

## IN THIS ISSUE

Published early, so that you will read about our latest book launch and be in time to acquire your copy of the book, is this Spring 2005 issue containing the following:

- The final instalment of Dick Austin's series on the Furphy Family and their association with Kangaroo Ground, begins on Page 1.
- A piece written by Sheila Dixon on Page 6 in praise of a favourite local meeting place, the Post Office, nowadays heavily disguised as a winery. (See also cover picture.)
- On Page 8, Dr Peter Fleming writes about those birds who have good reason for welcoming recent rains, the ibis.
- Broadcaster Sheila Dixon concludes, on Page 10, her recollections of holidays hereabouts in the 1930s.
- One of Kangaroo Ground's wineries is recommended on Page 13
- Historian Mick Woiwod contributes several reminders, previews and more on Page 14.
- Once upon a time a member of one of Kangaroo Ground's pioneering families lived in a castle, as you'll read on Page 16.
- Dr Peter Fleming undertook a dangerous project recently, photographing old buildings such as you see on the back cover before they collapse.

# KANGAROO GROUND CHRONICLE

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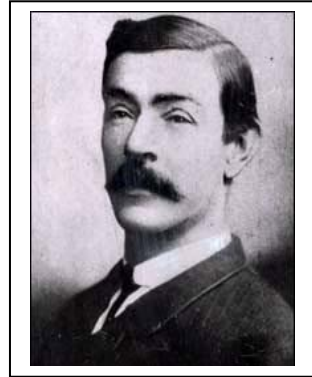


# HIGH ACHIEVERS OF KANGAROO GROUND

## John and Joseph Furphy

John and Joseph Furphy were amongst the first 22 pupils at Andrew Ross's Kangaroo Ground school when it opened in April 1851.

Part 1 looked at the family's time in the Yarra Valley and Kangaroo Ground. Part 2 looked at John's subsequent career, which put the family name into Australian English. Part 3 began Joseph's story.



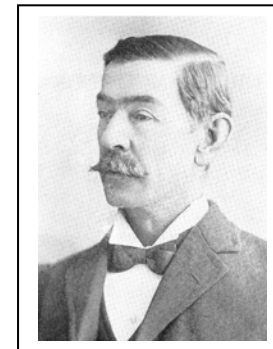
### Part 4: Joseph (Joe) Furphy the Writer

Shepparton had a Mechanics Institute, so now Joe had a source of books, allowing him to read more systematically and widely. Acutely conscious of his lack of formal education, Joe now set about educating himself – he called it ignorance shifting. In a letter written in 1903 he wrote, with characteristic Furphy self-deprecation, “Have been too busy in trying to get lever under outer edge of own damd (sic) ignorance ...”.

One of Joe's loves during the Shepparton years was *The Bulletin*. A weekly publication founded in 1880 by J.F. Archibald (the Archibald Prize for portrait painting was one of his bequests), it was pro-republic, pro-underdog and socialist in outlook, encouraging a defiant, aggressively Australian nationalism. It had a massive circulation, paid its contributors well, and provided an opportunity for Irish-Australians to express themselves. Many contributors wrote under pennames – A.B. Paterson was *The Banjo* and A.H. Davis was *Steele Rudd*. By 1886 *The Bulletin* was publishing the poems of Henry Lawson and 'Banjo' Paterson - *Clancy of*

*the Overflow* appeared in 1889 and *The Man from Snowy River* appeared the following year. The early years of *The Bulletin* is now seen as the first voice, and characteristic expression of Australian literature.

*The Bulletin* invited its readers to write about their experiences, irrespective of their occupation or education. Joe, who unlike Steele Rudd and Henry Lawson had actually been a selector and bullocky, did just that. He was successful in 1889 with *The Mythical Sundowner*, written under the penname Warrigal Jack. Everything he submitted over the next three years was, however, rejected.



From 1893 Joe was more successful in his *Bulletin* submissions, and by now he was using the penname *Tom Collins*. From 1898 to 1904 there was a steady flow of short stories, poems and letters from Tom Collins or Warrigal Jack published in *The Bulletin* and *Steele Rudd's Magazine*.

During the 1890s Joe began a series of short stories, based upon his bush memories, but rather than submit them for publication, he worked on them, adding his reflections on the nature of human existence and integrating his wide knowledge of literature. After years of work on the project, he had written *Such is Life*. Knowing nothing about publishing, he sent it to J.F. Archibald at *The Bulletin* for advice, who passed it on to A.G. Stephens, one of his sub-editors and also a literary agent, who was to become the first significant literary critic in Australian writing. Stephens responded enthusiastically, seeing the book as destined to become an Australian classic, although he suggested splitting the work into a number of books (which Furphy resisted but eventually agreed to, giving birth to the trilogy of *Such is Life*, *Rigby's Romance* and *The Buln-buln and the Brolga*). It took years, but in 1903 the first book, *Such is Life*, was finally published, a month before Joe turned 60.

The book is far more than a historical reminiscence about bullocking in the Riverina, although it is infused with bush life, customs and scenery from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is a romance (manifest to the reader though ostensibly unnoticed by the author), but it also contains many philosophical digressions. It is written in the dialects of bullock drivers, drovers and squatters, yet it is packed with references to, and parallels with, the Bible, Shakespeare (Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth), Dante, Homer, Virgil, Goethe, Milton and Chaucer. It is a book full of symbolism and allegory that was lost on most readers of the time, and most readers today, as it assumes a knowledge of Shakespeare, the Bible and Latin that is way beyond most of us.

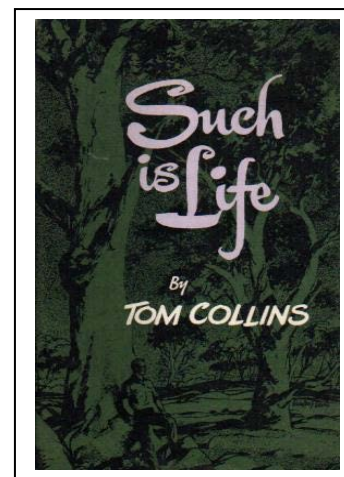
Publication brought Joe recognition as a writer. His book received positive reviews in all the major Australian newspapers except the Sydney Evening News, where 'Banjo' Paterson wrote an unfavourable notice. Prime Minister Alfred Deakin praised the book in an interview in 1905 and Furphy began corresponding with a number of other literary people, including 25-year old Miles Franklin, whose *My Brilliant Career* was published at the same time as Joe's book. Yet publication didn't change his way of life. Many did not know that Tom Collins was Joseph Furphy, and sales were poor. He continued working at the family foundry.

Joe's foray into literature was seen by his family as a bit of a joke, as if he were a dreamer indulging in a fantasy. His brother John was the 'serious' writer in the family, having articles published in the Salvation Army magazine. Joe's son Sam did take an interest in his Dad's work, often coming into his sanctum and picking up a page of a manuscript, reading it and then despondently remarking "No use, Dad; you're too vulgar". There is no record of Joe's wife or John ever reading anything he wrote. Only his mother was supportive and only she believed in his intellectual endowment and treasured his literary attempts.

Like John, Joe was a sincere Christian. He was baptised into the Shepparton Church of Christ and later became its secretary. Unlike John, however, Joe's Christianity was not one of pietism, and he became increasingly critical

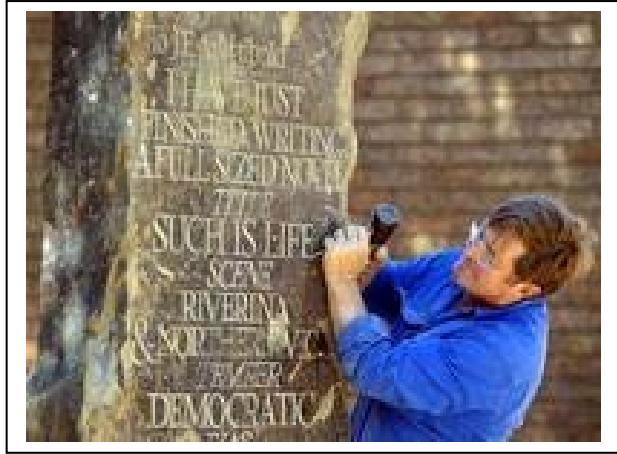
of what he called churchianity, and of the Christian churches failing to teach the essence of Christianity. In a letter he wrote in 1902, he quoted Lessing with approval: "The Christian religion has been tried for eighteen centuries; the religion of Christ remains to be tried". In later life Joe claimed to belong to a church with only one member. *Rigby's Romance* is very much a book about how to apply Christianity to contemporary existence.

By 1903, the year *Such is Life* was published, Joe and Leonie's three surviving children had all moved to Perth and were anxious for their parents to join them. This occurred a year later and Joe became active assisting his sons in their foundry, building houses for them and himself, sinking wells, clearing their blocks, planting fruit trees and building fences. This work would now be the pattern until his death in 1912. Joe felt increasing frustration that he could not regain the literary productivity of his Shepparton years, but also at his inability to get the rest of his trilogy published.



At the time of his death, *Such is Life* had sold only 1,100 copies, whereas Steele Rudd, Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson were selling tens of thousands of copies of their books. Despite offering to give *Rigby's Romance* to a publisher royalty free, he was only successful in having it published in serial form in the Broken Hill Barrier Truth newspaper, and *The Buln-buln and the Brolga* remained unpublished.

Joseph Furphy is buried at Karrakatta Cemetery in Perth. There were no editorials or obituaries for him, and on his death certificate his family listed his occupation as 'Mechanic'.



**Letter cutter  
Ian Marr works  
on the Furphy  
monument in  
Shepparton.**

Photo: *Sandy  
Scheltema*

Tragically, Joseph Furphy's reputation as a major Australian literary figure did not emerge until years after his death. At first, people mistook his books as historical recollection only, missing the sophistication and richness of his work. Only in the 1940s did interest in him lead to a re-evaluation of his work. The literary journals *Meanjin* and *Southerly* both devoted entire issues to Furphy during the 1940s and over 50 papers on Furphy have now been published in these two journals alone. In 1944 Miles Franklin produced her biography of him, in which she wrote "Time, worth, consensus of opinion and expert judgement have combined to establish *Such is Life* as an Australian classic: It is our *Don Quixote*, our *Les Miserables*, our *Moby Dick*, our *Vanity Fair*". During the same year Angus and Robertson reprinted *Such is Life*, and it has been in print ever since. Over the next four years the same company published *Rigby's Romance* and *The Buln-Buln and the Brolga*, the latter finally published 36 years after its author's death. James Joyce refers to Furphy in *Finnegans Wake*. H.M Green, in *Australian Literature 1900-1950* calls *Such is Life* "...the most original and vigorous novel that has come out of this country", and John Barnes wrote of him "... when his energies are concentrated on showing the bushmen as they really are, there is no Australian writer who surpasses Furphy – not even Lawson".

## UNUSUAL POST OFFICE

In the not quite bustling hamlet of Kangaroo Ground, about 30 kms north east of Melbourne is a Licensed Post Office. Not one of your ordinary ones, mind you, but probably the only one of its kind in the great land of Oz. In the weeks ahead people entering this very practical green shed will see that it harbours stainless steel tanks, French oak barrels and other bits and bobs that definitely point to the wine industry. There you have it. A Post Office in a wine shed. And don't forget the aroma issuing from this shed at a certain time of the year – it draws people like a magnet.

Kangaroo Ground is one of those little places with a store, a museum, tennis courts, primary school, church, a school of languages and this post office. It's surrounded by cattle and sheep farms and the more contemporary olive trees and vineyards. Quite a few people commute to the city but are thankful they can come home to this beautiful place on the cusp of the Yarra Valley.



The people round here were asked whether they wanted a mail delivery service but most of us knocked it back because we enjoy visiting the post office. Ken King, our "Postie" as the Licensee calls himself is not only into wine but also people. He is a most affable bloke, interested in everything and a great deliverer of jokes as well as mail. It's a place where all of us Kangaroo Ground people find going to the Post Office a place for a bit of a talk, how the grapes are going and who got their VCE. Oh, and you can put your money in the biscuit tin for the papers.

Off stage to the actual Post Office is a tasting room. Well the main product has to be checked out doesn't it? Very soon Ken will be out there in the vineyard to check the sugar content of the grapes. Then comes the time for the pickers. I love this time and I can't wait to see the big vats with their pink bubbling loads of fermenting grapes. The Chardonnay is more decorous and does its thing in beautiful tall Italian stainless steel vats.

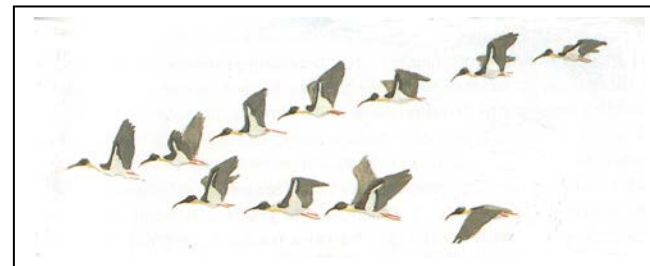
At the moment the wedding veils are all over the vines, except 2 rows right in the middle. I was puzzled about this and asked Ken why were they not covered. Expecting some arcane answer, he said he'd run out of netting!

A long time ago around the 1850s Kanga was settled by the many families from Scotland and quite a few Europeans. Amazingly a lot of these families still own land here, and the nicest thing about the whole place is that it really hasn't changed much. The views are still breathtaking, the cows mumble away at real grass and the kangaroos still live all over the place. There will be some drinking at my little pond tonight. So here's a toast to Kangaroo Ground and the people and to the museum, school and church and not forgetting that very special Post Office in the wine shed.

- Sheila Dixon

## BIRDS OF KANGAROO GROUND

### Ibis and Spoonbills



As I write, it is winter and we are seeing undulating lines or loose Vs of large waterbirds passing overhead, possibly heading for their breeding grounds in the Murrumbidgee-Murray Valley region. Sometimes they catch a thermal and glide in circles to attain a greater height. These are Ibis, and the two species common to Kangaroo Ground are easily distinguished.



#### The Australian White Ibis

They are often seen probing the ground in wet paddocks or wetlands and are common visitors to municipal rubbish dumps. They eat a wide range of food including crustaceans, water insects, fish, snails, frogs and crickets. The Straw-necked Ibis also feeds in dry paddocks and will eat grasshoppers and caterpillars when available.

The Straw-necked Ibis has a black upper and a mainly white underside while the Australian White or Sacred Ibis is white all over with black tipped flight and tail feathers and plumage that is often soiled. Both have a long curved black bill and black bare-skinned head.

During breeding there is much deep bowing to each other eg when mating, when changing shifts during incubation and even to the young before feeding them. The nest is a platform of sticks on an island or in a swamp thicket – somewhere safe from foxes and other predators. It is chosen by the male who brings the sticks to the site where the female builds the nest.

Spoonbills belong to the same family but are slightly larger. There are two different species of Spoonbills. The Royal Spoonbill has an all white body with a black face and bill and black legs. The Yellow-billed Spoonbill is all white with a yellow bill and legs, but like the Sacred Ibis, the white plumage is often soiled.



**The Royal Spoonbill**

Spoonbills are generally seen in ones or twos walking through the water of shallow dams or wetlands swinging their long spoon-shaped bill through the water to detect their prey with the sensitive tip. The Royal Spoonbills feed mainly on fish, molluscs and crustaceans. The Yellow-billed walk slowly through the shallow water stirring the mud with their feet and feed mainly on water insects, but also eat fish, crustaceans and molluscs. More than 700 items have been found in a bird's full stomach.

During breeding the male approaches the female who responds aggressively at first. When the male succeeds in nibbling the female's bill they bond. The female selects the nest site and builds the platform from sticks supplied by the male. On the nest there is much flapping of wings and mutual preening.

- Peter Fleming

## SELF SUFFICIENCY THIRTIES STYLE

Bend of Islands resident Sheila Dixon concludes her reminiscence, originally broadcast on Radio National's *Bush Telegraph*.

...0...

To say we were self sufficient was nearly right. The milk from Alice the cow made various delights. Grandma would set some in a wide china basin overnight and then literally cut the cream off in the morning. It was almost like cheese and was thick and yellow. Sometimes she would bring the milk to the boil and let it cool, again in the china basin. This turned into clotted cream and was heavily dripped over strawberries from the garden. Divine! The eggs were wiped with something called Keepeg. They were then put into boxes of crunched up newspaper for the winter, and used for cakes and puddings. Then there was the fruit to bottle and make jam. Summer was a busy time for all this. We were far away from shops up here and Grandma was a dab hand at making toffee. Crunchy or stickjaw, it was beautiful and took our minds of those lolly shops in the city.

At some time early in the year there would be the Christmas pudding event. Grandma used to make about three and they were hung up in the pantry in their calico jackets ready for the big day. One was always kept back for the next year and as grandma lived until 90, there were a lot of people having to learn how to make Christmas puddings after that. Grandma was a Yorkshire woman and as such was a great cook. I well remember her Yorkshire pudding, a crispy brown cloud. It was served with gravy before the main dinner. A sort of poor man's entrée I suppose.

Aside from the food there was the homemade soap. What a mess it was in the making but when finished it was lovely and cut into blocks. It was used to wash our hair and was followed up with a rosemary rinse for getting the shine back in after all our swimming in the river. That rosemary rinse! When I smell it today I can still feel my head being dumped in the wash basin and getting it in my eyes.

Finally, self-sufficiency that didn't quite work as well as today was the use of a coolgardie safe for trying to keep food



**Catherine Oxley née Braithwaite  
born Whitby, Yorkshire, England, 1864,  
died Bend of Island, 1955.**

The “Grandma” of Sheila Dixon’s articles, photographed c 1925 in one of the fur coats she had made for her every eight years, donated the land known as Oxley Reserve at the Bend of Islands.

food cool. It was a tall metal and flywire box with hessian draped down the side . A dish of water on the top of the safe kept the hessian wet, and this was supposed to keep the safe cool. The eternal cry was, though, ‘Who let that fly in the safe?’ The flies were always hanging round hopefully and the maggotty tragedies of life in those days were pretty commonplace . A trick with ‘funny’ meat was to wipe it with vinegar, but once you saw someone doing this you knew the meat ‘had gone’ as they used to say.

One last bit of self sufficiency was more in the religious sense. Our oldest cousin was about eighteen and had a serious interest in the bible. She made it known that she would hold Sunday School meetings on her veranda at 10 o’clock. I can’t remember my feelings about this but as the child of fairly waspish parents I think I went along with it. Peggy even had a funny little foot pedalled organ which we found pretty fascinating. So we all trailed along. After the inevitable hymns and prayers, we received handouts of sacred cards which always showed Jesus as a hippy before his time. In the seventies, in the hippie era, I remember, Jesus seemed to be a popular figure or was it his alter ego? I used to wonder how on earth did they know what he looked like. The best part of Sunday school was when Auntie Violet brought out the cordial and biscuits. We felt we had earned them.

Now that I live permanently up here in this beautiful place I have gone back to Grandma’s roots. I grow my own vegies and pick mushrooms in the autumn. Any free offerings of fruit are instantly made into jams, jellies or relishes. I grow just about all my own vegetables and can live off them from my freezer in winter. The concrete tank provides a liquid tantamount to champagne and the pollution of the city hasn’t reached here yet. At certain times of the year the moon comes up in the east and shines on the river. What more can you ask? I just wish Alice was still here. Who can forget after all these years that lovely whanging sound of her milk pouring into the galvanised bucket, the sweet smell of it, and all that beautiful cholesterol! Ah, those were the days!

- Sheila Dixon

## KANGAROO GROUND'S WINERIES

### Redbox Vineyard and Winery

The urge for a lifestyle change brought Anne and Brian Coffey to Kangaroo Ground in the early 1980s where they purchased 20 acres on the corner of the St Andrews Road and Ness Lane. While maintaining his plumbing business at Alphington, Brian gradually established a house and a vineyard on the property. A lucky result of the excavation work was the creation of a large cellar under the dwelling, a cellar which today offers perfect storage space for 1,000 bottles of fine wine.

Around 1986 Brian planted just over 8 acres of grapevines, Chardonnay, Riesling and Cabernet. These vines flourished on the deep volcanic soils on the site, and today as mature vines, they produce grapes of high intensity making commendable wines which have been enjoyed in far away places such as Lyon, Paris, New York, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Geneva and Vienna; in Shanghai, Delhi, Pondicherry, and Tokyo.

Sadly, failing health curtailed Brian and Anne's plans for further developing the site. After Brian's death in 2004, Colin and Glenys Spencer acquired the property and it was on their cellar door patio that we recently enjoyed a glass of good wine, a superb cheese platter, and a long chat.

Colin and Glenys open their cellar door Saturday, Sunday and Public Holidays, 11am-6pm. The telephone number is 9712 0440.

The Andrew Ross Museum is grateful to the Redbox Vineyard & Winery for its generous support of the recent Cemetery Tour.

- John Austin

## BOOK LAUNCH AT THE ANDREW ROSS – 2:00 PM SUNDAY 28 AUGUST

The Andrew Ross Museum is proud to announce its latest publication, *Golden Days on the Caledonian Diggings: The Diaries of Thomas Young of Kangaroo Ground, Panton Hill and Christmas Hills 1859-1865; 1895-1900*

The book is an in-depth study and expansion of two recently unearthed nineteenth century diaries detailing a range of previously unknown aspects of Kangaroo Ground and the nearby Caledonian Diggings that in the late-1850s gave rise in turn to each of the hamlets north of Kangaroo Ground.

Over recent months, local historian, Mick Woiwod, having transcribed both diaries, has researched the period thoroughly, and added to the finished work a series of six comprehensive explanatory notes, photographs, sketches, maps, footnotes, etc., designed to throw further light and colour on these hitherto little known diggings. The book is to be launched in the 1878 'Old Classroom' next to the Museum. See enclosed flyer for details.

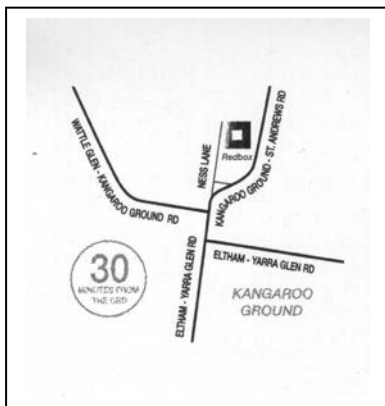
### Garden Hill Viewing Platform

The Shire of Nillumbik has announced the provision of \$140,000 for the construction of an all-abilities Viewing Platform on Council land adjacent to the War Memorial Park on Garden Hill, Kangaroo Ground.

The site chosen for this exciting project provides a 270 degree panoramic view of the Yarra Valley and mountains. The initiative is the product of six years of dedicated work on the part of the Shire and its advisory committee. Octagonal in configuration with a remarkably innovative roofline, the centre has been designed to incorporate eight large double-sided panels chronicling the Aboriginal and European histories of the district. Together with the many other amenities set in place in recent years in the grounds of the adjacent War Memorial Park, this latest project is destined to place Kangaroo Ground on the map for all eager to learn more of its exceptionally rich heritage.

### Learn! Learn! Learn!

Here's a once in a lifetime opportunity for all history buffs keen to learn more about the local scene and how it came to be the way





that it is. The 10 historical societies of the Shire (which of course includes the Andrew Ross Museum), have combined for a 10 week course, titled Tales of Old Nillumbik. Each Tuesday afternoon at the Eltham Living & Learning Centre — commencing 2:00 pm 4<sup>th</sup> October — a 90 minute informative address and discussion on a different town or district within the shire by local individuals expert in their field. To register, call the Eltham Living & Learning Centre on 9439 3463 and decide whether to sign up for the entire 10 weeks or that of the district(s) that interests you most, starting with Kangaroo Ground on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> October. For further details contact Mick Woiwod on 97120563.

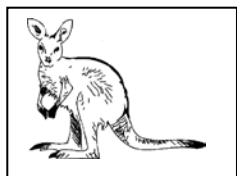
### Laughs! Laughs! Laughs!

History is about life and life of course does have its humorous side. The Andrew Ross Museum, in association with its artist-in-residence, Don Brown, is in the early stages of planning an illustrated volume with prime focus on precisely that. Success for the project depends largely upon readers sending in their stories! Keep them reasonably short to go with one of Don's dreamt-up quirky sketches on an A4 page. See humour as not only 'the ability to enjoy what is comic or amusing', so include escapades that may not have been considered funny at the time — and they need not necessarily relate to Kangaroo Grounds — anywhere local will do.

### Exhibitions

Have you seen the museum's recently completed Room 1 exhibition! Well, if you haven't you are missing something truly remarkable — an informative mural complete with audio — a tableau depicting the school Ross taught in — the pub he built above the present tennis courts — and the 300 page diary in which he chronicled 25 years of the local scene. The Room 2 display, too, is currently being changed. Its latest, *Chalk to I.T.* — mounted in association with Eltham College — chronicles the changing nature of local education over the past 30 years. Note: there is no entry fee to the museum on opening days.

- Mick Woiwod



## THEY CAME TO KANGAROO GROUND

### 3. Agnes Muncaster Bell

There were women amongst the earliest white settlers in Kangaroo Ground. History has not accorded them as much space as has been given to the men, but their roles, responsibilities and influence were of crucial importance.



One of the most intriguing was Agnes, the wife of William Bell. This was the lady who, boarding the first ship to bring migrants to Victoria, the *David Clark*, in 1839, led not only her brood of five children but also a cow which she intended to milk personally for their nourishment during the long voyage.

Within ten years the Bell family were landholders at Kangaroo Ground, farming alongside several of the other families who had emigrated from Scotland with them aboard the *David Clark*. There were marriages and intermarriage and of course births.

Go to the church or the cemetery at Kangaroo Ground and you will see Agnes commemorated as Agnes Muncaster Bell. What is this Muncaster connection?

Go to Ravenglass, on the north west coast of England and you'll see Muncaster Castle. Here Agnes's mother lived as the wife of Lowther Pennington (1745-1818) the 6<sup>th</sup> baronet and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lord Muncaster. Inheriting the title from an elder brother who died without male issue, Lowther Pennington was already 46 years old when he married Agnes's mother. She was almost as old herself, and had two or three daughters, but the succession was assured when within a year a Pennington son and heir was born.



Muncaster Castle

Just how Agnes featured in the arrangements that operated at Muncaster Castle subsequently is unclear. According to oral history she eloped with Scotsman William Bell, who possibly was a farm worker or coachman at the castle, in 1818. Also that year, her step-father, Lord Muncaster died. Under the terms of the will of her mother, who died in 1827, Agnes may have later received a small inheritance.

Family papers lodged at the Andrew Ross Museum tell that Agnes was the younger daughter of James Morrison, an army officer, and Esther Barry, a Londoner. Her birth was registered in 1788 at Newcastle-on Tyne, in the north of England. When her mother remarried and became Lady Muncaster, Agnes was thirteen years old.

Death certificates for Agnes and her husband William Bell give no names of their parents. Those of her children name her as Agnes Tweedie. Perhaps her full history will never be known. Certainly, however, her children caused her to be commemorated locally as Agnes Muncaster Bell. Certainly too, her descendants are numerous, whereas the last descendant of her Muncaster half-brother died in 1917.

- John Austin

## STILL STANDING



Travelling west on the Wattle Glen Road from Kangaroo Ground, you'll see this old barn. It stands on a property occupied until the 1960s by the Noble Family. When the property changed hands, the dwelling was removed but the barn remains.

I pass it every Monday, and wonder whether, when I return, it will still be standing.

Here it is, photographed in April 2005 by Dr Peter Fleming.

- John Austin