

KANGAROO GROUND

CHRONICLE

ISBN 1324-6437

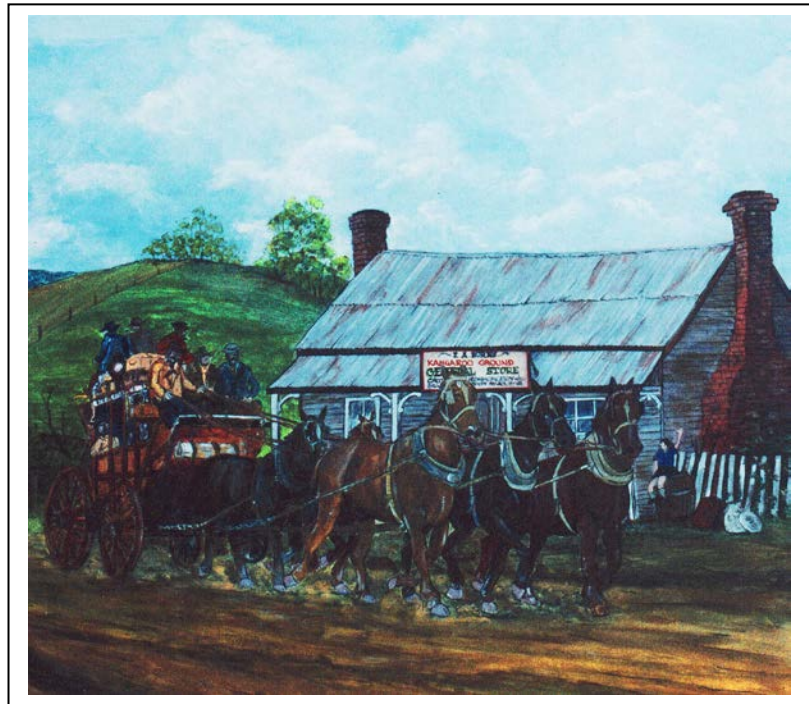
Newsletter of the

Andrew Ross Museum Inc.

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School House, Kangaroo Ground, 3097

Volume 12 No 1
Autumn 2006



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- Anticipating the publication of the Andrew Ross Diary later this year, Dick Austin on Page 1 looks at Andrew Ross's adult years prior to his arrival at Australia.
- In her inimitable style, Sheila Dixon writes up a Saturday morning visit to the St Andrews Market on Page 6.
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High Achievers of Kangaroo Ground

Andrew Ross



Dick Austin

Andrew Ross played a key role in the origins of nearly every social institution in Kangaroo Ground.

Part 1 looked at his family background.

Part 2: Childhood and Early Adulthood

As Andrew grew up at *Cargenholm* his uncle John Ross, now a commander, was appointed by the British Admiralty to lead an expedition to find the north-west passage (a route from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean via the Canadian Arctic). Although he explored the Bering Strait and the west coast of Greenland and named many bays, when he reached what later proved to be the only practicable entrance to the NW Passage, he declared it no more than a bay enclosed by mountains. Upon his return he was widely (and probably unfairly) derided and humiliated, and the expedition was seen as a total failure. He was never employed by the Admiralty again, although James, George's son and our Andrew's cousin, who had been a member of this expedition, participated in a number of further successful polar expeditions. John, meanwhile, began building a house at Stranraer in the heart of Wigtownshire, the ancestral shire of the Ross family. He named the house *North West Castle*, possibly to commemorate his expedition or perhaps because Wigtownshire is in the north west of Britain (it is in the south west of Scotland). The house still exists as part of

a hotel of the same name, and it displays the Ross family coat of arms.

When Andrew was 9 years old his parents rented out *Cargenholm* and moved to Richmond in Yorkshire, England, apparently to progress the children's education. Four years later they moved, in quick succession, to Tynemouth, Whitby and Newcastle, before depositing Andrew and his brother at a school at Witton-le-Wear (near Durham) and returning to Dumfries.

Within a year Robert was dead, leaving Margaret with four young children, Andrew being the oldest at 14, and Elizabeth the youngest at 5. Andrew's immediate family was now quite vulnerable. His father and all his grandparents were dead, and he only had two living uncles, one of whom (George) had just been declared bankrupt for the 3rd time. Most of Robert's money had been invested in *Cargenholm*. The future security of Andrew's family appeared to depend upon his other uncle, John Ross.

In 1829 John departed on a privately funded Canadian Arctic expedition. He put up £3,000 and his friend Felix Booth (of Booth's Gin) put up £10,000. Andrew's cousin James, now a commander and member of the Royal Society, was 2nd in command. No news was heard about the expedition for four years, and although a number of search expeditions went looking for them, most assumed all were dead. When they returned, late in 1833, their survival was seen as miraculous and John was an overnight celebrity. He met King William IV, he was knighted, and he received honours from the sovereigns of Russia, Prussia, Sweden, Denmark, France and Belgium. Over 4,000 congratulatory letters poured in. The expedition had become hopelessly trapped in ice and had abandoned one of their ships, yet

John had kept the party alive over 4 Arctic winters, due mainly to his being smart enough to learn from the local Inuit. During the trip James discovered the Magnetic North Pole.

Also in 1829, at the age of 15, Andrew began keeping a diary. Remarkably, he kept this up for the next 66 years, and it has all been preserved. Although it contains obsessive notes about the weather and his daily activities, it also contains periodic reflections on his life. For example, in 1834 he wrote, “The fact was that the return of my Uncle John in October 1833 had upset all moderate ideas, and I deeply sunk in every fact which the newspapers afforded of his popularity”.

At 16 Andrew moved to Glasgow to attend the University, studying logic, Greek, French and astronomy. He remained there for 18 months. During this period he began attending church regularly. Mid-way through 1832 he started work as a junior clerk, probably due to financial imperatives. The following year his uncle George was declared bankrupt for the 4th time and spent the year in prison for fraud.

John’s return in late 1833 did not bring the financial rescue that Andrew and his family hoped for. Because the expedition took much longer than planned, John didn’t have enough money to pay his crew’s wages



John Ross

and had to ask the Admiralty for help. John hoped to address his financial difficulties by self-publishing a narrative of the expedition and Andrew left his clerk job and moved to London to help with the production of the book, where he assisted in computing meteorological tables. As a narrative of the journey, the book is seen as having serious shortcomings, and it damaged the relationship between John and James. John sold the book by sending agents around Britain to canvas for subscriptions, and Andrew was one of them. Although over 7,000 subscribers eventually signed up, the book was not a financial success and Andrew appears to have made little from this work.

The next chapter in Andrew’s life is the incredible story of The Duke of Cornwall’s Harbour and Launceston and Victoria Railway Company. This company was launched by his uncle George, with both George and John as directors. It aimed to build a harbour and town at Tremoutha Haven (Crackington Haven) on the north Cornwall coast, and to build a connecting railway to Launceston in central Cornwall. The king acted as patron and a number of MP’s were on the committee. Andrew was the Private Secretary and both he and his mother appear to have invested in the venture. Given George’s business record, it is not surprising that the venture failed dramatically and had built nothing by the time it was dissolved a year later. Andrew was now unemployed and poorer and George spent 6 months in debtor’s prison.

Another very odd event followed in 1836, when Andrew was 22: on May 3rd he records in his diary “Married at St Pancras Ch(urch)”. He married Mary Ann Brimmer, a woman he made no mention of previously in his diary. A month later he wrote to his mother and

uncle to tell them of his wedding, so obviously they knew nothing about it and weren't invited to the church service. Mary was English, born in Southampton, and amazingly, given the inauspicious start, they would remain married until her death nearly 50 years later.

In 1837 Andrew wrote in his diary that in 1834 he should have joined a church Young Men's Society, "which might have had a very great and beneficial effect on my future life, particularly in preventing the errors of the next two or three years... Had I remained in Glasgow and matured my principles I might have obtained peace of mind. I was unfortunately engrossed with ideas of personal aggrandizement and political notoriety... I was absorbed in self and craved continually after enjoyments to soul and body".

The year following Andrew's marriage was one of failure and financial struggle for the wider Ross family, with the exception of James, who was offered (and declined) a knighthood. John formed the India Steamship Company, which was liquidated within a year. Andrew's mother sold *Cargenholm*, their only asset. Andrew and Mary moved from one lodging to another around London, possibly unable to afford the rent.

... ..

Part 3, to appear in the next edition of *The Chronicle*, looks at Andrew's early years in Australia.



St Andrews Market

I went to the St. Andrews Market last Saturday. It's just north east of Kangaroo Ground. I found it ranging between the 1970's and 2001. Cars everywhere and parking people doing a roaring trade in fines. The market winds its way round a hill spread with stalls to explore. Such a lot of surprises piled on tables or spread out over the ground unlike any other market I know.

Want your runes read? I'm not sure what they are but I am assured they can give you guidance in life but after that it's up to you. Runes come from a Scandinavian, Greek or Turkish heritage and were thought of as magical. Isn't it wonderful that they have come down all this way from the 3rd century and finished up in a bush market in Australia?

Then there are the organic vegie stalls. There is an Italian family there from Kinglake. They pick the stuff in the morning before they come and the red soil of Kinglake is still on them. Once the Mum from the stall chased me through the crowd to give me the change I had forgotten. You don't find that often. And the vegies don't come any fresher than these.

The clothes are such a variety, caftans and all those tie dyed bits and pieces which take me back to the seventies when one of my daughters used to sell the stuff in a outlet in the city called the Gusunder. A strange smell of incense and funny cigarettes permeated that place then. The incense is still with us here. Then there were racks of hemp clothing, rather nice stuff, more twenty first century designs these days. My favourite clothing stall is the one with the clothesline of rainbow dyed socks.

There is always the man with the tools. All spread out on the ground and what an assortment. Some tools I haven't seen since I was a child when I used to poke around in work sheds up here at Kanga. I used to love levels. I was fascinated by the little bubble in them that showed when things were just right and even.

A stall that is my favourite is run by a smiling Turkish man. He has a friend who does his baking and the fragrant Turkish bread sits there among the dips and nuts. The pine nuts and sesame seeds are so fresh and half the price of those from the supermarkets. The dolmades, the hummours are just perfect with the bread for a Saturday lunch.



The bread stall is a sight to behold. Crusty hand made loaves of all persuasion. Brown loaves with oats on top, sesame seeds, loaves with olives and other surprises. I'd have loved to have been there when they were coming out of the oven. I always notice that bakers have a certain look about them. Warm and clean, an open smiling face and always happy about their early morning's work. And I don't blame them.

Then there is the big tent where you can get chai or tea and relax among the trees. There is such a variety of eating stalls too. Plenty of lovely vegetarian goodies and cakes and tarts. And all this on an area of bush and looking as colourful as the people selling their treasures. I think the only time it hasn't operated was the weekend of the first of Feb. when we had the bushfires up at Kinglake. St. Andrews was a bit close for comfort.

Citizens of the Year

Those who know them will not be surprised that Mick and Marg Woiwod received this year's Nillumbik Shire Citizenship Award on Australia Day. It's hard to imagine a more generous, resourceful and inspiring couple.

"He's sitting in the river, John", I was told by Margaret when I rang their home on a particularly hot day in January. The Woiwod property fronts the Yarra at the Bend of Islands. "I've been down there too but I've returned home and had a cold shower."

When Mick rang back next day, he was immensely cheerful. “Do you know, since my health improved recently I’ve installed a number of little rustic seats on our path down to the Yarra. I sit on one of them in the river, too. It’s a great place to read a book, keep cool, and soak up the scenery. Come and join me any time!”

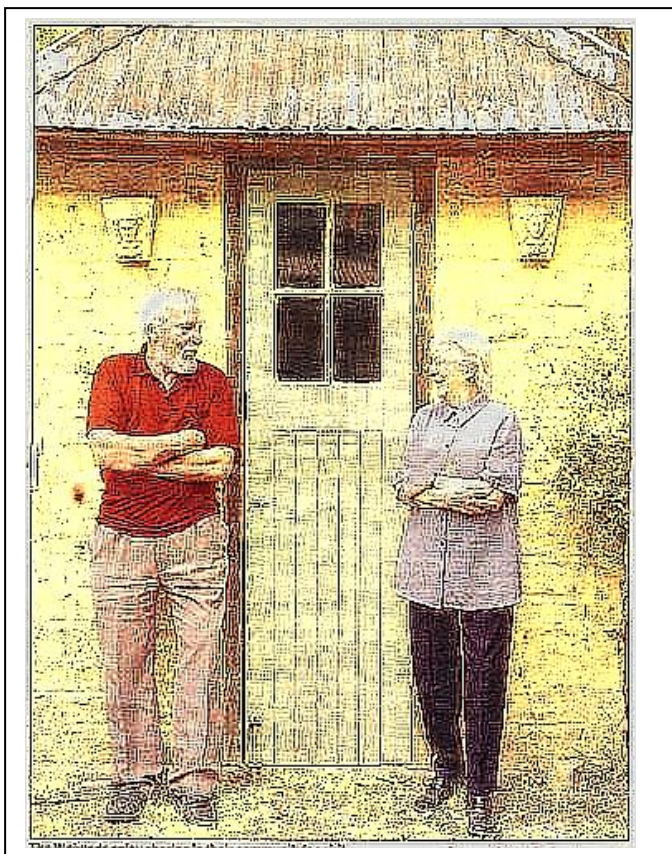


Illustration processed from a photo courtesy *Diamond Valley Leader*.

Bushfires Then and Now



**John
Austin**

With smoke in our nostrils, and ears tuned in to radio bushfire reports, Kangaroo Ground residents had an anxious week earlier this year. Whereas fearful devastation occurred elsewhere, Kangaroo Ground was not harmed. Indeed, it has been nearly 40 years since fires ravaged this district.

The memory of those 1960s bushfires lingers on. What heat! The heat of the worst days combined with the heat generated by the fire fronts reduced all human efforts to nil. Strong north winds blew cinders from hill top to hill top. Houses were sometimes aflame before residents had any warning. Some people survived by wrapping themselves in blankets hastily dipped into the bath tub and then lying on the bush track while the fire passed over them. And what a spectacular sight is a weatherboard cottage when it catches fire! Flames roaring around black skeletal posts, joist and struts, seem to leap up to the sky.

Many of the district’s oldest dwellings, dating from the time of the pioneering Donaldson and Bell families were reduced to ashes. “I escaped with just a toothbrush,” remarked Charis Pelling, the shire’s first lady president. The Pelling family lived in one of the district’s oldest houses. On the same property, a weatherboard cottage rented by local artist Neil Douglas survived. Neil’s theory was that, when the selected native shrubs that he planted around the cottage burned, they put it “in the eye of the storm”.



Donaldson descendant Barbara French provided in 2005 this picture of the ruined original Donaldson buildings soon after the 1969 bushfires. The Pelling family were the last occupants

In the aftermath there was generous local support. In particular, the small band of regular worshippers at the Church gave over all their spare time for many months afterwards raising money, clearing house debris, constructing new dwellings and billeting people who literally had nowhere to sleep.

The Thompson House



Does the cottage in this painting look familiar? If you're driving to Kangaroo Ground from Yarra Glen you'll see it on the right just before the Cemetery. In recent years it was the home of a splendid young lad named Jordan McCarthy. Last year Jordan was orphaned. Len and Helen Muir adopted him, adding him to their own family of three sons. More than \$73,000 dollars has already been raised locally for Jordan's benefit.

In earlier times the house belonged, for several generations, to the Thompson family. And thereby hangs a tale ...

Two years ago the above oil painting was added to the Andrew Ross Museum's collection. The anonymous donor had found it in an opportunity shop in

Queensland. On the back he found fading handwritten notes identifying the house's location.

The closely written notes on the back in 1991 evoke a time many years earlier when the writer visited her Johnston grandparents. She begins, "It was a two-storey house. The painting shows downstairs which was kitchen, dairy, and boys' bedrooms. Upstairs was the parlour, bedrooms, music, cedar furniture".

She relates that "Grandma Johnston bought the little house on the hill with her egg and cream money. It was called *Rosebank*". This is possibly the house now occupied by Mary Floberg. After much peering at fading handwriting and scanning of the Kangaroo Ground Register at the Museum, we have identified the writer as Ida Mary Spry (Mrs W W V Pinkham), a Johnston granddaughter born in 1914. The artist's name is not known, nor is it known how the painting came into Mrs Pinkham's possession and how it eventually reached a Queensland opportunity shop.

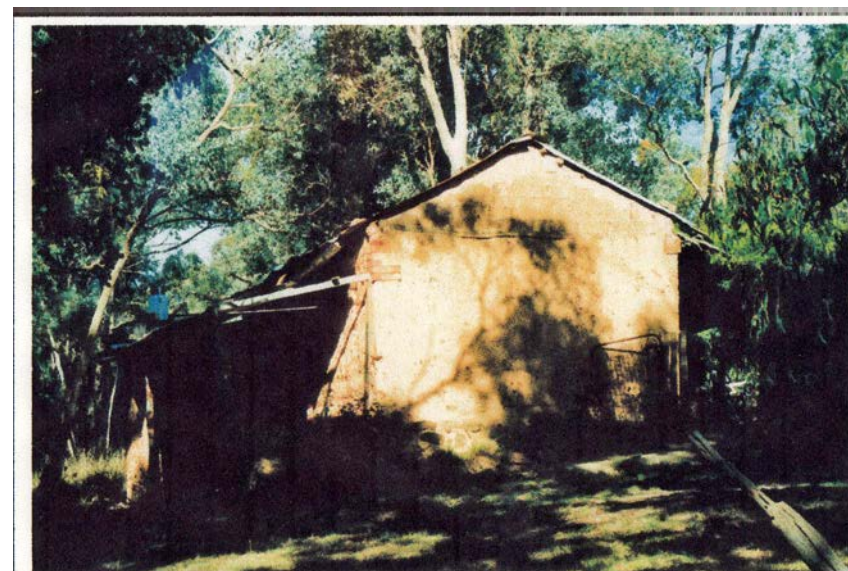
The last Johnston family member to occupy the house died in 1981.

The Museum obtained property title copies several years ago. Although they don't reveal the age of the cottage, they show that the property was first owned by Ferdinand Ramseyer, a Frenchman hired in the 1860s by Joseph Stevenson to teach him viticulture and winemaking. The Stevenson wines and grapes won many awards at Australian shows and exhibitions in later years. Wine was also exported to England and France. Stevenson's vineyard *Bankhead* was on the opposite side of the road from the cottage in the oil painting.

All of which suggests that this cottage might in parts date back to the 1870s, making it one of the oldest surviving dwellings in the district.

- John Austin

Eccentrics – We've Had a Few



Our roving photographer, Dr Peter Fleming, provided the photo above of a local landmark known as Clarky's Mansion. A mudbrick structure, it stands at the corner of Henley Road and Nicholas Lane. In the Museum's collection, there is also a fine painting of it done by George Taylor. Our elderly investigative reporter has had difficulty researching this building's history and discovering more about the Mr Clark who once occupied it. It is Diana Bassett-Smith, that fount of local knowledge, who remembers Mr Clark.

"I spent much of my childhood at *Wongaburra*, my uncle's Kangaroo Ground property on Henley Road. Clarky was a neighbour. I recall one Monday evening when I was eight years old. I was left to do the evening milking while all the adults attended Croydon Market. Up came Clarky from across the paddock while I was

seated on the stool beside one of the cows. “Just popped over for a spot of chook feed,” he explained. I saw him with a spot of our chook feed soon after. He was heading back to his cottage with an 82 kilo bag of wheat on his shoulders. I was not very popular when the adults returned and heard about this.

“Clarky was living out his life alone after returning from army service in WW1. I recall being inside his “mansion” on one occasion in the 1930s. Saplings lashed together formed the base frame of the bed, with wheat bags sewn together being stretched from side to side. And guess what slept on the end of this “bed” during the winter months? No, not a dog. Curled up there on the end of the bed was – a tiger snake.”



HELP BUILD OUR CATALOGUE

A museum’s catalogue is as important as a museum’s contents.

- Anonymous

Are you computer literate?

Do you have an occasional spare hour when you could help build the Museum’s catalogue?

Some of the work could be done at home.

For inquiries ring 9712 0217

Kangaroo Ground Wineries

2. Samson Hill Estate.



Positioned on the highest hill in Kangaroo Ground, with its rich black soil nourishing several hectares of vines, the Samson Hill Estate offers spectacular views, a restaurant, and wine shop and tasting facilities.

The vines were planted in 1998. The locations were chosen to match up with the types of grapes: the south east corner for Verdelho, the south west corner for Pinot Noir, and the north facing slopes for Shiraz.

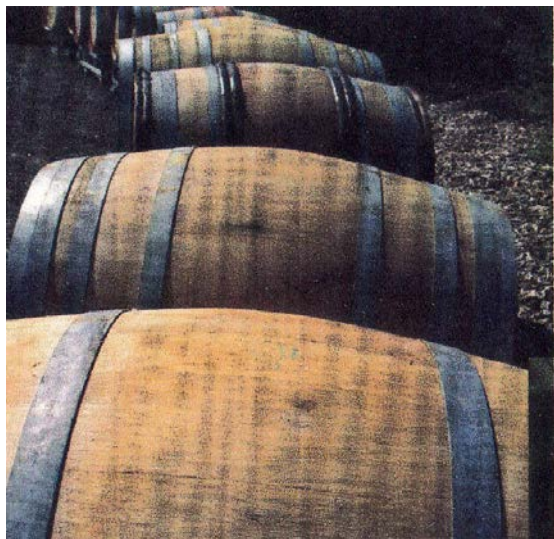
The Cellar Door was opened in November 2003 after the first vintage had been processed in 2001.

A permit was recently obtained allowing restaurant facilities to operate seven days a week. Opening time each day is 10am. Lunch is served every

day; breakfast on Saturday and Sunday; night dinner Wednesday to Saturday. Telephone 9712 0715.

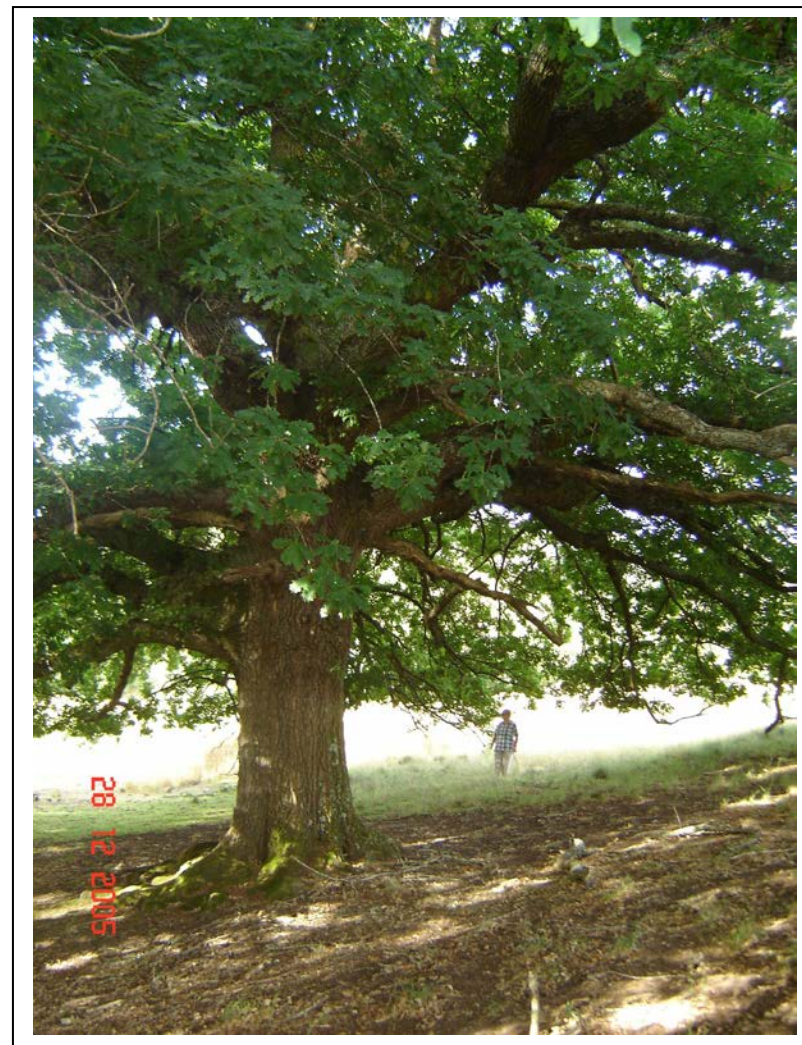
Take things easy when you visit Samson Hill Estate. Take time to survey the panorama of hawthorn hedged hills below and Melbourne's high jagged skyline beyond before doing anything else. Gulping and indigestion might occur if the views, the food and the wine were enjoyed all at once.

Pago Sampson and her staff assist and support many local organizations. Their generous support to several functions organized by this Museum is gratefully appreciated.



Contents of articles in the *Kangaroo Ground Chronicle* may be reprinted by non-profit organizations provided credit is given to the source and a copy is forwarded to the Museum's address at Kangaroo Ground 3097.

The Stevenson Oak



The largest and possibly the oldest oak tree in the district, located beside Watsons Creek near Oxley Bridge, stands on a property originally owned by the pioneering Stevenson Family.

Photo courtesy the Taylor Family.

