



Annual Report 2024-2025

Prepared for

St Kilda Historical Society AGM 2025

1 September 2025

This year is my last year as president of the Society – a position I have held since 2020 and covers the testing Covid years. During this period, we have built on the endeavours of others including most recently Jen Stone, Elizabeth Burns and Peter Johnson.

Our year's activities are listed in this Report where I believe we can demonstrate improved performance, increasing skills and measurable achievements. Identifying a few amongst the many are our expanded Newsletters, amazing events schedule and responses to many inquiries we receive on a daily basis.

1. MEMBERSHIP

Liz Kelly

The Society's membership continues to hold well. We currently have 102 paid-up 2025-2026 members plus 26 Life members. We are averaging a couple of new membership applications per month, and we picked up three new members following our April history talk at Europa on Alma retirement apartments in St Kilda.

2. EVENTS

Lindy Smith, Alan Baskin, Phillip Stewart

Beginning with Philip Bird's talk in August 2024 about the 1970s shared house in Mozart Street, the Society switched to holding events its events on Monday evenings (rather than Sunday afternoons) at the St Kilda Army and Navy Club.

The response from members and their guests has been positive, with strong attendance numbers that have been bolstered when we have also opened the event to the public. Events

are promoted to the public only after Society members have had an opportunity to book their tickets first.

While most events continue to be free, we sold tickets to *Coming Home: Suzie Miller in St Kilda* to cover the (discounted) cost of the Alex Theatre venue, and to the preview of Emma Louise Pursey's play about Joy Hester, which was a fundraiser for the professional staging of the play later this year. Again, Society members gave their support, ensuring that the events were a success.

Our walks on Sunday afternoons continued to be very popular as well, although we were unable to offer as many as in previous years. We encourage Society members to get in touch if they would like to lead a walk, give a talk, or have ideas about other events that we could offer.

The events held in 2024-2025 are recapped below, starting with the most recent event:

Paulie Stewart: All the Rage, Monday 16 June 2025



David Tenenbaum, Paulie Stewart

A delightful evening reminiscing with Paulie Stewart about how he became a journalist, formed the punk band *Painters and Dockers* and the Australian-East Timorese band the *Dili Allstars*, spent his formative years in St Kilda, and other tales from his compelling memoir *All the Rage*.

History Walk: Would you like fries with that? Sunday 1 June 2025

The mansion Halcyon, envisioned by the widow of an ex-convict, was one of the stops on the history walk to explore Acland Street's past, led by Liz Kelly. About 18 Society members were treated to glimpses of the street's fascinating past including jazz in bygone clubs, gangland murders in motels, homes of resident baronets and ex-premiers, and stories of family dynasties, a school, a Synagogue, an art gallery, a theatre, and a rarely noticed plaque.



History Walk: 'Ellwood' - Lost in the Lagoon, Sunday 4 May 2025

Beginning with how the land was used and cared for by the Yalukit Willam, Isaac Hermann took a dozen walkers through the history of the astonishingly rapid and massive impact of colonisation in the 19th century around the area we know as Elwood.

The stories he told of culture, community, cruelty, kindness, tragedy, destruction, big dreams and dumb ideas were all the more graphic when heard while walking through the landscape.



Artist Joy Hester - a preview, Monday 31 March 2025



Emma Louise Pursey, Janine Burke

The sold-out evening with art historian/biographer Janine Burke and actor/writer Emma Louise Pursey presented a compelling homage to artist Joy Hester's controversial life, culminating with Emma's reading of her play, *Where is Joy*.

The Society ran the event as a ticketed fundraiser to help fund the production of *Where is Joy*, which will open at 45 Downstairs in October.

Pre-European Indigenous Culture in St Kilda area, Monday 10 February 2025

More than 60 people filled the room at the St Kilda Army and Navy Club for a captivating account by Dr Gary Presland of how the Yalukit Willam clan once lived, honouring and caring for the land, before European incursion and the establishment of St Kilda. His insights drew on his 45 years of research into the Indigenous history of the area.



Guided Tour: National Theatre, Monday 9 December 2024



Sixteen members of the Society enjoyed an exclusive guided tour of the heritage listed National Theatre, a *beaux arts* building constructed in 1921 as a cinema, then modified in 1974 to accommodate the ballet and drama schools, still there 50 years later. We visited the foyer areas, auditorium, backstage and rehearsal and training rooms.



Coming Home: Suzie Miller in St Kilda, Monday 23 September 2024



Helen Halliday, Suzie Miller, Marianne Latham, Lindy Smith

Some 200 people packed the Alex Theatre to hear Suzie Miller, whose play *Prima Facie* has become a global sensation, discuss her life and work with documentary maker, Marianne Latham.

A gracious, dynamic, and eloquent speaker, Suzie enthralled our audience with tales of growing up in St Kilda, the influence of her mother, Elaine Miller (twice Mayor and long serving St Kilda councillor) and of her passion to seek social justice for the marginalised, first as a lawyer, then as a playwright.

History of St Kilda Film Festival, Sunday 8 September 2024

After the formalities of the 2024 AGM, Lisa French, the Dean of RMIT's School of Media and Communication, spoke about the history and cultural significance of the *St Kilda Film Festival*.

French, who was the Director of the *St Kilda Film Festival* from 1991 to 1993, explored its origins and development from its inception in 1983 to the present day, highlighting the creativity of the vibrant artistic community of St Kilda in the 1980s and 90s.



Mozart Street - Living in the 70s, Monday 12 August 2024



Philip Bird's talk revisited a 1970's shared house in Mozart Street, St Kilda, home to some of St Kilda's most interesting painters, photographers, film makers and musicians. They included one of Melbourne's best-known bands, the Skyhooks, and photographer, Carol Jerrems, famous for documenting the revolutionary spirit of the 1970's.

3. NEWSLETTER 2023-2024

Krystyna Kynst, Editor

We produced three newsletters during the 2024-2025 financial year - in August 2024, December 2024, and April 2025. In the first instance, the newsletter is emailed to members. Each time, around 84% of members engage with the newsletter. Some two to three months later, each newsletter is then published on the Society's website.

In December 2024, the Society bid farewell to the newsletter's wonderful graphic designer, Jocelyn Harvey, who laid out over a decade's worth of the Society's newsletter stories and images. Brendan Moore took over the design with a new layout for the April 2025 issue.

Thank you to last year's contributors *Ken Norling, Sam Taylor, Lindy Smith, Isaac Hermann, Oscar Schwartz, and Liz Kelly*. We very much encourage our members and the public to contribute stories to the newsletter.

The 2024-2025 issues featured stories about wealthy 19th century entrepreneur James Orkney of the Espy; revealed the "dark deeds in a sunny land" of pastoralist Samuel McKay; and relished the hoopla surrounding the arrival of the British flying boats at St Kilda Pier in St Kilda in 1925.

The issues uncovered the stories of WW1 soldiers Eric Tullock and John Hannaker, and of German/Jewish WW2 refugee, Carl Oppenheimer; investigated the Caravan Park in Fitzroy Street and the Chinese Market Gardens in Inkerman Street; and debunked the myth that the Vineyard Restaurant's started as a 19th century boathouse.

Coincidentally, stories about three men from quite different backgrounds, found that all had served on the St Kilda Council in the late 19th century: solicitor George Turner (in 1885-1900), heir to Colgate fortune Samuel Perkins Lord (from 1866 to 1874), and real estate agent Timothy Kelly (for one term from 1890).

4. SOCIAL MEDIA

Alan Baskin

The society has increased its activity on Social Media over the past 12 months, and plans to continue using its Facebook, Instagram and other accounts to further publicise its resources and activities. The aim is to share our images and details of our activities and, while staying politically non-partisan, to provoke discussion among followers about issues affecting our area.

We've started from a relatively low base with around 1,300 Facebook followers at the beginning of the year. After increased activity, particularly over the last few months, that has now increased to around 1,600.

Our existing Instagram account could no longer be accessed by the committee, so a new account has been started from scratch. It is slowly gaining followers. The society retired its X (Twitter) account, as it was not being used, and opened new accounts for Threads and TikTok, which are dormant at the moment, but will be developed in the future.

Work is also being done to integrate our social media accounts with our dedicated website.

5. ENQUIRIES

Liz Kelly

In the last financial year 2024-2025, we responded to 110 email enquiries. Most questions were from descendants seeking information about their St Kilda ancestors and/or recent house buyers researching the history of their new home.

Queries about our hotels featured: we received requests from a journalist writing histories of the Prince of Wales and the Village Belle; and from someone whose ancestor had been the licensee of the Inkerman Hotel- which brought to light a Tasmanian convict who became a St Kilda builder.

It's not just locals who contact us. We received a question from New York about the famous American opera producer, Frank Rigo, who died at his home in Dalgety St in 1936.

6. COLLECTION

Lindy Smith

We completed our work to digitise our collection of ephemera and uploaded 493 items to the Victorian Collections website. They have now been preserved in digital format before they deteriorate further and are also accessible online to Society members and the public. During this process we deaccessioned 121 items, most of which were donated to other collecting organisations.

Some time ago, the Society was given a collection of documents held by William Henry Greaves, the Town Clerk of the City of St Kilda from 1934 to 1964. His papers give a fascinating insight into

how the City operated and its role in the community during his tenure. This material is now being scanned and uploaded to Victorian Collections.

Our immediate priority in the coming year is to review and relocate our collection and Society records as we move into new space in the library. Already, we have discarded hundreds of photocopies and administrative records that are readily available online, nowadays. We are also exploring new approaches to using the items in the collection to tell stories about St Kilda's rich history.

As always, we welcome assistance from other Society members who would like to get involved.

7. RESEARCH PROJECTS

Library Relocation

Helen Halliday

The organization and renewal of the St Kilda Library is warmly welcomed. The Society played a pivotal role in both support and the rehabilitation of the Library and in securing our own space in the revamped internal layout. In the new layout we will have secure storage space for our collections and a work room which is bright and spacious. We thank the officers for their support in making this possible.

We envisage greater participation in the activities of the Library and better interface with the public, as a result of the upgrade, which includes a centrally located children's area, more space for reading and lounging and generally recognizing the original intent of the architect Enrico Taglietti.

The building's architectural significance was recognized this year when it achieved a heritage listing under the State Heritage Act.

Maps and Mansions project – phase 3

Helen Halliday

During the year the Society worked on its next most significant map found in the basement – the MMBW Map of St Kilda. This map is a 2m x 3m and is a composite of all the MMBW (Metropolitan Board of Works) maps for St Kilda.

Interestingly, it includes hand drawn overlays of the many new streets created following the extensive period of mansion demolition up to the 1940's.

This map has been digitized and is available on the website at a high level of resolution with details of almost all the buildings extant at the turn of the 20th century.

We now have nine major maps and/or map collections covering the period 1842 to around 1942.

Additionally, we have added extensive information to a contemporary google map, allowing people to explore historical buildings by location. Currently this includes information on over 150 mansions.

Indigenous project

Helen Halliday

In 2020, the Society formally changed its constitution to include the history of the aboriginal people who occupied the St Kilda area: the Yalukit Willam clan of the Boon Wurrung tribe.

During the past year, we worked with a team at Monash University to apply for the *City of Port Phillip Cultural Development Fund* to create an aboriginal map for the St Kilda area. Where possible, people and places will be identified and local language documented.

This project will be accomplished with specialists from Monash University under the guidance of N'arweet Carolyn Briggs. Since this is a project of considerable importance to me, I will be providing ongoing leadership on behalf of the Society to fulfill the grant (if/when received).



N'arweet Carolyn Briggs with Monash University's Aly Soutar (l) and Ana Lara Heyns (r)

Ailsa O'Connor Courtyard

Helen Halliday and Janine Burke

Though close to our hearts and with considerable support from the City of Port Phillip, this project has had to be delayed. The end was in sight, and the project was on the brink of implementation when we were advised that it now requires permission from the Heritage Council since the Library received its identification as a Heritage Place. We thank Janine Burke and the O'Connor family who have shown considerable forbearance and persistence!

Podcast – Denis Farrington, King of Swing

Sally Moore

Working with Paulie Stewart, I am uncovering the remarkable story of a man whose influence shaped the sound and soul of St Kilda for decades.

From the 1940s onward, Denis Farrington helped ignite a post-war entertainment boom, turning St Kilda into a live music mecca. By the 1970s, he was managing over 40 bands and had become a one-man institution - with every musician in town hoping for a place in his legendary little black book.

In our three-part podcast series, Paulie and I bring Denis's legacy to life through conversations with those who knew him best: his partner and big band singer Patti Lewis; lifelong friend Geoffrey Orr; his ever-loyal driver Bill Skacej; and Danny Rosner Blay, grandson of Holocaust survivor and renowned musician Leo Rosner (whose story featured in *Schindler's List* and who shared a close bond with Denis).

8. COMMUNITY

Liaison with historical groups and Indigenous events

Mike Perkal

Since the last AGM, I have attended three meetings of the South Metro Historical Societies (comprising 14 Societies) and represented the St Kilda Historical Society at several Indigenous events, including:

- *Sorry Day* Lunch at the St Kilda Town Hall sponsored by the Port Phillip Citizens for Reconciliation Inc. One hundred and sixty people attended, including the Mayor Louise Crawford and other Councillors, First Nations people, Community groups and school children.
- Start of *Reconciliation Week* - a Boon Wurrung First Nations Flag raising and smoking ceremony outside the St Kilda Town Hall. N'arweet Carolyn Briggs officiated and raised the two flags.
- Opening of the *Confined 16* Aboriginal Art Show at the Glen Eira Town Hall, which contained 400 paintings by Aboriginal artists who had been incarcerated. The Exhibition was sponsored by Torch, who support these artists, with all proceeds of sales going fully to the artists. Torch CEO, Susannah Day, gave the opening address and one of the artists told of her journey to become an artist.
- *Building Aboriginal Cultural Awareness for Community Groups* presentation by Terri Cooper of the Koorie Heritage Trust, at a half day seminar sponsored by the City of Port Phillip at Gasworks Art Park.

Communication with the City of Port Phillip

City of Port Phillip Cultural Heritage Reference Committee

Phillip Stewart

During the last year I attended the meetings of the Cultural Heritage Reference Committee run by the City of Port Phillip. On this committee we discuss and make decisions on Council proposals in this area such as retaining bluestone street guttering and lane paving, restorations to monuments, adding Blue Plaques to historic buildings, adding street furniture, adding street names, and many more such issues.

I am pleased to report that progress has been made on the future of the O'Donnell Gardens fountain, with Council committing to further improvements and maintenance.

9. COMMITTEE

The Committee has worked tirelessly throughout the year doing the very considerable tasks needed to produce the outcomes outlined in this report.

I thank them all for their work. In particular I wish to thank Phillip Bird for continuing to provide us with his services as Treasurer. However, he has now really retired leaving both a personal gap for the Society and a loss of his considerable expertise.

Life membership nomination

The committee recommends that Jocelyn Harvey be appointed Honorary Live Member of the Society in recognition of her volunteer work to layout each of our newsletter issues over the past 13 years, including her commitment to quality, her patience and understanding of the Society's needs and her quick response to edits. Jocelyn's graphic design and her dedication have been instrumental in developing the newsletter into the excellent publication it is today.

Five Year Plan

The Society developed its last Five-Year plan in 2021. This year the committee participated in a half day planning workshop to review the direction set by the Society's previous Five-Year Plan 2021-2025, and to discuss what the Society would like to achieve in the next five years, to 2030, such as:

- deepening its relationship with members by engaging them in the Society's work (as project volunteers or as committee members) and by encouraging them to tell their past and contemporary stories;
- transitioning from a Society that once collected only physical objects to one that collects ephemera, stories and digital records;

- involving the community in recording not only the past stories of people and places, but also capturing the stories of the 21st century, possibly using podcasts as a medium, and to this end finding ways to enable and encourage citizen historians;
- exploring the opportunities offered by technology for greater public engagement and learning more about available interactive tools that can add value, share knowledge, and inspire interest in history;
- maximising the Society's visibility within the library by showcasing St Kilda's rich and exciting history in the library's public areas and creating an inviting area of interest, collaboration and community resource.

I have loved the opportunities my 13-year role on the Society's Committee of Management, the last five as its President, has provided; not the least being the ability to work with many people to bring our history to life through podcasts, films, books, maps, and digital technology.

The Society relies on the support of many and I hope others will enjoy this opportunity as I have over this period. There is no doubt in my mind that people's lives are enhanced by contributing to its community: the Society is one such avenue. Recent changes relating to the St Kilda Library renewal project will add depth and breadth to our ability to share our knowledge of the St Kilda area.

While President, it has proved difficult for me to actually progress with projects for which time is the most precious resource! My personal passion is to continue to enhance our information base on the website. I believe our maps project has the capacity to meet much higher standards using advanced technology. I will be working on these aspects of the aims of the Society.

Helen Halliday OAM

President, St Kilda Historical Society.

1 September 2025