through her body at the memory.



While Lorna and her family endured the wrath of Victoria's worst storm, the twin screw steamer Coramba faced its own tragic fate. Departing from Warrnambool on Thursday November 29, 1934, and en route to Melbourne, the ship encountered extremely turbulent seas. Despite Captain Dowling's warning about severe weather, The ship set sail, only to succumb to massive waves, tearing lifeboats from their davits and ultimately capsizing. The ship's clock found later had stopped at 10.30 p.m., possibly indicating the time of the Coramba's tragic end.

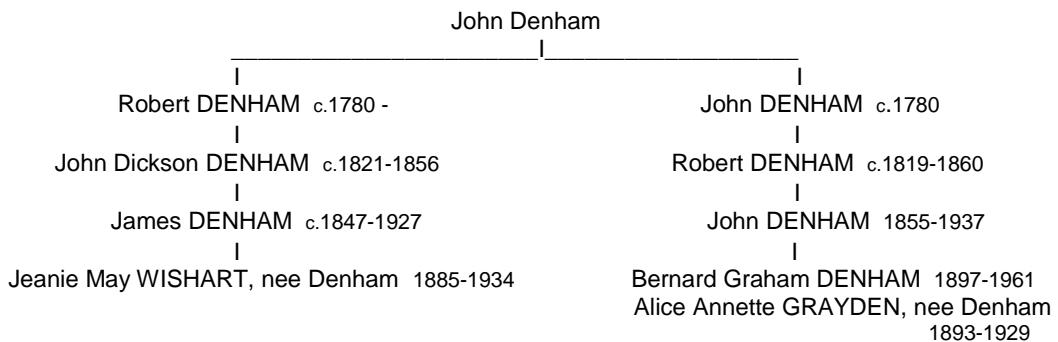
Lorna reflects on the impact the Coramba's loss had on the local community, with debris scattered across beaches and a futile search for survivors by local men. Tragically, all seventeen crew members perished. The storm itself, reaching its peak on Friday night,

November 30, caused widespread devastation across Victoria, leaving 35 dead, 250 injured, and around 3,000 people homeless.

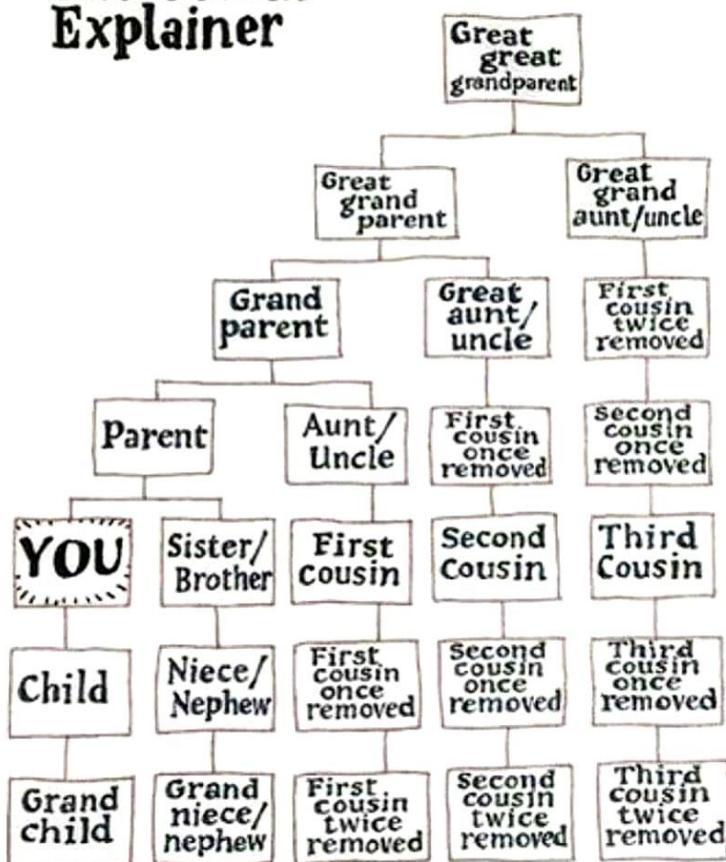
In the years following the shipwreck, items from the Coramba washed up on Phillip Island's beaches. Lorna's older brother, Jack, found a sturdy wooden bench seat from the crew's mess on Smiths Beach, serving as a poignant reminder of the storm for over fifty years. Unlike the fate of this bench, the Coramba itself, lost for many years, was finally located in May 2011, around 10 nautical miles south of Seal Rocks.

### THE 'CORAMBA'

What may not be widely known is that there is another, admittedly distant, link to Phillip Island. It does go back four generations, but John Denham, Bernard Graham Denham and the family of Alice Annette Grayden nee Denham, who were living on Phillip Island in 1934, were related to Jeanie May Wishart, the late wife of Robert Muir Wishart, second officer of the 'Coramba'.



### The Cousin Explainer



found on Facebook

## PHILLIP ISLAND IN THE NEWS

### PHILLIP ISLAND.

By Our Special Reporter.

On Thursday, January 5th, a meeting of the following residents was held in the Hall—Messrs. McFee, Underdown, A. McIlwraith, J. Anderson, W. D. Davie, W. Jeffrey, and W. E. Thompson. Councillor McFee (President of the Shire), who presided, explained the object of the meeting was to form a committee and appoint officers for the purpose of carrying out the scheme for the erection of a memorial cairn at Rhyll, where the British flag was hoisted in 1826 and a settlement formed. It was agreed that those present, with the following, be a committee—P. G. Dickson, F. Hatfield, D. Robb, A. S. K. Sambell, W. Kennon and Williams, junr. Councillor A. McIlwraith was appointed treasurer, and W. E. Thompson secretary, who reported that his Excellency would be present at the lecture on Wednesday, 11th January. The secretary reported having received a cheque for £22/2/- from Mr. Alfred Shaw, and smaller amounts. Further subscriptions towards the cost of the erection of the cairn may be forwarded to Mr. A. McIlwraith or Mr. W. E. Thompson. Members of the committee, accompanied by S. J. Barrett and Mr. Chas. Long, gathered at the site of the old well at Rhyll on the morning of January 12th. By a happy chance, they were

joined by the chief architect of the State Public Works Department, Mr. C. Brittingham, who very kindly offered his services in connection with the erection of the memorial. It was decided to place the cairn some few feet to the seaward side of the old well, which is to be cleaned out and bricked, and so made available for craft and fishermen to draw supplies of fresh water from. (This well was originally sunk by the settlement in 1826.)

It was decided to construct the cairn of local stone, with, if possible, a tablet of Woolamai granite let into one side, bearing the lettering, and that the decorations be somewhat the same as the Flinders cairn, and that Mr. Long be asked to prepare a suitable inscription.

The following inscription has been suggested :—

"To commemorate the discovery of this port by Surgeon George Bass, January 4th, 1798, the visits paid by Lieut. James Grant, March, 1801; Lieut. John Murray, December, 1801; and the French expedition under Baudin, April, 1802; and the establishment of a temporary British settlement on its shores, December, 1826."

"Erected by the islanders in co-operation with the National Parks Committee and the Education Department."

Frankston and Somerville Standard. Friday 20 January 1922

For some months the Cowes Public Hall has been closed, owing to extensive building operations being carried out to enlarge and improve the hall. The space in the hall has been increased to nearly twice the width, as well as lengthened, and cloak rooms, supper rooms, etc., have been added, while at the front are the club rooms of the local branch of the R.S.A.

The re-opening night was celebrated on November 21, by a fancy, plain and poster ball, which was largely attended, and the commodious hall was packed.

Mr. Cootee, of "Anzac" House, in a felicitous speech, reminded the company of the way in which the hall had expanded from a small beginning to its present commodious size, and declared the renovated building open. He then spoke of the soldiers' club rooms, and presented the key of them to Mr. Williams, president of the Soldiers' Club, concluding with an urgent appeal to all soldiers to join up with the Soldiers' League and stand together.

The Phillip Island orchestra supplied excellent music for the dancing. Old-time as well as modern dances were on the programme.

Frankston and Somerville Standard. Wednesday 26 November 1924

Thomas Jefferson, a Virgin, and Benjamin Franklin were two singers of the Declaration of Independence. Franklin discovered electricity by rubbing two cats backwards and declared "A horse divided against itself cannot stand." Franklin died in 1790 and is still dead.

School Boy Howlers (source unknown)

### IGA COWES

Anyone shopping at the IGA Grocery store in Cowes, please give our **Shopper Number 595** and all credits will go to the Phillip Island and District Genealogical Society Inc. It would be most appreciated by the Committee if you could spare a few points.