

Mud Flats and Flowing Tides

The History of the Newhaven Yacht Squadron

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Chapter 1

1798 – 1962

Esmeralda – History of Western Port

‘Over thirty years ago Doug saw one end of an old abandoned boat protruding from the sand, on the beach near where a jetty used to be. Doug asked George Mapleson, one of the local identities, if he knew the owner of the boat and George directed him to an elderly chap, in the nearby town of Korumburra, who was happy to sell it and for \$50 Doug became the owner.’ It took Doug quite a while to dig the boat out as he found to his amazement that it was more than nine metres long with most of it covered by sand. Eventually, she was lifted out of the sand with car jacks. Greased railway sleepers were placed under her and at high tide, with lots of help from friends, Doug managed to slide her into the water. ‘She promptly sank, but progressively over the next week or so Doug was able to bail her out and as the clinker planks took up she rode higher in the water. As recovered she needed a lot of repairs...This work was all completed at the old boat ramp south along the beach at Newhaven, including steam bending of the new blackwood ribs. Her planks were all kauri and deck timbers tallowwood. Her hull was fibre glassed...as he found the boat continually leaked.’

‘While *Esmeralda* was undoubtedly constructed as a tough working boat, age has given her a distinguished patina and she is definitely a very pretty boat. Doug has also installed a small cubby cabin, which he keeps ‘traditionally’ varnished...Another of *Esmeralda’s* very attractive features is a carved Samson post with elaborate bow chocks (low rail near bow), made from blackwood...It is obvious a lot of care and attention was originally put into her construction – far more than if she was designed as a modest hard working fishing boat.’

Her origins remain a mystery. Doug Dendle, her owner, believes that she was a whaler constructed around 1900. Local maritime expert Neil Lacco believes that *Esmeralda* was a ‘mash’ boat also built around 1900. This is the name given to boats operated by gill-netters who, to remove the larger fish that were caught by their gills in the openings of the nets, would bash them with a paddle to clear them from the netting; thus mashing them. A third possibility is that she was a navy whaleboat. The website of the Egan Marine Institute in Nantucket, Massachusetts describes whaleboats like *Esmeralda* which were designed by Charles Beetle in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century and are still used by the Nantucket Whaleboat Rowing Club. ‘When Bern Cuthertson planned his re-enactment in 1987 of the voyage of George Bass from Sydney to Melbourne, he built a whaleboat and named it *Elizabeth* after Bass’s boat. He tried to buy *Esmeralda* as he said it was “the only accurate whaleboat he had seen in Victoria”.’

Whatever *Esmeralda’s* origins and past working life, she is now proudly moored at Newhaven Yacht Squadron and gives great joy to Doug Dendle on his many fishing expeditions.¹

Chapter 1

1798 – 1962

Esmeralda – History of Western Port

'I have named the place, from its relative situation to every other known harbour on the coast, Western Port.'²

In 1795, George Bass, who was twenty-four years old and ship's surgeon, sailed with Governor John Hunter to the Colony of New South Wales (Australia) on board the *Reliance*. The colony was only ten years old and much of it was unexplored. It was totally dependent on supplies from Britain that arrived by sea following a circuitous route from the Indian Ocean, around the dangerous southern coast of Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). Van Diemen's Land was at the time thought to be part of the land-mass of the Colony of New South Wales. Twenty-eight years earlier, when Captain James Cook had first sighted the eastern coast of Australia, he had considered the possibility of a strait between the land masses of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land because of the sea swell and weather conditions he encountered. But this was still unexplored territory when George Bass sailed into Port Jackson New South Wales.

Having arrived in Port Jackson, George Bass found himself with nothing to do as the *Reliance* was laid up for repairs. So he and his twenty-one year old friend, Matthew Flinders, spent time exploring the colony's coast in a small rowing boat, the *Tom Thumb*. Then news came in 1797 that the *Sydney Cove*, a merchant ship bound for Port Jackson from India, had foundered on Preservation Island, one of fifty islands in the Furneaux Group that stretches from Wilson's Promontory in Victoria to Cape Portland in Tasmania. This incident strengthened the general theory that Van Diemen's Land was an island and spurred George Bass on in his desire to further explore the coast of New South Wales. Happily for Bass, John Hunter considered him to be 'a young man of well-informed mind and an active disposition'³ and when Bass asked for a boat so that he could explore the eastern coast of the Colony of New South Wales, Hunter immediately gave him 'an excellent whaleboat, well fitted, victualled, and manned to his wish'.⁴ The flat-floored whaleboat, built in Sydney of native timber and double-ended, as was the style of whaleboats, was twenty-eight feet and seven inches long. It was designed for eight oars but Bass only took six volunteer sailors from the King's ships with him. This number of men could easily row the boat but sails could also be raised and the boat remained light enough to make the most of sailing conditions. The whaleboat was named *Elizabeth* by her captain, George Bass.⁵

At six o'clock in the evening on Sunday 3 December 1797, George Bass and his crew 'rowed out between the Heads, and finding the wind at north-east by east set the sails and stood to the southward.'⁶ Bass explored the east coast to what is now known as Wilson's Promontory but was then called Furneaux's Land after Captain Tobias Furneaux who sighted some of the islands in 1773 and thought they were part of mainland Australia. Bass had every intention of sailing for the north of Van Diemen's Land but the combination of an east-south-east gale coming off what was later found to be a strait, and named Bass Strait by Matthew Flinders in honour of his friend, and a leaking boat

resulted in him turning back to Wilson's Promontory. From there he travelled in a west-north-west direction sailing close to the coast in search of shelter. On 5 January 1798 he found the shelter he was looking for.

At 7, seeing a large break in the land, we stood for it and found a strong outset of tide. Many shoals were breaking in different parts of the entrance, so that we could not then see where the channel was. I therefore landed to look for it, and found we were at the back of a long spit which we could not now round, as the tide of flood was beginning to make in strong; we therefore waited until high water, and then crossed the spit and entered an extensive harbour...I have named the place, from its relative situation to every other known harbour on the coast, Western Port.⁷

The whaleboat had entered the outer bay near Griffiths Point. In his journal Bass described the 'typical sea condition which occurs in the entrance with a strong outgoing tide running into an opposing wind driven sea.'⁸ The breaking water over the southern part of the Middle Sand would have forced him to seek shelter in the quieter waters in the eastern side of the entrance. Further progress into the eastern entrance would have made the fact obvious that the Middle Sand, or long spit as he termed it, extends well past Davis Point at San Remo. Landing at Griffiths Point and ascending the cliff face would have given him an excellent view of the entire entrance and the passage into the bay, which he named Western Port.

Bass and his crew finally entered Western Port with the change of tide, rowing past a point of land that was originally called Woody Point but would later be renamed Newhaven. They crossed the bay to the east and were successful in finding a freshwater creek, probably near Bass, surrounded by green grass and ferns. There they made their camp for the next twelve days. After repairing their leaking boat, they explored the waters of Western Port and discovered that there was a wide western entrance, as well as the narrow winding eastern entrance through which his crew had rowed. He explored part of the land mass and discovered that it was an island and he named it Snapper Island after the first headland he had passed because it reminded him of a snapper. This headland is now known as Cape Woolamai.

He reported that 'the land round Western Port is low but hilly, the hills rising as they recede, which gives it a pleasing appearance.'⁹ Bass wrote in his journal that the quality of the soil was reasonable and apart from grass and ferns, there were gumtrees, she-oaks and swamp oaks, although the island itself was lightly wooded and generally covered with shrubs, which became salt marsh at the water's edge. Fresh water was hard to find, as was brackish water, and the land seemed to be in the grip of a drought. He found evidence of aboriginal habitation but saw only four figures that disappeared into the landscape. 'We saw a few of the bush kangaroo, the wallabah, but no other kind. Swans may be seen here, hundreds in flight, and ducks, a small but excellent kind, fly in thousands. There is an abundance of most kinds of wild fowl.'¹⁰ Bass also reported an abundance of sea life and seal colonies along the coastline.

Bass made comment about the tides and mudflats. 'The general rise of tide is from 10 to 14 feet. It flows on the full and change days about half-past twelve...Mud abounds so much that the greater part of the points are not approachable except towards the top of high water, and then at the risk of having your boat left until the next tide, for the mud runs out far and flat, and so soft that there is no walking the boat over it.'¹¹ This description of Western Port waters and land remains true today.

Finally, 'as the seventh week has now expired, our reduced stock of provisions forced us to turn homewards. We did it very reluctantly.' On 18 January 1798 at five o'clock in the morning Bass and his crew left Western Port. Their journey back to Port Jackson was made just as difficult by the weather as they had experienced on their journey out. He finally entered the waters of Port Jackson on 25 January 1798. Matthew Flinders's summary of Bass's journey rightly recognises its epic nature.

Mr Bass sailed with only six weeks' provisions, but with the assistance of occasional supplies of petrels, fish, seals' flesh and a few geese and black swans, and by abstinence, he had been enabled to prolong his voyage beyond eleven weeks...a voyage expressly undertaken for discovery in an open boat, and in which 600 miles of coast, mostly in a boisterous climate, was explored, has not, perhaps, its equal in the annals of maritime history.¹²

News spread of the discovery of Western Port with its abundant colonies of seals. This attracted sealers who set up huts on the island. Their activities ultimately almost completely wiped out the seal population on the island. In March 1801 the navy once more visited these waters. Lieutenant James Grant explored the land and waters of Western Port entering it 'between Phillip Island and Seal rocks where seals provided an interesting diversion'.¹³ Grant's ship, the *Lady Nelson*, was a 60-ton vessel built in 1798 for the purpose of exploration. At the time, her design was revolutionary as it included twin retractable keels that allowed her to enter shallow waters safely with a draft of only 1.8 metres. She was the first known decked vessel to enter Western Port and ultimately to navigate Bass Strait. During her first visit, Churchill Island was discovered and Victoria's first agricultural colony was established. The island was named by Grant after the Devonshire farmer who had provided much of the seed that was planted. Grant recorded in his diary

I sowed it in wheat, seeds of different sorts, planted onions and potatoes, with cucumber, pumpkin and melon seeds; also threw in several sorts of apple seed and some stones of plums and peaches, together with a few grains of rice and coffee.¹⁴

On her second visit to the area in December 1801, Lieutenant John Murray at the helm of the *Lady Nelson* found enough of the wheat and corn growing to allow a bushel of seed to be harvested and this was fed to three captured pairs of swans. Several other firsts occurred on this voyage. Victoria's first road sign was erected when Murray and his men cleared a path to a source of freshwater at what is now Ventnor and raised a sign giving its direction. The first known contact between Victorian Aborigines and white men occurred on the eastern side of the bay and although it was fleeting, later on conflict developed between the Bunurong people (the indigenous peoples of the Wonthaggi area) and the sealers and whalers who came to the area. When they began to succumb to the European diseases their numbers rapidly declined.

Many left the area to join the Koolin tribes around Melbourne.¹⁵ Before these troubles descended on them, the Bunurong peoples came to the coastal areas for shellfish and stone for tool making. They lived at camp sites now marked by middens, stone tools and bone fragments. The entrance to Port Phillip Bay was also discovered on the second voyage although the Heads were not entered at the time due to bad weather. In his reports on the expedition, Lieutenant Murray initially made mention of Snapper Island but he later changed the name to Phillip Island, after the first Governor Arthur Phillip.

Exploring the waters of Western Port was not an easy task. 'The men had a hazardous return run down the Bay. Despite all exertions on the oars, a strong tide turned the boat in whirlpools. At daylight they arrived back at *Lady Nelson* with a firm conviction that it was unsafe for any small boat to run in the dark.'¹⁶ This was not unlike the experiences of modern sailors caught in storms around Phillip Island.

Within minutes the change hit and wind strength went from an estimated 30 knots N.W. to in excess of 45 knots S.W. Then on top of this we were hit with fierce rain squalls of over 60 knots, visibility was reduced to 50 metres by stinging blinding rain. With the tide going out against the S.W. wind, plus the half metre N.W. chop, the sea state was exciting to say the least, and waves of 3 metres were encountered. Our yacht "Tainui" would wallow in the troughs at around 5 knots until wind and wave would propel her forward at speeds to 11 knots.¹⁷

During 1801, the French sailing ships *Naturaliste* and *Géographe*, under the command of Captain Nicholas Baudin, also visited the area. They were charting the coastline, circumnavigating French Island which they named Île des Français, and observing the flora and fauna. After those visits, other than the hunting activities of sealer and ex-convicts, no other exploration occurred for the next twenty-five years.

On 12 November 1826 the French corvette *Astrolabe*, under the command of Dumont d'Urville, entered Western Port and was greeted by Phillip Island sealers. Shore parties assessed the soil and vegetation and the flora and fauna while attempting to make contact with the Indigenous Australians.

Nautically, Western Port is extremely interesting. In effect, it offers an anchorage as easy to get into as to get out of and for this double reason is infinitely superior...Its topography is excellent...In a word...it will be an important port in a passage like Bass Strait where the winds blow furiously...and the currents can make sailing dangerous.¹⁸

Once more the British took an interest in Western Port, fearing that the French were attempting to set up a base and challenge Britain's possession of the Colony of New South Wales. However, unknown to them, at that stage the French had already abandoned their plans. The other factor that encouraged Britain's interest was Hume and Hovell's report on their 1824 overland expedition, which suggested that the area was suitable for settlement. Unfortunately, Hume and Hovell's calculations were wrong. The bay they suggested suitable for settlement was Port Phillip Bay not Western Port. However, before either of these misconceptions were recognised, the chartered brig *Dragon*, captained by Samuel Wright of the 3rd Regiment, entered the waters of the western entrance on 24 November 1826 to stake Britain's claim to the land and waters of Western Port. A month later they were joined by HMS *Fly* under Captain F Wetherall's command. The parties, comprising a detachment of the 3rd Regiment and twenty-one convicts, set up a post at what is now Rhyll, but was named Fort Dumaresq after the Governor's wife's family. Formal possession of the land was taken on 3 December 1826 when the flag was hoisted and recognised by a twenty-one gun salute. On 12 December 1826 this site was moved to a hillside just east of what is today Corinella. Land was cleared, a garden was established, roads were laid and a camp was set up where the convicts collected shells for the kiln, burning them down to supply lime for the making of bricks. By early the following year enough bricks had been fired to build Victoria's first Government house – an

edifice with 'a brick chimney, shingled roof, wide verandahs and a commanding view of Western Port.'¹⁹ Unfortunately, and in spite of the many expeditionary successes, lack of fresh water was a problem and the area was once more abandoned by the government of New South Wales in 1828.

By 1835, Tasmanian settlers began to take interest in Western Port because 'they regarded the shores across the Strait as an extension of their own territory.'²⁰ John Griffiths, an Australian born son of a New South Wales ship builder and former convict, had a well established shipbuilding business in Launceston. He also engaged in sealing and whaling and this is what attracted him to Western Port, as did the possibility of establishing a bark industry. Griffiths Point, now San Remo, was named after him. John Pascoe Fawkner was another Tasmanian who set his sights on Western Port, although in his case unsuccessfully. He commissioned the *Enterprise* under the command of Captain John Lacey, who was not impressed by either the land or the waters of Western Port.

The boat got on the mud-flats and stuck fast till the tide rose. All the food was gone. Cold, frosty night. Cold wind, nothing to eat or drink, and one [of] our Cockneys sorely lamented that he ever left his poor old mother. Positive fact.²¹

While land settlement was slowly proceeding, Western Port was well known in international shipping circles as a haven for boats threatened by storms in Bass Strait. 'The 1836 edition of Horsburgh's Directory for the East India Company drew mariners' attention to the bay's wide entrance and its suitability over Port Phillip as a place for shelter.'²² Western Port could also be treacherous as the passengers and crew of the *Norval* discovered in 1836. They took shelter and attempted to off-load the cargo of over one thousand sheep at Corinella. The plan was to allow the sheep to forage and then drive them overland to the Port Phillip settlement. Mr Mudie, who was in charge of the sheep, and a sailor died when their row boat capsized. Less than eighty sheep survived the storm. One of the more successful settlements in Western Port, equal in importance to those of the Henty pastoral station at Portland and the arrival of Bateman and Fawkner on the Yarra, was the Anderson settlement.²³ Samuel Anderson was born to a merchant and shipping family in Scotland in 1803. He migrated to Van Diemen's Land and while in Launceston learned about John Griffiths' successful bark industry and his farming activities on Churchill Island. Samuel Anderson finally settled at Bass River near the site where George Bass had found fresh water. His property was a farm rather than a pastoral station. He planted an orchard that was recognised in 1982 as perhaps containing the oldest living fruit trees in Victoria. Anderson was joined by his friend Robert Massie, and together they grew wheat and established possibly the state's earliest flour mill. They also harvested sea salt by pumping it onto the lower river flats where the water evaporated leaving salt crystals. They utilised the remains of the old Corinella settlement for various building projects, ran cattle that were the offspring of the cattle from the original settlement, and discovered coal at Cape Paterson, which they used on the farm. Samuel Anderson was later joined by his brother Hugh. His sister also came to the area as the wife of the Reverend H E Potter, a pioneer Anglican clergyman of Western Port.

The Anderson farm was founded at the same time as the township of Melbourne and it supplied the town's markets with produce for nearly a century. The produce was either transported by sea to Melbourne or across the bay by boat to what is today Hastings, and then overland by bush tracks and rough roads to Melbourne. These routes were also plied by ministers of faith such as the Reverend J H Gregory who, in 1850 after meeting a congregation of about twenty-five white persons and twenty-two or twenty-five Aborigines at Dandenong on 21 July, took off down the Gippsland

road and on Sunday 28 July performed service at the Station over the Bass River. At this time, as the Port Phillip and Western Port areas were beginning to look 'like an outpost of the Colony of Tasmania',²⁴ Governor Richard Bourke of the Colony of New South Wales visited the settlement at Port Phillip and named it Melbourne. He also brought the Crown Lands in this area under the same conditions as those of New South Wales ensuring that any new settlers would need to gain the New South Wales government's permission to purchase land, unlike what had previously occurred with the Tasmanian settlers.

Settlers from other parts of New South Wales, as well as Britain, began to arrive. Cape Schanck was settled as a pastoral lease by Robert Jamieson – 'a canny gentleman from the north side of the Tweed'.²⁵ Samuel Rawson joined Jamieson and it was these two pioneering pastoralists who opened up many of the dray tracks as they drove their cattle across the Peninsula to Gippsland. John Rogers, a Cornish agricultural overseer, worked on the smaller islands of Western Port – Churchill, Elizabeth and Sandstone. In 1842, Scottish brothers William and John McHaffie applied for a lease for the whole of Phillip Island's lands. These were called 'Wastelands of the Crown'²⁶ although inhabited by sealers and men who had fishermen's rights that allowed them to farm a plot of land and build a hut near the foreshore. One such hut was called Parish's Hut, which was located near the foreshore in low shrub that came down to the water's edge and protected nesting mutton birds. For the next three decades, the brothers successfully established themselves and their families on Phillip Island. They cleared some of the island's vegetation. They introduced fallow deer, rabbits and kangaroos for game hunting. They developed tracks throughout the island that allowed them to move their wagons and drive their cattle safely to Woody Point, as Newhaven was then known. There they had a stockyard close to the foreshore and they built a race to guide the cattle through opened gates into the deep waters of the Narrows, forcing them to swim across to San Remo. The stockyards, which were probably located where the bridge today enters Newhaven, were close to the Newhaven swamp as this gave access to water. Not only did animals swim across the Narrows but an apocryphal story suggests that 'McAffie once found himself on the San Remo side and could not find anyone to row him across, so he just stripped off and swam across.'²⁷ Another story relates to a sealer who tried to help himself to a few chickens belonging to a local Chinese squatter living near the Newhaven jetty. 'Too much noise alerted the Chinese who appeared brandishing a cleaver. Dropping the birds he (the sealer) dived off the end of the pier and was last seen swimming at great speed for San Remo or "Griffiths Point" as it was then known.'²⁸

Woody Point at that time was an idyllic setting covered with scrub gums, tea-trees, wattle, boobialla, white Correa, myrtle, salt bush, mangroves and green grass. Bird life in the trees and on the mudflats was prolific. Introduced deer, rabbits and pigs were to be found roaming the bush. They would have provided food and sport for the McHaffies and their friends. In later years, as the deer became more numerous and started to break fences or jump over them and eat the crops, the settlers tried to run them off the island by rounding them up 'on their horses with stock whips cracking and dogs barking',²⁹ driving them onto Newhaven beach and forcing them to swim across to San Remo. Unhappily for the settlers, on one occasion 'a handsome young buck was entering the water to start the swim when he suddenly saw a graceful young doe making off along the beach. Wheeling in a flash he was off after her, which triggered all the deer into a stampede. The jig was up and the weary settlers rode home in disgust.'³⁰

Unfortunately for the McHaffie family, their success bred resentment. The island was surveyed in 1865 by Commander Henry Cox, who officially named Cowes after the Isle of Wight in England. Upon completion of the survey, the island was thrown open for free selection. In 1868 the Victorian government cancelled the McHaffie lease, divided the island into one hundred and thirty-two lots of rural land and township properties and auctioned them off. This included the newly named Newhaven Township, which had previously been called Woody Point. The McHaffies' lands shrank to 640 acres around the homestead. Many people were lured by the apparent success of the McHaffies in taming the land but were greatly disappointed. They failed in their ventures as a result of the vagaries of the climate and soil, as well as poor choice of plantings. Many of these settlers sold up their land to two men, John Cleeland and William Harbison, who by 1882 came to own over three quarters of the island between them and they used it for sheep and cattle grazing. As a result of these land sales, the population dropped from one hundred and sixty-five in 1872 to fifty by 1902. (NYS Quarterly September 1990).

John Cleeland, a sea captain, arrived at Newhaven in 1869 and over time bought more than seven hundred acres around Cape Woolamai, as well as land at Newhaven and Cowes for sheep and cattle grazing. He built 'Wollomai House' – a stately home surrounded by beautiful gardens. Cleeland made his fortune in a number of ways that included being the owner of the Albion Hotel in Melbourne and breeding 'sheet anchor' horses, Shetland ponies, sheep and goats. His home at Cape Woolamai was the social centre of the island with regular hunting expeditions and lavish parties to entertain his guests, amongst whom were many celebrities of the day. He was a man with a social conscience and became a Justice of the Peace working for the benefit of the community. His family set up the first navigation light on Cape Woolamai. His son, also named John, was just as community-minded and built a large shed, probably near the north-east corner of Anderson Street and Seaview Street, which contained life-saving gear, including a rocket launcher that would be useful if a ship were to come to grief in the waters of Western Port. In case of a shipwreck there was a 30-foot whale boat, purchased from Henty's of Portland, in a shed that sat on a bracken-covered knoll, close to the jetty. John Cleeland was also the owner of the winner of the 1875 Melbourne Cup with *Wollomai*, a horse he bought from the McHaffies. This horse was trained along the beaches of Newhaven in preparation for the race. 'To transport "Woolamai" to Melbourne, Captain Lock put the horse on his boat, the "John and Elizabeth", packed it all around with bales of chaff and sailed from Newhaven to Stoney Point on the Mornington Peninsula, then walked the horse to Melbourne.'³¹

As well as grazing, another industry to take hold on Phillip Island was chicory production, the island's frost-free climate being ideal for this. The first crop was grown in 1870, and John and Solomon West built the first kiln in 1873.³² Chicory is used as an essence and this industry boomed during the Great Depression years and Second World War when coffee was scarce and it was used as a substitute. The last operational kiln was closed in the 1980s although derelict kilns, with their traditional pyramid-shaped roofs, can still be seen dotting the landscape of Phillip Island.³³

'Shipbuilding in the Newhaven area first happened in 1873 when Captain McLeod built a 100-ton ketch called the "Trusty". She was launched almost opposite Churchill Island.'³⁴ Captain McLeod did not have access to an established shipyard so he built his own slipway and building supports. Tragically, he died sometime later, crushed by this boat when she was shored up on the foreshore for maintenance. Other arrivals to have an impact on the area were Charles and Margaret Grayden. Charles Grayden had arrived from England in 1835 and led a somewhat itinerant life until he married.

The couple initially settled in Hastings in 1860, finally moving to Newhaven in 1867. As Charles Grayden had made a living as a fisherman at Hastings, he presumably moved all his family's belongings to Newhaven by boat. He built his home close to the shoreline. This gave him a prime position to act as a carrier of people and goods across the Narrows in the 26-foot fishing boat that he had built. This work was not just commercially useful but was also important for the community's survival.

In May 1887 a woman in San Remo and another in Newhaven were awaiting to give birth. A pioneer mid-wife, Mrs Findlay and our skilful boatman, Charles Grayden (Senior) rowed backwards and forwards across the Narrows to ensure that the women were attended to, both day and night. Twin boys were born at Newhaven that night and twins (boy and girl) at San Remo the following morning. One of the twin boys, Jimmy Clarke, grew up to be an expert skipper of Westernport Ferries. Genista, Alvina, Killara and Reliance were some.³⁵

Charles and Margaret Grayden reared their children in Newhaven, including Richard, who would play a pivotal role later on in his life in the development of Phillip Island. The Forrest family settled on a narrow strip of land that backed onto the sea at the Caves, now known as Forrest Caves. As the land was too poor to farm they made their living by breaking horses for the Cleelands. Samuel Pickersgill was another man who worked for Cleeland although originally he, his wife and children took possession of Churchill Island for farming. However, as he never went through the legal formalities of owning the land he was ultimately dispossessed and had to move onto Phillip Island. Later owners of Churchill Island were John Rogers and Samuel Amess. Their endeavours are remembered with the naming of Rogers Cottage and Amess Homestead, which are now part of the Churchill Island Heritage Farm.³⁶ Around this time, a Mr Fowler lived on the headland opposite what is now known as Fowlers Bight and conducted Church of England services in the residence of the Murray family who owned land at Swan Bay. Richard Anderson arrived about this time and built his house almost on the beach in Cleeland Bight near the end of Anderson Lane. He was one of the fishermen in the area and like many fishermen had his own slipway and jetty. Stanley Kennon was another who moved his house from Flinders to Newhaven in his own boat. It was re-erected in Anderson Street where two large palm trees mark its position. Kennon made a living by fishing for crays, transporting fuel out to the lighthouse at the Nobbies and carrying cargo on his larger boat. In the early 1890s his house was once more dismantled and transported to Chapel Street in Cowes where it was refurbished. Another wing was added and a croquet lawn and tennis court were developed in its gardens. It remained open as a guesthouse, 'Genista House', until it burnt down in 1936.

Another industry that flourished on Phillip Island, although not for a great length of time, was the Quarry at Woolamai. The Port Phillip District of New South Wales was declared a separate colony on 1 July 1851 and named Victoria. Shortly after, gold was discovered in Victoria and a tremendous building boom ensued that resulted in the golden age of building ornate edifices. In the 1870s, the pink granite cliffs of Cape Woolamai were rediscovered. Bass had commented on these as 'the pink glow from the rocks at the entrance to the channel'.³⁷ Stone masons in Bendigo obtained a lease to supply this stone to the Equitable Life Assurance building being developed in Collins Street Melbourne. 'From a quarry on the eastern side of the Cape the huge blocks weighing up to 14 tons were run out on to a short jetty on rail tracks. Small sailing ships came into the jetty at high tide, the stone was lowered into the boat's hold at low tide and they would sail off on the next high tide – not before the blocks were well wedged in so they would not move on their voyage around the island

and through Port Phillip Heads to Melbourne.³⁸ Disaster struck when Captain Andre Hendrickson, the new skipper of the ship *Kermandie*, failed to secure his load and the ship and crew disappeared at sea in December 1892. At its peak of trading, the quarry employed up to three hundred men living and working in fifty huts that were built close to the quarry. Supplies of food and equipment were brought along the Cleeland Bight beach to the site by a horse-drawn wagon. The quarry closed after the *Kermandie* disaster although the site, now part of a National Park, remains popular today as a destination for locals and visitors to Phillip Island, even though many of the huts and equipment now lie buried under a sand dune that moved across this area during a windstorm. The large sand dune at Cape Woolamai, or Spew Hill as it is occasionally called, is a popular attraction for young and old alike who slide down its steep slopes.³⁹

Families arrived onto Phillip Island by ship but when a new track was found through the Koo Wee Rup swamp after it was drained, overland access to the area became easier. With more families coming to the island the need for a school arose and an English family, the Thompsons, opened up their Newhaven home as a school, possibly on the south-eastern corner of Anderson Street.⁴⁰ Conditions must have been cramped for the family as its 'two daughters had to convert their bedroom into a school room each morning and reverse the procedure each evening.'⁴¹ As numbers of children grew the Victorian government appointed a teacher and built a two-room school on the north-western corner of Anderson Street. Life was hard for the children as many walked five kilometres or more, often barefoot, to the school. Bill Watt (1871–1946) who was Victoria's Premier and later a Federal Parliamentarian, was one of these pupils. As the Depression of the 1890s set in, many families moved away from Phillip Island and once more the school was moved to a private residence, this time the Fowler's home. By the First World War, the school population had shrunk dramatically and one teacher was employed to teach the children at both the Newhaven and San Remo schools. As a result, the Half Day School was established whereby children moved between San Remo and Newhaven, being rowed across the Narrows daily, to continue each day's classes. By the 1920s the population once more began to rise, partly as a result of the increase in holiday travel, and the Newhaven School once more became a day school. The six families in Newhaven all had children, according to Harry Cleeland grandson of John Cleeland, and together with the nine Cleeland children they all attended the school at Newhaven. 'Newhaven was a one-room school filled with local kids, the numbers bolstered by children from the local Boy's Home. The parents weren't too keen on their children mixing with the boys, who were mostly from the children's courts in Melbourne, and they succeeded in having another, separate room built on for them.'⁴²

By the turn of the century, the Newhaven fishermen had developed their open ocean fishing skills and, as a result, developed their specially designed Couta boats for the sole purpose of catching by pole the barracouta fish that were so plentiful in this area. Not many of these boats remain but one – *Gosling* – was berthed at the Newhaven Yacht Squadron for many years until she was advertised for sale.

Built at Rhyll in 1959 by the professional boat builders and fishermen the Walton's...half decked fishing boat with half cabin and open cockpit...26 foot long, 10 feet beam and draws an amazing 3 feet 6 inches – steady as a rock in all conditions. Carvel planked on steam bent frames: stem keel, stern post – Western Australian Jarrah as is open cockpit deck. Ribs – NZ kauri: Deck beams – Oregon; deck – Queensland white beech...Steering – stern hung rudder and tiller.⁴³

'The cousta boat, as a fast and efficient commercial sailing craft, reached the peak of its evolution in the 1910s and 1920s. By this time hull shapes had improved due to continuous experimentation, the gunter-gaff had been introduced, and motors had not yet had a marked effect on reducing sail plans.'⁴⁴ After the Second World War, although the boats built were of similar length, they were fuller bodied, heavier and diesel-powered. In particular, boats built by the Lacco family, especially Mitch and his son Ken, were famous for their speed and practicality.

And the *Jenny* that was the first boat that Ken built. What happened is his father ordered the timber to build a 42 ft boat to go fishing out in Bass Strait. He got the timber from Borneo and he had to go away fishing to get some money...and when he came back Ken had built the *Jenny* out of the timber and Ken said "I got a hiding everyday for a week for using the timber" and then old Ritchie said "Seeing that you made such a good job of that one you better build another one." So they built the *Rosebud* and from then on they just built *Rosebud* pattern. There were hundreds of them. There was Mitchie and Ken and Gumbo and Alec – all brothers and all good boat builders and they did 52 in 52 weeks – that's a lot of boats. And Ken's mother used to make all the sails. She had an industrial machine and made all the sails.⁴⁵

The fishing fleets of San Remo and Newhaven grew as fish were plentiful and, with transport by sea and overland improving every year, the markets in Melbourne were within easier reach. Fish was taken by wagon along the old fish track, which later became the Nepean Highway, on the Mornington Peninsula. 'About 1910 they took the railways to Wonthaggi because they wanted the coal...some of the fish used to go by train from Anderson.'⁴⁶ Fishing fleets made up of 26- to 28-foot long boats rigged with a standing lug sail and a square stern, which allowed two men to work side by side, trolled the waters of Bass Strait catching mainly barracouta. 'They'd sail out to the south and then up towards Cape Patterson and then they'd come back. Go out in the morning with the northerly and come back in the afternoon with the easterlies.'⁴⁷ The fish were then boxed at the San Remo and Newhaven jetties and transported by ferry to Hastings and then on to Melbourne. 'The limit was 12 boxes per man. Then they flooded the market and they got down to 8 boxes per man...There were always fights outside the San Remo pub because there were never enough boxes.'⁴⁸

Some days we would have 1000 boxes of fish on the jetty and often there were not enough boxes for everyone. People hid them at home in their backyards so they would have boxes for the fish. They used to fight over the boxes and the transports were fighting between themselves...They took the fish to market by semis and sometimes they would get to Melbourne and the fish would be condemned. So then they would have no money for the fish and have to pay the transport costs. She was rugged in those days, Bernie.⁴⁹

The local fishermen amalgamated into the San Remo Fishermen's Co-operative in order to give themselves better commercial muscle, stop the bitter infighting and dilute the entrepreneurial effects of Port Phillip Bay co-operatives. By the 1950s, with the decline in the fishing industry, the co-op started selling fish and crays to the public and by the next century, with major extensions and renovations to its building, it had become a modern seafood and fish and chip shop. It is also well known for the daily feeding of the pelicans from the little sandy beach opposite the co-op next to the jetty.

The competitive spirit of the cousta fishermen spilled over from their work practices to their sailing. 'They'd be drifting down Kilcunda there and then it would come up fresh northerly and as soon as the first bloke pulled up his sail to come home, it was on. Everyone got out with their sail and the race was on, trying to get home under sail.'⁵⁰ Racing books were kept at the San Remo pubs as men bet on the result of these impromptu races. Between 1934 and 1951 Cousta boat races were held on New Year's Day. The boats were beached in preparation for the race, propellers were removed and some even had their hulls smeared with mutton bird oil to improve their sailing speed. A well-known contender and frequent winner was Charlie Newman's boat *White Wings*, which was the first to have a Marconi rig. The races were sailed over a course that included the Narrows where the tides often run at four to six knots, where the mudflats and reefs lie in wait for the unwary and where the wind is funnelled between the two land masses making sailing harder and very competitive. In 2001, locals and visitors were treated to a display of Cousta boat prowess when a special race was run to commemorate the Centenary of Federation.

The day of the race arrived and the Club was abuzz with activity at the 11 o'clock briefing. There were the 11 boats from Port Phillip, plus "*Penelope*" sailed by Bob Phillips representing Newhaven and "*Kareela*" from Rhyll, skippered by NYS member Peter Inglis. Ken Lacco, the builder and designer of many of the competing boats arranged to have local "old time" fishermen on board the visiting boats, to advise the crews from the other bay on local conditions, shallow water, rocks and the tide flow.⁵¹

Spectators were treated to a brilliant display of sailing in the first leg of the race with the thirteen boats, their masts unfurled, making good progress in the 15-knot winds from Western Port, under the bridge into Cleeland Bight and gybing around the C-buoy. There was then a tacking duel in the windward leg back under the bridge. '*Rhapsody* rounded the start mark with the rest of the fleet in hot pursuit. The Committee boat was monitoring the yachts rounding the mark when it noticed that all the boats were heading to the side of the bridge closest to Phillip Island. This has two main problems, the mud bank there dries at low tide and the bridge clearance is significantly less than the main span. Maybe one of the old fishermen knows of a gutter through there? Unfortunately not! Several cousta boats had to lower their gaff to fit under the bridge, two run aground and *Surprise* actually hit the bridge and broke her bowsprit. Action a-plenty!!!'⁵² Spectators at the original cousta boat races seventy years earlier would no doubt have been treated to plenty of action even without the presence of the bridge as the tide, winds and hidden mud flats would have separated the canny and knowledgeable from the rest.

Large sailing ships no longer sailed into Western Port unless by accident as happened in April 1901 when the fully rigged 2,000-ton sailing ship, the *George T. Hay*, sought shelter from a gale off Cape Woolamai and anchored under the lee of the Cape. She almost ran aground because the captain did not have maps of the shoals and surf in Cleeland Bight. She was finally towed out to sea by *Genista*, a well known Western Port ferry steamer, after her master had undercut the competition and negotiated a price of £20 for her safe salvage. 'Unfortunately, Captain Spicer turned out to be a most ungrateful and devious soul. After Captain Clark had completed his part of the bargain, the only "cutting" that took place was the *Genista's* towline.'⁵³

In the early years of the twentieth century, the motor car and electricity were beginning to appear on the mainland, but life on Phillip Island still depended on the candle and kerosene lamp, tank water and primitive toilet facilities. Its isolation rested on the fact that the island was only accessible

by boat either across the Narrows from San Remo or by ferry to Cowes. The first regular ferry service started in 1878 with the *Eclipse*, a small paddle steamer, running from Hastings to San Remo with stops at Cowes, Rhyll and Newhaven.⁵⁴ The *Eclipse* was later replaced by a larger ferry, the *Genista*.

Crossing from San Remo to Newhaven was never easy and the incoming tide was used. The dray or jinker was manoeuvred on to the rowing boat by straddling it with the wheels partly in the water. The horse was tied by line to the stern. The boat was then rowed across with the horse swimming behind. Landing was on the shore near where the jetty is now. Cattle were swam across with lines attached to their horns.⁵⁵

Families supplemented their income with home-bred fowls and cows, often kept on nearby vacant blocks in Newhaven Township. Eggs, cream, milk and butter were all home-made. Many families travelled to Cowes to buy their supplies as Newhaven did not have a store. Cowes also had the first island hotel, the 'Isle of Wight', which opened in 1870. Such excursions would take the whole day by horse and cart with children riding along on horseback. The baker, however, delivered daily to Newhaven and Woolamai. They were very dependent on each other for any of the services town-dwellers took for granted. There was a small blacksmith shop on Beach Crescent operated by David Justice, a land-owner in Ventnor. He also dabbled as a sideline in dentistry. 'His patients would sit on the anvil and he would go to work with his home made forceps, no anaesthetic, no fee. His worst operation was drawing 12 teeth for his wife. She was not greatly disturbed but he was so upset he had to lie down for the rest of the day.'⁵⁶

In 1918 Charles Newman and his family arrived in Newhaven and initially set up their home at the Cleeland-owned property called Eden. Being an expert boat builder Newman saw his opportunity and, in 1929, built the first punt capable of carrying two cars across the eastern passage. The punt also carried produce and cattle from San Remo to Newhaven, which was not unusual as 'they used to put half a dozen sheep in and sail across and sell them and bring some grain (back)'.⁵⁷ Initially the punt was towed by a Couta boat, using the wind to get it across the Narrows. Later, it was towed by a motor launch and was known as the 'Ferry Link'. Newman's business thrived; he bought ten acres of land stretching from Anderson Street to Cleeland Street where he built his cottage. He supplemented his income by fishing and was soon joined by his son, Bazel, in this industry. Another builder of boats, Walter Henry Crole, established himself at Newhaven just after the end of the First World War. Having built his own slips and small pier he proceeded to build his first boat there – the 40-foot *Nautilus*. She was followed by the 45-foot *Flinders* and by many smaller craft. In 1940 he built the 77-foot *Alacrity*, which was sold to the United States Navy and, following an aerial attack by the Japanese off the coast of New Guinea, was sunk with great loss of lives. At the end of the war, he built the *Stella Maris*, a sister ship to the lost *Alacrity*. She was launched from the foreshore not far from the jetty in 1946 with great fanfare as an excited crowd of over one thousand people watched. These large boats were built for cray fishing and later, when shark became a popular market item, the Crole family was the first to go into shark fishing. Although Newman and Crole, together with 'Dicky' Anderson and Alan Mears, were the first families to settle in Newhaven with the aim of creating a small fishing and boat-building centre, many others followed. 'I saw the *Moondara* [a 60-foot working boat] built there and it was hard up against our house.'⁵⁸ 'Well, down there where Stan Broad lives there was a 55-foot boat built there and that was one of many that were built there.'⁵⁹ In its heyday Newhaven's sheltered anchorage often had thirty boats moored in the channel. To help the men get to their moored boats, a dinghy jetty was built between the Newhaven pier and the Newman's private jetty. After the bridge was built a shed was added to store the boxes of caught

fish before they were carted to Melbourne by one of three Newhaven carriers - *Fleisner*, *Drysdale* or *Moat*.

At a public meeting in 1888 the residents of Griffiths Point voted to change the name of their newly proclaimed township to San Remo, after a resort in Italy. Just like its Italian counterpart it was advertised as the 'Sanatorium of the South, as no fever of any kind makes its appearance, and influenza patients arriving there in every instance have recovered within a week.'⁶⁰ Towards the end of the 1900s Phillip Island, San Remo and the Westernport district were considered to be a good holiday destination with beach, boating and fishing activities being the primary draw cards. As travel became easier and more commonplace between the two world wars, guesthouses grew in number on Phillip Island and a new industry was born. Probably one of the first, 'Ocean View', was built by David Todd on the south-west corner of Anderson Street.

The home was well constructed in weatherboard with large full length windows under wide verandahs, plus the usual galvanised iron roof. David Todd created a fine garden to surround the house. He had a gravel path into the front door off Anderson Street. This was lined with a neat rosemary hedge. He planted Norfolk Pine trees in the surrounding land.⁶¹

The Post and Telegraph Office, with seven telephone lines, occupied one room in the house and this became a focal point for the community as they waited for the mail to be sorted and handed out. The ferry *Genista* would deliver the mail to the Newhaven jetty and David Todd would go down to the jetty to collect it 'then walk back straight up the grass and fern covered rise, past the whale-boat shed then on passing a house called "Eden" which was owned by John Cleeland'.⁶² The landscape at Newhaven and the surrounding hills was now quite different to what Bass had seen. Over the years all the old trees had been cut down for buildings and cooking. This opened up the land around Newhaven to swathes of grasses. Boobialla, myrtle and golden wattles were now the predominant trees. The timber covering the Bass hills east of Newhaven had suffered a similar fate as 200-foot messmates and blue gums were cut down for the building of wharves, bridges and housing or were used as sleepers for the new Kilcunda railway line. And blackwoods were taken down to be made into furniture and railway carriages.

Across the road from the Todd's 'Ocean View' guesthouse, John Cleeland built a small tea room on the vacant block of land at the corner of Anderson Street. This was run by Cleeland's two daughters for five years from 1927. It was then used as a home for members of the Crole family before the building was moved to the block of land next to 'Newman House' where it still stands today. Charles Newman was best known as the name behind the Ferry Link but he expanded his family business and went into the guesthouse industry. Their first foray into this business was when Mr and Mrs Newman bought 'Redcliffe House' on Forrest Avenue. This had been a boarding house before the Newmans bought it in 1924 and created a guesthouse accommodating twenty people. This property was purchased in 1937 by Miss Gawler who ran it as a guesthouse for underprivileged children until 1950. The house still stands today. Of interest to film buffs, the Australian-made film *Summerfields*, which was shot around Newhaven, used this house as the home of the schoolteacher hero.⁶³ Having sold Radcliffe House, the Newmans opened a guesthouse on their own land, the ten-acre property facing onto Anderson Street that they had earlier purchased and built. It became known as 'Newman House'. This guesthouse catered for holidaymakers in a grand way. It ran daily fishing expeditions that not only provided sport but also ensured that fish was on the menu. The family grew their own

vegetables and kept fowls and cattle on the property. This house, along with another in San Remo on the hill, was a safe haven when the ferry was not running. 'The trouble was if it was rough they couldn't get it [the ferry] backwards and forwards [across the channel] and the people couldn't get off the island so they would congregate there.'⁶⁴

Another guesthouse, also run in the style of a farmlet, belonged to the McNairs. This property occupied all the land in Newhaven that was later to become the St Paul's Boys Home, a training school opened in 1928. 'They ran a few cows, sheep and geese. As well they had a small orchard, grew some vegetables and offered people a farm style holiday by the sea.'⁶⁵ Both the fishing and guesthouse industries were to be a blessing for the inhabitants of Newhaven during the Great Depression because, although money was hard to come by, there was plenty of food in the form of fish, fowls, vegetables and fruit from the orchards. 'They had a farm there with lots of pigs and he had a big dray and a draft horse. At low tide or at high tide he'd go and shoot this great net around and he'd pull it in with the draft horse and the dray. They used to fill the dray up with fish and feed the pigs.'⁶⁶ In spite of the hard times that beset the world, fascination with the motor car grew. Motor car racing was a growing sport and venues such as the Isle of Mann in the United Kingdom became world renowned. This is where the idea of a race track for Phillip Island arose – a destination far from populated areas where the noise of racing vehicles and the smell of fumes and rubber would not inconvenience anyone.

They brought their cars to San Remo where they were ferried across on the punt. On race days in the 1930s the seamen sometimes worked until 11pm ferrying cars back to the mainland. One day they took 300 cars across on the four-car punt.⁶⁷

Between 1928 and 1938 this was a popular venue for car racing and Phillip Island was host to the Grand Prix. In those years the six-mile (10.6 kilometres) circuit was on the island's rough and dusty roads. 'On paper it looked like a featureless rectangle with four incidental right hand corners. From behind the wheel it was a hard brutal treadmill of a place. Drivers boasted they steered by following the treetops through the billowing dust and flying stones.'⁶⁸ Some signs still exist on the roads near Wimbledon Heights, indicating their former use. In 1956 the Phillip Island Auto Racing Club (PIARC) opened Australia's first international Grand Prix circuit. This circuit closed in 1962 due to the mounting cost of upkeep. In the 1960s and 1970s Len Lukey purchased the track but once more maintenance costs led to its closure and the area was used as farmland. The race track was re-opened in 1985 by Placetac Pty Ltd, although it is now owned by Linfox Corporation. The Australian MotoGP, the World Superbike Championships and the V8 Supercar Championships, as well as innumerable vintage car and motorbike races, are held annually on the track with such famous names as Stoner, Agostini, Brabham, Brock, Gardner, Doohan and Rossi starring.⁶⁹

In 1939, due to the increased popularity of Phillip Island, and to replace the smaller non-motorised San Remo to Newhaven punt that had been running, a small company built a six-car punt powered by a German Junkers two-stroke motor which 'made a lovely smooth sound when running.'⁷⁰ Reg Justice, son of Ventnor property owner and part-time dentist David Ventnor, was given the job of skipper on the new punt, which ran as required between San Remo and Phillip Island, but only during daylight hours. Cars cost ten shillings a vehicle with passengers being charged an extra two shillings and six pence. The approaches to the ferry were at times so bad that vehicles drove through the fast running sea water to get to the ferry. The only other way onto the island was by the Cowes

to Stoney Point ferry that had the capacity to carry thirty-six cars and up to four hundred passengers. Generally, it ran once a day but during the holidays more frequent passages were possible.

Newhaven being a small community, many families intermarried and so it was that Reg Justice married Olive Grayden. The family moved from Ventnor to Newhaven and Olive Grayden took over the running of the David Todd's 'Ocean View' guesthouse and renamed it 'Ferry Lodge'. In spite of the fact that Phillip Island played host to motor car races, very few people on Phillip Island actually owned a car. 'Olive tells the story of one cold winter's night when she and Mrs Todd took the horse and jinker into Cowes to see the movies in the local hall.'⁷¹ It was Olive Grayden's brother, Richard, who now began to play a pivotal role in the history of Newhaven and Phillip Island. He recognised the economic needs of the community and the tourist potential of the area and proposed that a bridge should be built linking San Remo to Newhaven and, therefore, Phillip Island to the rest of the world. It took him twenty years of promoting the project before a Bridge League was formed in April 1937. In November 1938 a public meeting held in Cowes voted resoundingly to support the building of a bridge. Funds were limited and there were also the almost insurmountable engineering problems of bridging a channel with deep and fast flowing tidal waters. Finally, a suspension bridge able to carry loads up to six tons was decided upon. The bridge was made up of fixed approaches from San Remo and from Newhaven with the interconnecting part a 550-foot suspension span – a 'miniature Golden Gate Bridge'.⁷² The main cables were second-hand and sourced from the North Shore Bridge in Sydney. 'When I was 15 I walked across the old suspension bridge before there was any bridge there at all – just cables. I got across to this side – the thing was shaking – I didn't actually walk I crawled across it.'⁷³ Tramway cable hangers supported the wooden deck. The finished bridge was 1,765 feet long and 18 feet wide between kerbs. There was no footpath but there were six pedestrian refuges along its length. The final cost was £50,000. 'Twenty months later in November 1940 the first bridge was officially opened by Victorian Premier Albert Dunstan MLA.'⁷⁴ Richard Grayden's vision was remembered when the park near the bridge in Newhaven at the corner of Forrest Avenue and the main Phillip Island Road was named 'The Richard Grayden Memorial Reserve'.

People and traffic now flowed relatively freely onto Phillip Island and, although the roads were not sealed until the 1950s, the area rapidly became a popular holiday destination. 'The farmers didn't appreciate it for a while. There were no fences on our property, so the sheep would run anywhere on the road, and when the traffic got heavier it became quite difficult!'⁷⁵ Newhaven's population rapidly grew to around seventy permanent and holiday homes housing around three hundred people.⁷⁶ Apart from enjoying the beach and water activities, holiday visitors to the area in the 1930s would visit Summerland Beach by car to see the little penguins come ashore in the evening. This was, and remains, such a popular excursion that the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife installed a fence and, later, viewing platforms to protect the penguins. From the 1980s various areas of Phillip Island were created as natural parklands and have now become self-funding commercial tourist attractions. Today, the Phillip Island Nature Parks cover an area of 1805 hectares and include Pyramid Rock, Rhyll Inlet, Seal Rocks, Cape Woolamai, Koala Conservation Reserve, Churchill Island and the Penguin Parade.⁷⁷ In 1956 the State Electricity Commission brought electricity to the island by overhead wires spanning the Narrows, finally replacing the kerosene lamps and candles that had served the community for so long. It wasn't until the late 1960s that water pipes replaced tank water

where, by the simple expedient of running the pipes under the new bridge, water was pumped from Candowie Reservoir onto Phillip Island.

‘When they built houses here they had to do it in relays. You just couldn’t drive across [the bridge] built for a three ton load limit...They couldn’t bring the big loads like they are bringing over now.’⁷⁸ There was also the issue of the bridge swaying, especially when a truck was driving across. Many pedestrians found this extremely disconcerting. ‘It used to sway a bit in the wind...It wasn’t so enjoyable riding a push bike across – the front wheel would get caught you’d go head over heels.’⁷⁹ ‘And some of the fishing boats that tied up at San Remo couldn’t get under the bridge because the masts would hit the bridge...they would have to wait until the tide went down a bit.’⁸⁰ ‘The suspension bridge gave good service but its load limit caused some difficulty – as for example some larger buses had to off load passengers who were then required to walk over the bridge.’⁸¹

With the island’s population increasing, the needs of the community finally outgrew the old suspension bridge and plans for a new bridge were considered. Engineering developments meant that the fast flowing deep tidal waters were no longer considered such a problem. Soundings and underwater inspections determined that the turbulence and depth of the channel further into Western Port were less and the seabed was more stable than where the old bridge stood. Contractor John Holland and Company was appointed in April 1966. Plans were drawn up for a reinforced concrete bridge with a central 200-foot navigation span flanked by 150-foot anchor spans and sixteen 100-foot approach spans on each side, the final cost of which was \$3.2 million. The contractor worked from a temporary steel bridge and the concrete piers were constructed inside cofferdams by first hydraulically digging into the seabed, placing the steel beams and then pouring the concrete. The larger beams were constructed in Melbourne and transported by road. The smaller ones were cast on-site on both sides of the channel and the false bridge was used to get them out over the channel and into place. The final structure was 2100 feet long and 28 feet wide between kerbs with a five foot-wide footway on one side of the roadway. The navigational clearance height at high tide was 40 feet.

The Honourable MV Porter MLA Minister of Public Works opened the new Phillip Island Bridge on 21 November 1969. After unveiling the plaque and declaring the bridge open, Mr Porter cut a ribbon and the official party proceeded across the bridge by car. An afternoon tea was held to celebrate the event and the Country Roads Board published a booklet celebrating the opening of the new bridge. The embankment at Newhaven (where the new bridge comes onto the island) was created by taking soil from the Seaview Street foreshore, leaving the two levels that regular users of public boat ramp are very familiar with. The old bridge was dismantled and put to good use by the Newhaven Yacht Squadron when it built the squadron marina.

Newhaven in the 1950s and 1960s was still very much a fishing town, although well past its peak of the pre-war years. Professional fishing was based around shark, crayfish, cuta and some bay netting. Cuta boats were moored off Newhaven’s little beach and at the main jetty. Most of Newhaven’s permanent residents were still very involved in this fishing industry in one way or another. Boat building continued to be an industry that occurred in the backyards of houses. Skipper George Armstrong with the support of his wife Hett built, over twelve months, a 50-foot shark boat in an open shed in Beach Crescent. Charles Blackney, a squadron member, drove the tractor that towed the boat through the streets to the water’s edge.

Her launching day in 1956 dawned bright, clear and still. The boat was transported from her place of construction by a means of a series of timber skids and rollers over the unmade streets to the beach alongside the main Newhaven jetty. Later on that day at the peak of the flood tide with onlookers lined deep along the length of the jetty the Margaret Wight began to gracefully respond to the incoming waters of Bass Strait. And what a sight she was; gleaming white hull, Lid timber decks, classic canoe stern profile...The speeches were made, the champagne bottle cracked and the christening cake cut.⁸²

‘They brought my grandmother [Margaret Wight] over in another boat – the *Lady Jean*, which belonged to John Farley, and she stepped aboard the *Margaret Wight* and cracked a bottle of champagne and gave a speech.’⁸³ The *Margaret Wight*, named after the matriarch of the Wight family, worked the waters of Bass Strait for many years under her maker and captain, George Armstrong. It was from her deck that the commodore, Percy Fraser, took the fleet’s salute on Opening Day in the early days of the Newhaven Yacht Squadron. Other boats too were built at Newhaven and it wasn’t unusual to see the massive hull of a professional fishing boat protruding out of a shed onto the street even in the 1950s and 1960s. ‘I built them in the shed here...the Pam Anne – that was named after my mother. John Mitchell and Billy Herst designed it and it was 19 feet and 8 inches...it had a Lacco bow and a Pompey stern. They designed it – made the mould – and there were four of them built. Johnny (Mitchell) had one. Stan Broad built the next one, which is the one of Wally’s [Antenovich] still in the marina. Keith Wilson built the next one for Manning and then I got the mould and I built mine.’⁸⁴

In the 1950s, Newhaven was still very much a quiet holiday backwater with no commercial development. ‘There were no shops there...you couldn’t walk across the paddocks some winters.’⁸⁵ This was in fact its charm. There was no radio or television and public telephones were few. People got to know each other and were dependent on each other for entertainment.

Percy and Dot’s longstanding fascination with Phillip Island, and Newhaven in particular, began in 1948 when they were invited down to Newhaven by Pat and Eric Clark for the weekend over New Year when they stayed in the garage at Tom White’s house with Pat and Eric. Dot recalls having a fantastic New Years Eve party with the residents around the area. Tom owned a double block in Beach St running between Beach and Cleeland Street. Percy was very interested in the blocks and at the end of that New Year weekend Tom told Percy that he would sell the blocks if Percy wanted them. In fact, Percy purchased the block fronting onto Beach Street and Eric Clark purchased the block on Cleeland Street. Percy and Dot liked the block as it had a nice open view of Cleeland Bight and later built their Newhaven holiday home. The view was later to be drastically affected by the new bridge ramps construction, as it passed by their frontage. Percy’s main interest at the time was in fishing and he and Dot would often go out fishing in his boat “Brandy Lil” moored at Newhaven. Their son Douglas loved to go off and help George Armstrong who was then working on the boat called the “Margaret Wight”.⁸⁶

The Frasers weren’t the only ones tempted by their friends to come to Phillip Island. Arthur Foster, originally a Leongatha resident in his youth, reminisced about how he and his wife came to San Remo. ‘We had all our friends here – we knew everyone. “Oh, you have to stop the night” and then we eventually got something here. It was cheap then. This block was only five to six thousand [dollars].’⁸⁷

Serendipity played a role for others who came to the island. Having just bought a caravan, the Hughes family was at a loss as to where they could take their Summer holiday and rang the RACV for advice 'and they said the Pines Caravan Park won the Park of the Year Award, so they went down and bumped into their neighbours [from Kew]. Then they bought a block of land. So that's mum and dad's old house...Mum and dad used to call it Kewhaven.'⁸⁸ The Pines Caravan Park was situated next door to The Boys Home and is now the site of the Newhaven College. Ken Stuchbery's family too were drawn by Summer caravan park living. 'So they started spending time in the old caravan park [in San Remo]...it was on that area roughly opposite where the pub was – the Westernport. There is a Chinese shop there now. My brother had a fixed caravan and they used to stay down there.'⁸⁹

The social life in the evenings was not the only attraction for locals and visitors alike. 'We were hysterical when going through the mud getting to the boat – I can remember this and we used to go oystering over there – through the mud over at Newhaven – I used to love the oysters – big ones – with the Inghams. And abaloning - we used to do so as it was really a great source of entertainment to be able to have the sea around us. We made the most of it – our kids loved the water.'⁹⁰

Families were drawn to the area as it represented the quintessential Australian Summer holiday of the 1950s and 1960s. The youth of the day were increasingly drawn to the island because of the growing Australian surf culture. Graeme 'Shirley' Strachan, of Sky Hooks fame, was one of these adventurous spirits who followed the surfing culture. He was a carpenter by trade and when he finished his apprenticeship 'he jumped in his Kombi and went down to live at the island.'⁹¹ He described Phillip Island-style carpentry: 'You'd get up in the morning and look out the window and say Yeah...Then you'd go down to Woolamai and check it out. There'd be a few bars there, and you'd go surfing. Then you'd have lunch and perhaps a couple of hours' work, and then it's high tide, so you'd go out surfing again.'⁹²

But it was the children of both the locals and the regular visitors whose activities played the biggest role in the future development of Newhaven. 'We used to go sailing in an old clinker dinghy and lived in San Remo. Us, the Talbot family, Graham Swallow and an old clinker that had a square rig on it to start with – we made it out of a potato sack and then our neighbour out at San Remo made a gaff rig sail for us and we thought we were the ant's pants sailing everywhere around with that and the Talbots – Lindsay Talbot – built a carvel hull yacht – the *Mary T*. The boys used to sail that.'⁹³

Naturally, the children used the sea around Newhaven as their playground. And off-the-beach dinghy sailing was one of these activities. 'The kids started mucking about in a dinghy and started a race.'⁹⁴

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- ¹ Excerpts from 'Saving *Esmeralda*' by John Baragwanath, NYS Quarterly, Autumn 2010
 - ² George Bass's Voyage in a Whaleboat – Historical Records of New South Wales Vol. III 1895 p.322
 - ³ NYS Quarterly, June 1993
 - ⁴ Ibid
 - ⁵ John Baragwanath, SSV, NYS Quarterly, Autumn 2010
 - ⁶ NYS Quarterly, June 1993
 - ⁷ Western Port Chronology 1798-1839, Valda Cole
 - ⁸ Kevin Chambers, NYS Quarterly, December 1993
 - ⁹ Western Port Chronology 1798-1839, Valda Cole
 - ¹⁰ Ibid
 - ¹¹ Ibid
 - ¹² Ibid
 - ¹³ Ibid
 - ¹⁴ Kevin Chambers, NYS Quarterly, Winter 2001
 - ¹⁵ Phillip Island History Bass Coast
 - ¹⁶ Western Port Chronology 1798-1839, Valda Cole
 - ¹⁷ Phil Bagley, NYS Quarterly, June 1991
 - ¹⁸ D'Urville Diary Note, Western Port Chronology 1798-1839, Valda Cole
 - ¹⁹ Western Port Chronology 1798-1839, Valda Cole
 - ²⁰ Ibid
 - ²¹ John Lacey Journal Entry, Western Port Chronology 1798-1839, Valda Cole
 - ²² Western Port Chronology 1798-1839, Valda Cole
 - ²³ Ibid
 - ²⁴ Ibid
 - ²⁵ Ibid
 - ²⁶ NYS Quarterly, September 1990
 - ²⁷ Ibid
 - ²⁸ Ibid
 - ²⁹ Ibid
 - ³⁰ Ibid
 - ³¹ Ibid
 - ³² Phillip Island History Bass Coast
 - ³³ Ibid
 - ³⁴ NYS Quarterly, December 1990
 - ³⁵ Ibid
 - ³⁶ 'Churchill Island History and Her Story' by Patricia Baird
 - ³⁷ J Baragwanath, NYS Quarterly, Winter 2010
 - ³⁸ NYS Quarterly, December 1990
 - ³⁹ Pauline Draper, NYS Quarterly, Autumn 2011
 - ⁴⁰ NYS Quarterly, December 1990
 - ⁴¹ NYS Quarterly, December 1990
 - ⁴² Harry Cleeland, Coast Magazine, edition 27, Winter 2012
 - ⁴³ Robert Bryce, NYS Quarterly, Autumn 2009
 - ⁴⁴ Western Port Fishermen, Helen Hannan & Bruce Bennett
 - ⁴⁵ Herb Fowler interview with Wanda Stelmach, April 2012
 - ⁴⁶ John Mitchell interview with Wanda Stelmach, April 2009
 - ⁴⁷ Herb Fowler interview with Wanda Stelmach, April 2012
 - ⁴⁸ Ken Lacco interview with Bernie Hayen, February 2001
 - ⁴⁹ Lindsay & Mary Talbot interview with Bernie Hayen, December 2000
 - ⁵⁰ Ray Dickie, Helen Hannan and Bruce Bennett, Western Port Fishermen
 - ⁵¹ Noel Street, NYS Quarterly, Winter 2001
 - ⁵² Noel Street, NYS Quarterly, Winter 2001
 - ⁵³ Kevin Chambers, NYS Quarterly, June 1999
 - ⁵⁴ John Jansson, Phillip Island Official Visitor Guide, December 2012
 - ⁵⁵ NYS Quarterly, December 1990
 - ⁵⁶ Ibid
 - ⁵⁷ Herb Fowler interview with Wanda Stelmach, April 2012
 - ⁵⁸ Ibid
 - ⁵⁹ John Mitchell interview with Wanda Stelmach, April 2009
 - ⁶⁰ *The Argus*, 9 July 1888, Western Port Fishermen
 - ⁶¹ NYS Quarterly, December 1990
 - ⁶² Ibid

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- ⁶³ NYS Quarterly, March 1991
- ⁶⁴ John Mitchell interview with Wanda Stelmach, April 2009
- ⁶⁵ NYS Quarterly, March 1991
- ⁶⁶ Herb and Janet Fowler interview with Wanda Stelmach, April 2012
- ⁶⁷ NYS Quarterly, March 1991
- ⁶⁸ Phillip Island Official Visitors Guide, December 2012
- ⁶⁹ Phillip Island History Bass Coast
- ⁷⁰ NYS Quarterly, March 1991
- ⁷¹ Ibid
- ⁷² Ken Stuchbery interview with Wanda Stelmach, April 2011
- ⁷³ Herb Fowler interview with Wanda Stelmach, 12 April 2012
- ⁷⁴ NYS Quarterly, March 1991
- ⁷⁵ Harry Cleeland, Coast Magazine, edition 27, Winter 2012
- ⁷⁶ NYS Quarterly, March 1991
- ⁷⁷ Phillip Island History Bass Coast
- ⁷⁸ Herb Fowler interview with Wanda Stelmach, April 2012
- ⁷⁹ Butch Legge interview with Wanda Stelmach, March 2010
- ⁸⁰ John Mitchell interview with Wanda Stelmach, April 2009
- ⁸¹ Country Roads Board publication for the 1969 Official Opening of the Phillip Island Bridge at San Remo
- ⁸² Matt Ingham, NYS Quarterly, Autumn 2012
- ⁸³ Matthew Ingham interview with Wanda Stelmach, June 2012
- ⁸⁴ Herb and Janet Fowler interview with Wanda Stelmach, April 2012
- ⁸⁵ John Mitchell interview with Wanda Stelmach, April 2009
- ⁸⁶ Dot and Percy Fraser interview with Ian Jemmeson, July 2002
- ⁸⁷ Arthur Foster interview with Wanda Stelmach, January 2009
- ⁸⁸ Hamish Hughes interview with Wanda Stelmach, June 2010
- ⁸⁹ Ken Stuchbery interview with Wanda Stelmach, April 2011
- ⁹⁰ Marge Horan interview with Wanda Stelmach, January 2009
- ⁹¹ Coast Magazine, edition 27, Winter 2012
- ⁹² Coast Magazine, edition 27, Winter 2012
- ⁹³ Butch Legge interview with Wanda Stelmach, March 2010
- ⁹⁴ Lindsay and Mary Talbot interview with Bernie Hayen, December 2000