

Dr Bill Wilson, APM, OAM, PhD, MPHA, 1942-2021



Dr Bill Wilson, a highly valued and respected PHA member, died on 26 February 2021.

Bill came to history as a second career, having previously served with distinction in the Northern Territory Police. Born and raised in Middlesborough in the UK, Bill came to Australia at the age of 27 after having served in the British army. Bill's work with the police had its challenges, including arresting a notorious drug runner in Katherine and coping with the experience and aftermath of Cyclone Tracey. He retired as the Northern Territory's Assistant Police Commissioner in 1996.

Bill began his academic studies in 1988 while still with the police, completing an honours degree in history before embarking on a PhD after his retirement from law enforcement. Fittingly, Bill's doctorate combined his former career with his academic studies: his thesis – 'A Force Apart' – was a history of the Northern Territory Police from 1870-1926. As an historian, Bill worked as a consultant but also taught history and politics and worked in equity and support at Charles Darwin University.

Bill became interested in the PHA in 2001 and, through his observation of and research into our organisation, was instrumental in establishing the Northern Territory branch in 2002. He soon became the NT delegate to our national body, Professional Historians Australia, and served as national president from 2004 to 2007.

Bill and his wife Patricia 'retired' to Beechworth in regional Victoria in 2008, but Bill continued to practice as an historian and served on the local council's heritage committee. Before long, Bill was persuaded to join the

PHA (Vic & Tas) committee and took on the roles of membership secretary and vice president respectively. Bill brought to the table a rare combination of wisdom and innovation. His knowledge of national accreditation standards and the governing bylaws proved invaluable, but equally his desire to embrace new ideas and procedures facilitated many advances for the PHA (Vic & Tas) committee and our members generally.

As membership secretary, Bill was the friendly and efficient first point of contact with PHA (Vic & Tas) for new members and he put considerable effort into streamlining the membership application and renewal process, lightening the load for future office-holders.

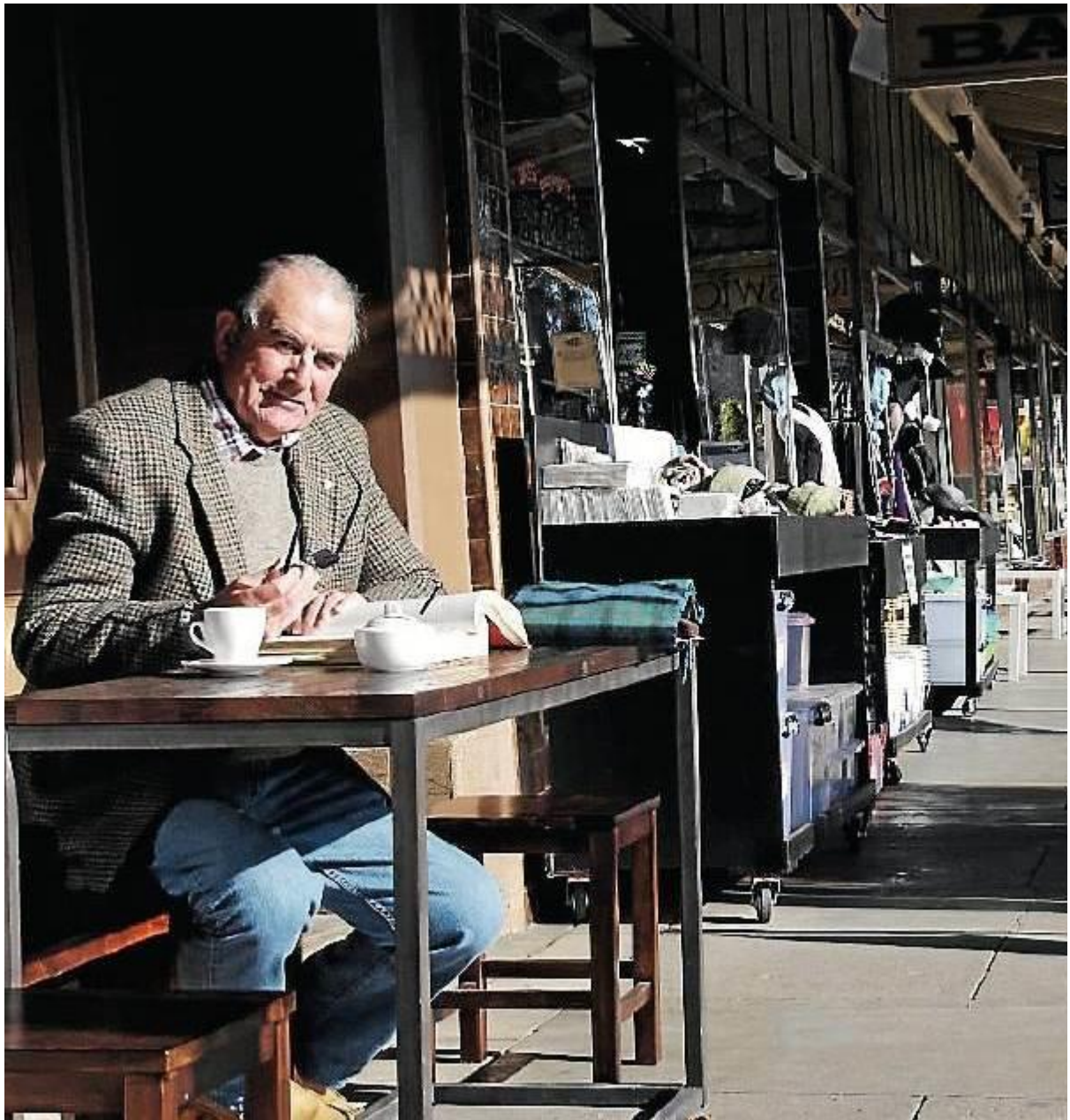
Bill was a great support to his fellow committee members and took every opportunity to promote the work of professional historians generally. He facilitated the appearance of numerous PHA members on Libby Gorr's ABC radio show. Last year, when Gorr needed an historian to speak about parliamentary scandals, Bill did some speedy research and handled the interview with ease. Bill was also called upon to give the prestigious Kerferd Oration (in conjunction with the Hon Tim Fischer) in 2012. The subject was the life and times of Sir Isaac Isaacs, who grew up in the Beechworth area.

Bill was a strong advocate for regional members, ensuring they were considered and catered for in decisions around events, masterclasses and forums. He advocated for the ethical and fair use of members' funds and was the mastermind behind the recent Pay it Forward program, being aware of the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic brought to our members and their households. In committee meetings Bill would often preface his comments with 'Sorry to be the naysayer', or something similar, indicating an earnestness, but Bill had a good sense of humour and could tell some great yarns.

The PHA, both at national and local levels, truly benefitted from Bill Wilson's membership. He personified genuine collegiality, kindness and friendship. He will be remembered fondly and respectfully by all who had the privilege of engaging with him.

Sonia Jennings
PHA (Vic & Tas)

[Assisted by Mary Sheehan, Amanda Lourie, Jill Barnard, Fiona Poulton and Alicia Cerreto].



Bill Wilson at Beechworth in 2012 prior to giving the Kerferd Oration