



Pioneer Echo

We look forward to your past

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The dedication panel on the lower edge of the quilt reads:

TO THE LADIES/of the/Convict ship Committee/This quilt worked by the convicts/of the Ship Rajah during their voyage/to van Diemens Land is presented as a /testimony of the gratitude with which/they remember their exertions for their/welfare while in England and during/ their passage and also as a proof that/they have not neglected the Ladies/kind adminitions of being industrious/June 1841

The Rajah quilt is representative of the determination and endurance of all those early pioneers who sailed through tumultuous conditions to journey to Australia including to Port Phillip.

Contributed by Dianne Wheeler PPPG member No. 1505

The Rajah Quilt



The Rajah quilt is one of Australia's most important textiles according to the National Gallery of Australia. It is an extraordinary work of art which was made by the hands of many convict women in abject conditions on the ship *Rajah* whilst sailing for Van Dieman's Land in 1841.

Its story is one of hope and persistence in colonial life. The Rajah quilt has miraculously endured the ravages of time and physical decay to provide us with a tangible link to this country's fragile early society and the women who transcended their conditions to work together in the service of art. Source: <https://nga.gov.au>

**See the article on
page 3
by speaker
Elaine Race on
*Crossing the Seas
to the Port Phillip
District***



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PEN

Spring is on the way after what can only be described as a miserable Melbourne Winter (smugly said with the heater on). I wonder how the pioneers managed to survive not just the cold but the need to provide for themselves.

We competed for the 2024 Nick Vine Hall Awards which examine the journals of history groups and although not winning an award, we received encouraging feedback from the judges. We can all be proud of our work. A special thank you to Stuart Hamilton for his efforts with the “journal” that we gave as an example of our communications. And on that topic, a special thankyou to Di Wheeler for her continued efforts in making the *Echo* so informative and getting it out to everyone.

Don't miss our next meeting where the topic is “*The Watson & Hunter Story*” about a wealthy Scottish pastoral company which established itself up near where Mansfield is today and held huge Victorian landholdings. Our speaker is Graeme McIntosh, who is writing about family histories of the Mansfield district. Look out for the “Wild Colonial Boys”.

We have a new banner to unveil at the September meeting. Don't forget, if you can't be there, join us on Zoom (see website for details)

Paul Cronin,
President

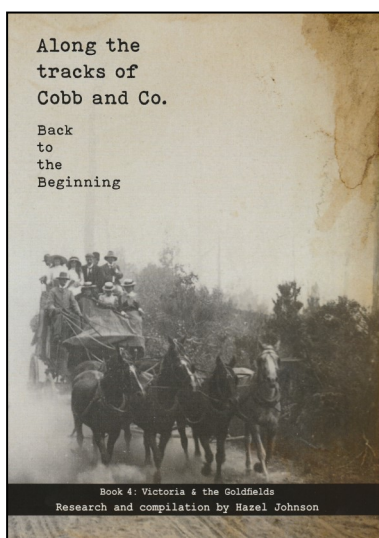
WELCOME TO THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS



PPPG No	Member Name	Descended From	Details	Date	Ship or other means
1574	Kathleen TONDORF	a) James HUNTER	Arr. P.P.D.	7 Jan 1849	<i>The Maitland</i>
		b) Helen HUNTER	“	“	“
1575	John GUEST	a) James PRATT	Arr. P.P.D.	4 Oct 1849	<i>Mohamed Shah</i>
		b) Jane PRATT	“	“	“

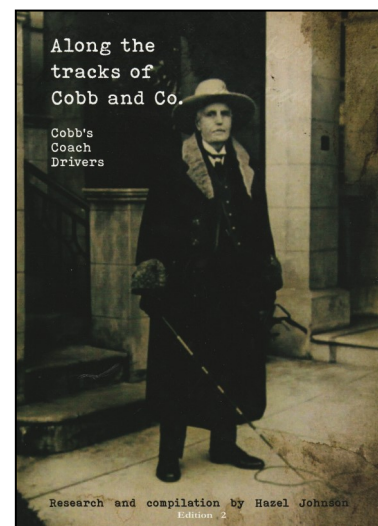


Additions to the P.P.P.G. Library



Left: *Along the tracks of Cobb & Co. - Back to the Beginning*, by Hazel Johnson digs in to the early settlement in the colony of Victoria, in addition to the commencement of Cobb & Co., in 1854, by the Americans , and the numerous Cobb & Co. proprietors thereafter. (Purchased by the P.P.P.G.)

The PPPG Committee and Members wish to thank Hazel Johnson for her generous donation of *Along the Tacks of Cobb & Co.—Cobb's Coach Drivers* to the PPPG library.



Address at the General Meeting on 13 July 2024

CROSSING THE SEAS TO THE P.P.D.

Speaker: Elaine Race

Seven minutes from the time the *Gulf of Carpentaria* struck an uncharted rock in fine weather her holds were filling with water; 25 minutes later the ship was rolling in her death throws. The report was a stark reminder of how quickly a disaster can happen at sea and how vulnerable passengers passing through Bass Strait would be if their ship was wrecked. This applied especially to the thousands of emigrants from Britain between Sep 1836 and Jul 1851 who arrived in the Port Phillip District of N.S.W (P.P.D.). At least 136,000 people came either independently or through the Poor Law Relief System or the Bounty System in an 18 year period. Heroes!

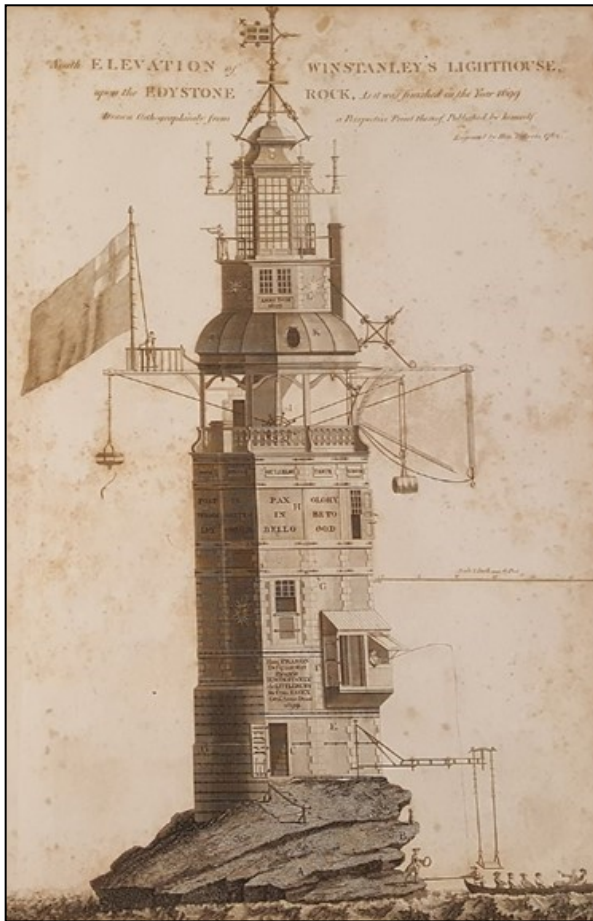
The brave explorers and cartographers who mapped the coast of the P.P.D. between 1771-1803, Flinders, Bass, Murray, Baudin and Hamelin had warned of the perils of this passage of water. Rocky reefs and volcanic peaks were hidden from sight by steep waves caused by the super charged south westerly winds from the South Pole hitting the relatively shallow waters of the Strait. Currents were unpredictable and fogs and squalls common. The coast was rocky and often steep. The fragility of their sailing craft was visible in pictures of a whaleboat in which Bass explored the coast from Sydney to Western Port in 1797 and the ships used by French explorers Baudin and Hamelin in 1802-03. Heroes!

Only 84 kms separates Cape Otway from Cape Wickham on King Island and captains often mistook one for the other in heavy weather and fog. The Bass Strait Maritime Centre estimates nearly 1500 ships were lost in these waters in the 1800s. Listeners were reminded that hundreds of emigrant lives were lost close to their destination after surviving famine and the threat of consignment to a Workhouse in their home country then the rigours of a 20,000 km sailing voyage. Of the 740 documented shipwrecks before 1855, the loss of the *Cataraqui* (at right) in the shoals off King Island in 1845 was highlighted. The loss of 420 souls destined for the P.P.D. rightly focussed government officials such as La Trobe



and Franklin on the issue of maritime safety and plans for lighthouses to be built at Cape Otway and Cape Wickham were promoted. There is evidence of over 1,000 ships using this passage during the period of the P.P.D which included coastal traders, convict transports and emigrant ships travelling to Sydney, Brisbane, Launceston, New Zealand and beyond. The Victorian Gold Rush was still in the future.

The evolution of lighthouses was demonstrated from 280 BC in Egypt to the 1960s when Glass Reinforced Plastic Boxes (GRBs) made them redundant. Wood or coal fires had been maintained in braziers



perched atop a tower for hundreds of years- the Isle of May light required 400 tons of coal to be hauled up each year then candles and oil lamps were used. At the Eddystone Light (left), Winstanley used 60 one pound candles each 24 hours and later, Smeaton's design required 24 candles to be replaced each 3 hours. The invention of the Argand Lamp with its hollow wicks and superior combustion was adopted almost universally.

A major development was the Fresnel lens (below) which refracted and reflected light beams making them longer and brighter. The young Fresnel worked for the *Commission des Phares* founded in 1811 by Napoleon, and developed a lighthouse plan for France with a hierarchy of lights to enable mariners to identify each lighthouse by the sequence of flashing lights.



Distinctive painted patterns on the exterior of the towers enabled daylight identification. 25,000 lighthouses still exist but mostly equipped now with electronic signalling devices and the Geo Positioning System was universally adopted from the 1980s.

We took a “probable” journey with Biddy Barry from Tipperary to the P.P.D. on the 500 ton *Gilmour* in 1841 noting the lighthouses



that made her journey safer. Emigrant Depots in Cobh Harbour (left) in Ireland and Plymouth in England were noted and conditions under the agency of another hero, John Marshall, explored. The dramatic history of the Eddystone Lighthouse with 50 ships wrecked there each year until the unfortunate Mr Winstanley built the first lighthouse, was discussed. He survived a kidnapping by pirates but then lost

his lighthouse and his life in an Atlantic storm five years later.

Mr Ruddyard's light burnt down with loss of life after 46 years and the beautifully constructed light Mr Smeaton built survived 122 years before the rock to which it was affixed crumbled. His distinctive lighthouse was transported to Plymouth Hoe and James Douglas for *Trinity House* (the General Lighthouse Authority for England, Wales, the Channel Island and Gibraltar since 1514) built the current iteration.

Stories of the remarkable lights off the Brittany coast were introduced. The stoic La Jument lighthouse on Ushant Island, the gracious 400 year old Cordouan Lighthouse at the mouth of the Gironde River and in the distance the lights of Penmarch'h.

A stop in Cape Town for supplies preceded the journey into the freezing conditions of the sub Antarctic and a mention of a 13 year old boy on the *Earl of Eglington* that nearly collided with the unchartered Heard Island in 1854. In 1864 he would marry Biddy's daughter.

Reports in the P.P.D. papers heralded the start of a major depression so life would be rough for Biddy and her fellow travellers as they established their new lives. It would be their first hot Christmas.

Descriptions of the only two lighthouses in operation in the P.P.D. years were provided. The William's Town Light (later known as The Timeball) was a useful light for traffic into Hobson's Bay from 1849. Its later role as a Timeball tower was linked to the calibration of marine chronometers – an essential item for mariners to determine Longitude. The raising of the copper ball at 1pm each day was discontinued when the keeper died and nobody noticed for ten days. It appears by 1928 ships crews tuned into local radio stations for time calls. The Cape Otway Lighthouse has done sterling duty from 1848 and is still in good condition. La Trobe who determined the site by rough walking and help from the local indigenous tribe could be considered a hero as this light and the one on Cape Wickham, King Island increased the safety of ships passing through The Eye of the Needle at the western entrance to Bass Strait.



Right: The Cape Otway Lighthouse is considered Australia's most significant lighthouse and is also known as the 'Beacon of Hope.' It is perched on towering sea cliffs 90 metres above where Bass Strait and the Southern Ocean collide, along the rugged Australian coastline where tourists now watch whales at play and hike the Great Ocean Walk. Source: visitgreatoceanroad.org



Above: The Cape Wickham lighthouse in the distance showing the rugged coastline Source: abc.net.au



According to the Heritage Council of Victoria (vhd.heritage.vic.gov.au) there were a total of 778 shipwrecks listed as at 16 August 2024, 130 of them in Port Phillip Bay, but many more have yet to be discovered.



SHIPWRECKS

The Rip, the infamous strip of water that lies at the entrance of Port Phillip Bay is considered to be some of the most treacherous waters in the world and is only 2.8 kms wide. As a result many ships have met their fate here and their remains now lie at the bottom of the ocean.

Source: nepeanhistoricalsociety.asn.au

Prince Albert - 19 November 1840 believed to have been the first vessel wrecked at Port Phillip Heads. Schooner, 27/19 tons. Built Sydney 1840; Washed ashore in a gale about two nautical miles east of Point Nepean. Four lives were lost. There was a letter and a small Indian cigar case with a lock of hair inside found along with several newspapers.

Source: nepeanhistoricalsociety.asn.au/history/shipwrecks

The article at right was taken from *The Port Phillip Gazette* 25 Nov 1840 page 3.

William Salthouse - 28 November 1841

Source: Trove; *Colonial Times* (Hobart, Tas. : 1828 - 1857) Tue 14 Dec 1841 Page 3 ENGLISH NEWS

INTELLIGENCE RESPECTING THE LOSS OF THE WILLIAM SALTHOUSE.-

The first vessel which has actually been wrecked within our Port is the unfortunate barque **William Salthouse**, 260 tons, and bound from Quebec to Port Phillip, laden with timber, flour, saltfish, beef, cider, and vinegar. ... and was the first vessel with merchandise from British North America to the British Australian Colonies. On Sunday November 28th, the **William Salthouse** was standing into the bay, with the wind at S. S. W. blowing hard, the tide at first quarter ebb. From the narrowness of the entrance and the opposition of the wind and tide, which were meeting at the entrance, the ripples, so well known to old navigators, were presenting a formidable aspect to the eye of the stranger ... stood too close to the reef which runs out from Point Nepean, and was in consequence wrecked. This reef represented as terminating abruptly at the last rock which shews itself above water, whereas the dangers continue under water at various depths, to the length ... of about 110 fathoms. On the extremity of this hidden danger the **William Salthouse** first touched when running in, subsequently striking with such violence as to knock off her rudder and part of her forefoot; the strength of the tide at this moment cast her athwart and finally carried her off; upon finding deep water again she let go her anchor, and was presently boarded by one of the pilots from the station at Shortland Bluff ... Slipping the chain, the pilot endeavoured, by steering her under sails and such part of the rudder as remained, to bring her up the bay; finding however, that she was unmanageable, the pilot gave her a second anchor, which let go in the tide way, snapped as it veered out of the hawse hole, and the ill-fated barque ran without redress upon the sand known as Pope's Eye. It was soon found that the water, which had risen six feet within the hour, would sink her, every exertion was therefore made to save the men, who with the commander, the pilot, and the ship's papers alone saved, were landed at the pilot station. No sooner had the report reached town, than Mr. Ashhurst, embarking in the cutter **Emily**, then lying at Williams Town, sailed down the harbour, to render every assistance ... and much to the credit of ... the commander, the **Emily** arrived at the wreck twenty four hours ahead of the revenue cutter **Ranger**, and the other vessels despatched to her assistance. On reaching the wreck, it was seen that no hope remained of saving the vessel or the cargo ... lying in three fathoms had six feet on her deck ... It is expected that she will go to pieces ... especially as the weather has been very rough. The greater part of her cargo as well as the hull is insured, and as the vessel was old, the loss, except the discredit which it will tend to bring on the navigation of this Port, will hardly be felt.— *Port Phillip Gazette*. '

WRECK.—Extract from a letter, dated Point Nepean, 19th November, 1840:—

"I am under the painful necessity of informing you, that a cutter has been wrecked between this place and Cape Schanck. There is part of the vessel about two miles from us, but not the appearance of any human being; no doubt they all met a watery grave. The vessel must have been lost during the late southerly gales. It would seem that some of the crew took to the whale boat, as there are the remains of a man upon the beach. I have sent a letter, picked up, directed to a Mr. Wignell. It was in a small Indian cigar case, with a long lock of female's hair. There were several newspapers directed to you. The vessel's name is the **Prince Albert**. There is no appearance of a cargo."

The letter alluded to is dated Sydney, September 28, and the party to whom it is addressed may obtain it by application at the Gazette Office.

CLONMELL.—No appearance of the "Devil's Pe'ant" from this vessel in sight at sun down.

THE PRINCE ALBERT.—There were only four persons on board this unfortunate vessel, who were supplied with provisions at Western Port by Mr. Cameron, on the afternoon of the day on which the tempestuous gale from the southward set in

SHIPWRECKS

LOSS OF THE **THETIS** 26 May 1848 - Two masted wooden schooner, built Moruya River, NSW, 1847;

The **Thetis** was a new vessel of 94 tons, the property of Mr. Rayner, of Sydney. Her estimated value was £2000. She was not insured. The following is the cargo shipped from Sydney in the *Thetis* — 2 rolls lead, 5 bars iron, 20 barrels raisins, 5 caroteels currants, 50 hogsheads beer, 13 logs cedar, 30 bags maize, 17 cases wine, 3 cases, 2 casks tar, 1 cask pitch, 11 packages iron guttering, 16 casks iron pipes, 1 case, 65 bars single iron, 1 bundle seeds, 2 casks, 4 cases, 256 chests and 140 half chests tea, 3 cases, 1 bundle of wire, 5 hogs head sugar, 12 kegs butter.

Inward bound from Sydney, struck Point Lonsdale reef, Port Phillip Heads, 26 May 1848. Fifteen minutes after she struck she was on her beam ends with her masts lying over the rocks. At the time, the night was frightfully cold, intensely dark and the rain was descending in torrents. The twenty-four passengers, most of whom were in bed at the time, rushed on deck, half naked and clung to the side of the vessel till low tide when they climbed on to the fallen mast and then dropped on to the reef. Two children were swept from their mother's arms and drowned. Due to the severe exposure to the cold and wet, their parents, who reached the reef in such a distressed and exhausted condition perished before reaching the shore. It took about five hours to get the exhausted passengers and crew to the safety of terra firma. They then travelled some five miles to the pilot-station where every attention was given to them. Source: *The Sydney Daily Advertiser* (NSW : 1848) Wed 7 Jun 1848 Page 2 LOSS OF THE "THETIS," SCHOONER.

The article (right), came from the *Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser* 21 June 1848 page 2

TANTALISING.—A few days ago, while one of the passengers to Melbourne per *Thetis* was on his way to Geelong, on board one of the steamers running between Melbourne and Geelong, he saw a chest of drawers, belonging to him, floating in the bay, but such was the inclement state of the weather, that it was impossible to get near it, although the contents were valued by the owner at upwards of £200. A cask of porter, value £6 or £7, was, however, picked up in sight of the owner of the drawers. —*Argus*.

ANOTHER WRECK AT PORT PHILLIP HEADS. It is our melancholy duty to record another fatality similar to that which occurred to the **Thetis** only a week ago. Two total wrecks within the space of six days; under precisely similar circumstances, form, indeed, an awful spectacle for contemplation. On Thursday morning last, the schooner **Sophia** made the Heads about 4 o'clock, a.m. The light on Shortland's Bluff was visible, but the night was so dark that the land could not be distinguished. Steering by the light (but with no other object from which to take bearings), the Captain determined on entering without waiting for daylight. Standing in towards the Heads the vessel suddenly struck on what was afterwards ascertained to be the reef off Point Nepean. A sea struck the vessel at the same time, carried away the boat, and washed the captain overboard. The captain rose near the boat, got into her, and managed to get her alongside the vessel. By this time the schooner was rapidly settling-down, and the crew and passengers accordingly got into the boat. Almost immediately afterwards, the ill-fated vessel sunk in deep water alongside the reef, not ten minutes having elapsed from the time when she struck till she went down. The crew had not even time to put oars in the boat, but as it was slack-water, they managed to paddle their way to the pilot station, where they were of course, hospitably received, and were on that same day conveyed to Melbourne in the Government schooner **Apollo**. The captain and crew, in this instance, as in that of the **Thetis**, behaved with the greatest presence of mind and promptitude; and although the result was calamitous, we must remember that, in such weather, it is a choice of evils to attempt the entrance, or beat about outside. Not one, either of the crew or passengers, saved anything except what they stood in. The captain, himself, had not even shoes on his feet. The **Sophia** was a vessel of about 60 tons, and was not more than nine months old. She sailed from Hobart Town on the 24th of May. We have not heard whether she was insured. Source: *The Geelong Advertiser* 3 June 1848 page 2



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Next Meeting:	Saturday: 14 September 2024
Speaker:	Speaker: Graeme McIntosh— The Watson and Hunter Story Watson and Hunter were a large pastoral company formed in Edinburgh, Scotland. They organised racing events on their property at Saltwater River, now Flemington Racecourse. The Hunter brothers were superb horsemen and their daredevil exploits earned them the nickname “the wild colonial boys. Today however, little is remembered of their name or exploits but they have left one great legacy. they were prolific at naming places. and many suburbs and districts in present day Victoria were named by them.
Hall Entry:	\$2.00
Doors Open:	1.30 pm. Sign in. Time to browse notice board, borrow library books, and chat.
Meeting Starts:	2.00 pm.
Guest Speaker:	2.30 pm.
Afternoon Tea:	3.30 pm. Refreshments.
Venue:	Wesley Hall, St. Andrew’s Uniting Church, cnr Burke and Malvern Roads, Gardiner. Public Transport: Right on the route of the No 72 tram and only a short walk from the Gardiner Railway Station. Melways Reference: Map 59 H7. Or Online via Zoom digital platform
Upcoming Meetings:	9 November 2024 - Fred Cahir—They rescued us: Aboriginal heroes on Country 1 March 2025– Craige Proctor—Telling the story of pioneer women

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NEWSLETTER DEADLINE : At least one month prior to the next meeting

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