

KANGAROO GROUND

CHRONICLE

ISBN 1324-6437

Newsletter of the

Andrew Ross Museum Inc.

andrewrossmuseum@yahoo.com.au

School House, Kangaroo Ground, 3097

Volume 12 No 2
Winter 2006



Museum's retiring Chairman, Roger Male (right) with incoming Chairman Robert Sampimon.

In This Issue

- Continuing his Andrew Ross series, Dick Austin on Page 1 looks at Andrew Ross's chequered career in Australia before he came to Kangaroo Ground.
- During Melbourne's early days Kangaroo Ground was described as "the bread basket of Melbourne". On Page 6 Mick Woiwod outlines its sources of nourishment dating from even earlier times.
- Kangaroo Ground's first storekeepers and a recently discovered photo of them feature in an article on Page 8.
- The story of those two tall gums trees beside the main road above the Kangaroo Ground tennis courts is told by Mick Woiwod on Page 10.
- An appreciation of the debt all Andrew Ross Museum members owe to Dr Peter and Wenda Fleming is outlined on Page 12.
- On Page 14 many readers have contributed recollections of the "singular" characters who once lived hereabouts.
- Dry stone walls may be seen in Kangaroo Ground. On Page 16 is something English poet Pam Ayres wrote about those who erect them.
- A lesson in local geology begins on Page 17.
- Mick Woiwod has produced a new book. Details of the launch and how to get your copy are on Page 19.
- Yet another local vigneron who helps to keep all the Andrew Ross Museum members merry whenever they meet is written up on Page 21.



Dick Austin

High Achievers of Kangaroo Ground

Andrew Ross

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

Part 1 looked at his family background and Part 2 looked at his life prior to migrating to Australia.

Part 3: Australia

Early in 1838 Andrew and Mary (both aged 23) boarded a ship and sailed for Australia. Andrew had borrowed one of his sister's share of the *Cargenholm* money to buy their passage. They arrived in Hobart in July, and then Sydney in September. Andrew carried with him numerous introductions and recommendations, and was perplexed when these didn't lead to immediate employment, concluding that his failure to afford first class passage damaged his prospects.

Andrew's expectation of a good reception in Hobart was probably justified, as John Franklin was the Lieutenant-Governor and he, like Andrew's uncle John and his cousin James, was an arctic explorer and a friend of theirs. After John Franklin's recall from Tasmania he led another arctic expedition, which never returned, and both John and James Ross led search expeditions to try to find them.

Despite his Uncle John's failure in establishing the India Steamship Company, Andrew took on a scheme of establishing a steamship link between London and Sydney. This work occupied his 5 week stay in Tasmania, where he tried to interest Governor Franklin in the scheme, and Andrew then pursued it with Governor Gipps in Sydney. He wrote letters to newspapers and distributed pamphlets, and then organised a public meeting, which resulted in his being

dispatched back to London to rally support for the scheme there. So less than a year after arriving in Australia, Andrew sailed back to Britain.

The trip to Britain was a failure and five months later Andrew returned to Sydney, now deeper in debt. During the following decades he periodically tried to revive the scheme, always without success. Andrew and Mary then opened a drapery shop, which only lasted a couple of months, they were forced to move a number of times, and Mary eventually moved back to Hobart to obtain work there. Andrew started a loan society operation, which also failed within 6 months and which cost him more money.

During 1841, at the time of Andrew's latest failed business, Caroline Chisholm persuaded Governor Gipps to allow her to use part of a disused barracks in Sydney as a Female Immigrants Home. She had been shocked when she first arrived in Sydney (at the same time as Andrew and Mary) by the now destitute women living on the streets and forced into prostitution, who had previously been encouraged to migrate to Australia. Once she had established the Female Immigrants Home, she set up branch homes at Parramatta, Liverpool and Campbelltown. The homes acted as both accommodation and employment agencies for the women. Caroline raised the funds to operate these homes and she usually appointed a clergyman to run them. Andrew had previously boarded with the O'Connor family, who took up the management of the Campbelltown home.

During 1842 Caroline set up additional homes in Yass, Port Macquarie, Moreton Bay, Wollongong, Maitland, Scone, Goulburn and Bong Bong. Andrew was appointed manager of the Maitland home, a cottage in East Maitland. Maitland at the time was the 3rd largest provincial city in NSW. Within a year the demand for these homes subsided and they were closed. Andrew's cottage became Maitland's first hospital.



Caroline Chisholm

Now based in Maitland, Andrew picked up occasional work as an auctioneer's clerk, and he had a couple of failed attempts to buy or establish local newspapers. He resumed the pattern of frequent moves, casual work and selling belongings. In 1844 he and Mary moved back to Sydney and he did semi-regular work as an auctioneer's clerk, a shop-assistant and a book-keeper. He also taught part-time at a couple of Presbyterian schools in Sydney.

Now 30, Andrew was doing no better in Australia than he had in Britain. He was desperately poor and doing work he felt was far beneath him. To highlight how he must have felt, during this period his uncle, John Ross, was British Consul at Stockholm, and Andrew's cousin James had led an astonishingly successful expedition to the Antarctic. While in Hobart James had stayed with his old friend Governor Franklin at Government House, and together they had established a magnetic and astronomical observatory, which Franklin named *Rosbank*.



Map of Antarctica, showing Ross Island, Ross Sea and Ross Ice Shelf.

An indication of James Ross' presence in the Antarctic region is that Ross Island is in the Ross Sea, on the edge of the Ross Ice Shelf, which is part of the Ross Dependency. Although he never claimed to discover it, James Ross was the first person to identify that the Antarctic was a continent. On his return to Britain in 1843 James was knighted and awarded an honorary doctorate of common law from Oxford University.

During 1846 Andrew met Rev. Irving Hetherington at a dinner in Sydney. Hetherington, then aged 35, was from the same region of Scotland as Andrew, and had come to New South Wales about 10 years earlier as a Presbyterian preacher. A few months after their meeting, Hetherington moved to Melbourne to take up the position of Scots Church minister. At the time of his arrival in Melbourne there were only three other Presbyterian Church ministers in Port Philip – A. Love at Geelong, A. Laurie at Portland and Peter Gunn at Campbellfield.

There had been a fourth Presbyterian minister: James Forbes had been sent from Sydney in 1838 at the age of 25 to organise the Presbyterian Church in Port Philip, becoming the first permanent Port Philip minister of any denomination. He built a weatherboard church at the west end of Collins St and established a parish school. A couple of years later he built a new church at the current site of Scots Church in Collins St. During a church split in 1846, Forbes aligned himself with the Free Church of Australia Felix, which meant his position as Scots minister was declared vacant. Taking most of the congregation with him, he established a new church and school. This school still survives as Scotch College.

So Hetherington was sent to Melbourne to take up the position at Scots Church vacated by Forbes. In order to re-establish the school, Hetherington invited Andrew in 1847 to move to Melbourne as the Head Teacher. The school opened in the original weatherboard church at the west end of Collins St with 8 students, although this rose to 90 students within 6 months. Andrew and Mary initially stayed with the

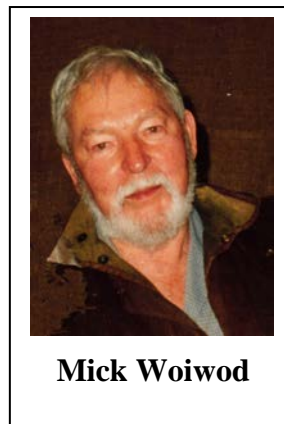
Hetheringtons at the Presbyterian manse. After a few months the school relocated to a cottage in Russell St, around the corner from Scots Church.

This was Andrew's big break, as he now had a prestigious position and a regular income. He remained in this position for nearly four years. Andrew was drawn in to Hetherington's Presbyterian world, and was soon actively studying Divinity, Hebrew and Greek in preparation for a ministry position. He also took up a position as Secretary of the Bible Society. Yet the story does not have a happy ending: Andrew was at times the sole teacher at the school and he found the work overwhelming. He also made little progress in his theological studies, eventually abandoning them.

While living in Melbourne, Andrew and Mary were joined by Andrew's brother Alexander and his wife Jane (Mary's sister). They lived in Andrew and Mary's house for the first few months after their arrival. Andrew helped get Alexander work at Robert Hoddle's survey office, and one of his first jobs was to survey Eltham. Alexander later surveyed the Kangaroo Ground cemetery.

Part 4, to appear in the next edition of *The Chronicle*, looks at Andrew's years in Kangaroo Ground.

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.



Mick Woiwod

Some Local Foods Gathered by Wurundjeri Women Around Kangaroo Ground

Kangaroo Ground is described somewhere in the early records as the 'bread basket of Melbourne' with some 500 acres of its fertile acres under wheat. And for thousands of years before that, its rolling hills had provided nourishment in the way of plant and animal foods for the innovative Wurundjeri 'fire-stick farmers' who had crafted it into a cornucopia to their own creation.

The name 'Kangaroo Ground' is the clue to its outstanding hunting proclivity. Added to kangaroo meat would have been the vegetable foods their women collected which research assesses to have been as high as 70% of the total protein eaten. Today, most all of those local indigenous food plants survive although not in the profusion they did in Aboriginal times.

Dr Beth Gott, the foremost authority on the subject, has identified some 900 Victorian Aboriginal food plants, many of which continue to grow in Kangaroo Ground. The edible portion of these plants in southern Victoria are for the most part underground in the form of bulbs and tubers.

Throughout late winter and early spring in pre-settlement times the hills of Kangaroo Ground would have presented as a sea of golden Murnong flowers, beneath each of which would have been a yam not unlike a small parsnip. Aboriginal women gathered these in their thousands to prepare with meat their husbands brought back to camp. The method of cooking yams was to light a



Yam Daisy

to light a very hot fire in a circular hole large enough to accommodate a collecting basket (approx 500 x 500mm), and to drop into that fire a collection of stones. Once the stones and hole were seen to be hot enough, everything would be scooped out and replaced by a basketful of washed yams and other collectibles around which would be packed the hot stones. All would then be quickly covered with grass and finally earth and allowed to steam. Food prepared in this way is said to have been highly palatable eaten warm, with leftovers served for breakfast the following morning.

Among our common names for other surviving local Aboriginal plant foods are: Chocolate, Vanilla, Bulbine and Fringe lilies, Milkmaids, Early Nancies, Blushing Bindweed, Native Geranium, Water Ribbons, Cumbungi, Nardoo, Cherry Ballart, Clematis, Appleberry, Cranberry, Coprosma, Kangaroo Apple, Native Raspberry and the bulbs of all fifty-plus local terrestrial orchids.



Bulbine Lily

Among other food collected by Aboriginal women would have been mushrooms, honey, fish, yabbies, mussels, and waterfowl eggs.

Put all this together and the diet of local people back then can be said to have been more diverse and nutritious than today's rich ethnic cuisines – certainly more palatable than the 'corn-beef and cabbage' cuisine our own people introduced to this country from England.



Chocolate Lily

They Came to Kangaroo Ground



John Austin

James Andrew Burns and Mary Jane Pryor

A faded mutilated photo, brought to the Museum recently, provides the only known picture of the Kangaroo Ground Store in the 1890s and its first proprietors.

Mary was the eldest child of a pioneering Eltham family, the Pryors, and she and James Burns were married at Eltham in 1879. Within a few years they moved to Kangaroo Ground and soon after "in a small way" they established the Kangaroo Ground Store.

The business thrived. This is how James advertised his lines in the *Evelyn Observer* in the 1890s:-

Kangaroo Ground Supply Stores - J A Burns - Retail and Family Grocer - Drapery, Ironmongery, Crockery, Boots and Shoes, etc. - Flour, Pollard, Bran, Chaff, Corn, Potatoes, etc.

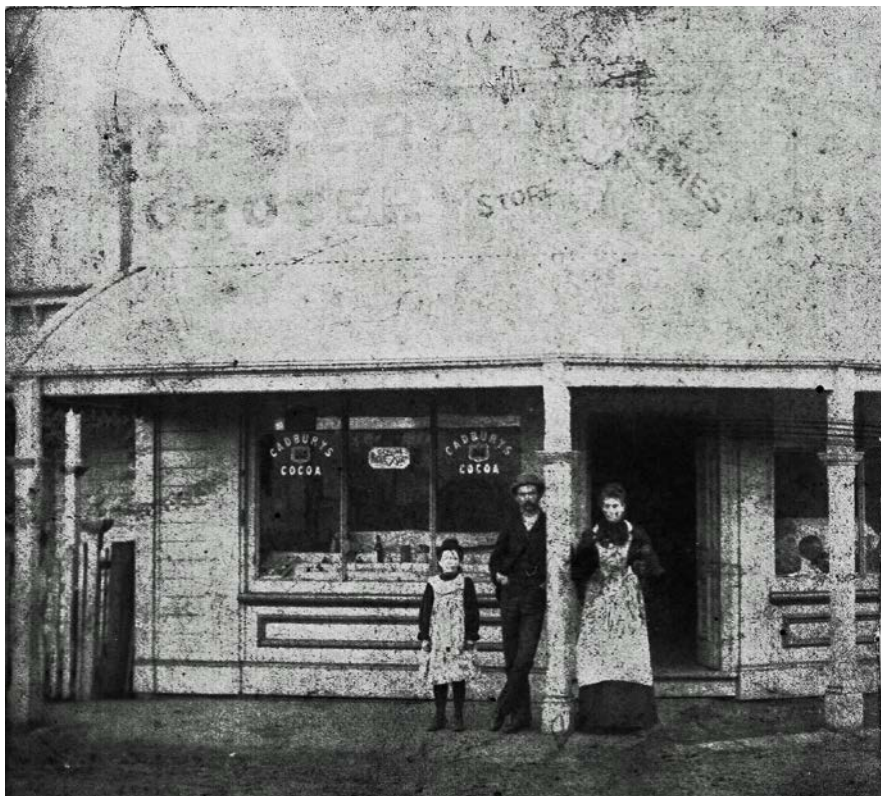
In the same newspaper the store is described in 1891 as "the biggest and best stocked store between here and Melbourne".

In 1899, returning early one morning from Melbourne, where he had been purchasing and collecting supplies, a frightful sight greeted James Burns as he topped the hill above Weller's Hotel. The familiar roofline of his store had disappeared. Within minutes he was looking at piles of ash and rubble and some wisps of smoke.

Happily his wife and eight children had escaped with their lives, although the eldest girl's hair had been burnt as she attempted to rescue her younger siblings. The building was fully insured, but not its contents.

Somehow, the Burns family “traded out of their losses”. The new store and residence that they built has survived, with renovations and improvements, to this day.

James and Mary Burns, now in their late 40s, sold the Kangaroo Ground Store to the Wraight family c 1906, and ended their days at Tatura some 20 years later.



James and Mary Burns with their daughter Jessie
at their Kangaroo Ground Store, c. 1890.
(from a photo provided by Len Morris)

Trees

Have you ever noticed those two tall gum trees on the main road above the Kangaroo Ground tennis courts? How old would you consider them to be? Well, thanks to Harry Gilham, President of the Eltham Historical Society, we can now tell you. They're into their 87th year.

You see, the Society has recently received from the Shire of Nillumbik, an allocation of the former Shire of Eltham's Memorabilia which Harry has been carefully sifting through and come up with the following gem. A letter from the Shire, dated 4th July 1918, addressed to Mrs Hanrahan of the Kangaroo Ground Primary's School Committee

Madam,

In reply to yours of the 28 ult, I am instructed to inform you that the Council has granted permission for the planting of an avenue of trees on the Eltham-Yarra Glen Rd between the Shire Office and the School at Kangaroo Ground. It is requested that the trees be planted not less than 9ft. from the building line and at a distance apart of not less than 10ft.

*Yours faithfully
Secretary*

World War I has been underway almost four years and many former pupils of the school have died in battle with surely others to follow and the mothers have chosen trees as appropriate living reminders of the sons and husbands who'd never return. Being mothers, they would surely have planted the trees soon after

permission was granted. Their choice was Sugar Gums (*Eucalyptus cladocalyx*)..



Main Road, Kangaroo Ground, Stevenson Hall then the School on the right, and the Store on the left, c. 1919.

The question is how many were planted and why is it that the others haven't survived? The accompanying photograph provides a clue — six trees between the present school-crossing and the tennis clubrooms — a distance of 120 metres, leaving a further 145 metres to the site of the former shire offices where the last tree stands today. That would make a total of 14 trees. Does any *Chronicle* reader know what happened to the missing dozen?

- Mick Woiwod

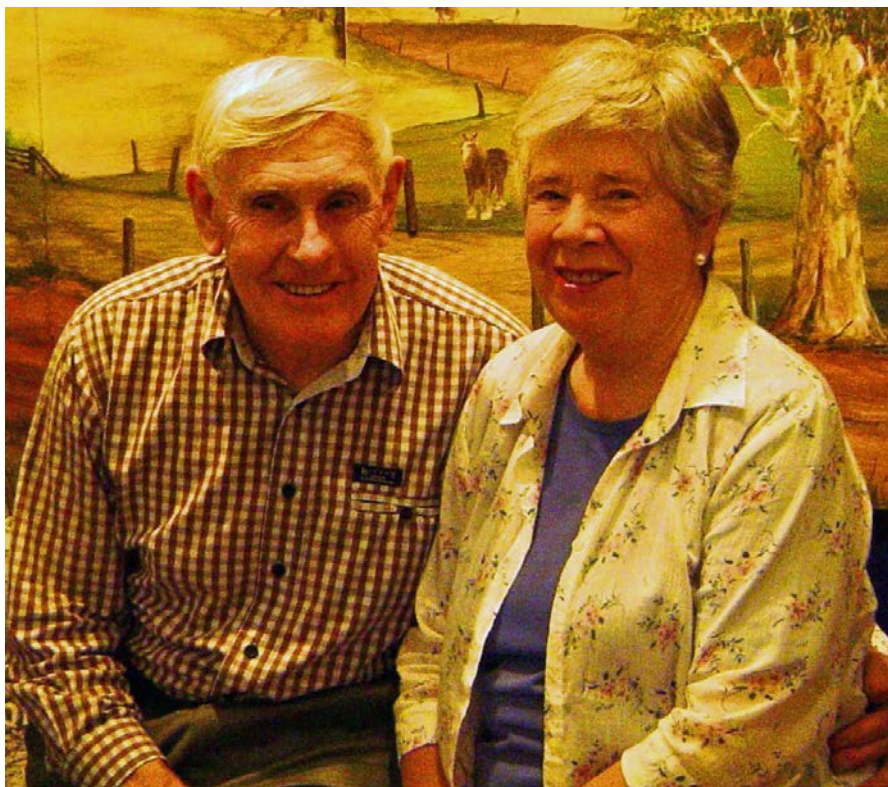
Dr Peter and Wenda Fleming

The success or otherwise of an organisation such as the Andrew Ross Museum is largely dependent upon good leadership and in this regard the museum has been well served over many years. Throughout its first eight years, Bruce Nixon was at the helm, opening up all manner of wonderful possibilities including the publication of many local history works. Then, with Bruce's retirement from active service, Dr Peter Fleming stepped forward to take over the chair in 2002 and open up many new, fresh and exciting initiatives.

It was Peter, ably assisted by wife Wenda, who hoed the hard rows that eventually saw the Andrew Ross in September 2003 receive its full Accreditation from Museums Australia — an enormous step forward for such a small museum. Then came the decision of the Shire of Nillumbik to award the Andrew Ross the honour of 'Community Group of the Year for 2005'.

Peter and Wenda's role, both being retired scientists, extended far beyond that of leadership into assistance and advice with the redesign of the museum's room displays, particularly its 'Listening & Reading Room' with the refurbishment of its existing 'Listening to the Landscape' chairs and the generous donation of three portable CD Players for visitor use. And then there were the two very successful plays, the *Bushranger Night* (in which Peter performed) and 'A Tribute to Alan Marshall' in the Emergency Operations Centre in 2001 & 2003 — the list is endless not the least being Peter's work in the humbler tasks of building maintenance involving blocked spouting, leaks in the roof, possums in the

ceiling, etc., and the storage of surplus museum artifacts.



The Andrew Ross is most appreciative of the role that Peter and Wenda have played in making the museum the place it is today and wish both a happy retirement and every success in their remaining local endeavors including continuing involvement in Museum affairs.

- Anon.

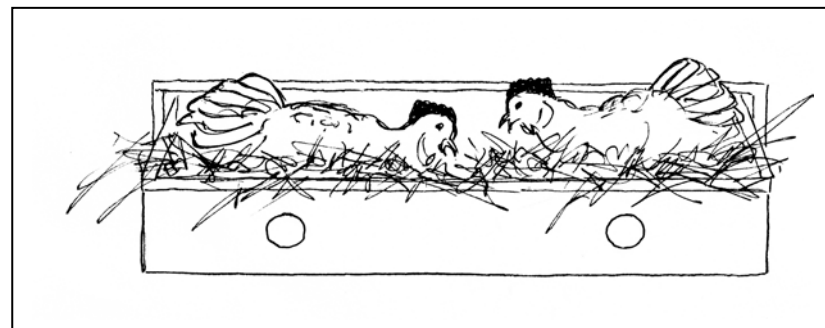


Eccentrics Remembered

Soldiers who survived World War One sometimes lived out tragic, broken, lonely lives hereabouts. To some of the children of the district, however, they are remembered as distinctly, comically peculiar.

One who was introduced in the last *Chronicle* edition is remembered by several of our readers. “When I was a little girl,” writes Sheila Dixon, “Dad always used to stop at his hut. Clarkie lived there then and cuddled up to his chooks. Dad bought the eggs. Clarkie had his bread hanging up to the roof with string so the chooks couldn’t eat it. They slept inside with him at night.”

Len Morris, who grew up at Watsons Creek confirmed Sheila’s recollection. “He slept amongst the chooks in his little hut. My father mentioned to him once that he was in need of a broody hen. Clarkie told him that he had two at home. To fetch one of them they went to Clarkie’s place, opened a chest of drawers, and there were the two broody hens sitting on straw inside the drawers.



“On another occasion,” Len continued, “Clarkie came to the door and asked my mother if she could spare three eggs. No, he didn’t want to carry them. Could she break them into a bowl for him to carry? While he then held a glass bowl that she had produced, the three eggs were broken into it, whereupon he dropped the bowl. ‘Oh, well, never mind,’ he said and walked away.

“He was passing the time of day at our place once,” Len

added. “My mother had recently made a large cake. It already had a few slices cut off it. She cut off a few more and handed the plate to Clarkie. Instead of taking one of the finger-size pieces, he took up the cake itself in both hands and proceeded to eat all of it.”

Another local eccentric, remembered in these pages, was well known to Len. “He lived with his animals too,” he recalls. “Go into his kitchen at meal time and he’d be sitting at the table, and sitting up around the rest of the table would be all his dogs.”

- John Austin, with illustration by Joan Pickard

Stables



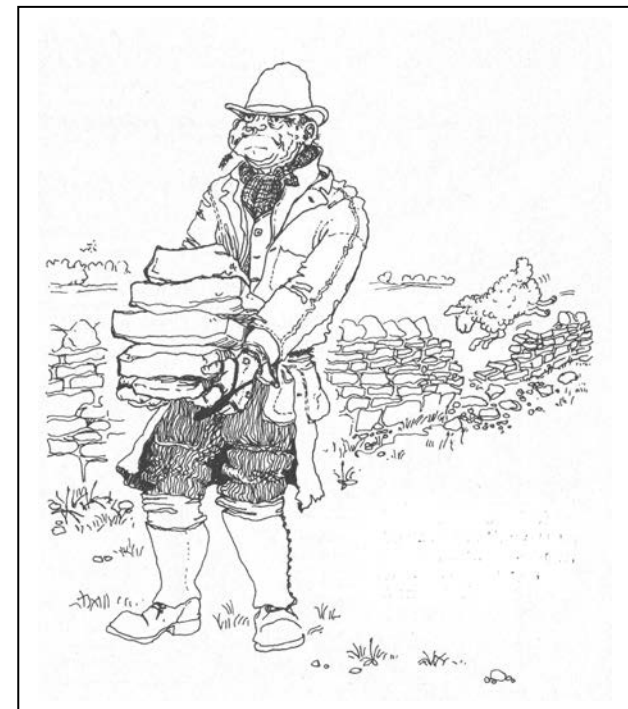
Everything looks sturdy and in pristine condition in this splendid photo, recently donated by Museum member Bessie Kelso. Bessie inherited it from her grandmother, but it came with no captions. Bessie guesses that the stables might have been on the Stevenson property *Kelvin Grove* or the Bell property *Violet Bank*.

Can anyone help with identification?

The Dry Stone Waller

I am a dry stone waller,
All day I dry stone wall.
Of all appalling callings,
Dry stone walling’s
Worst of all.

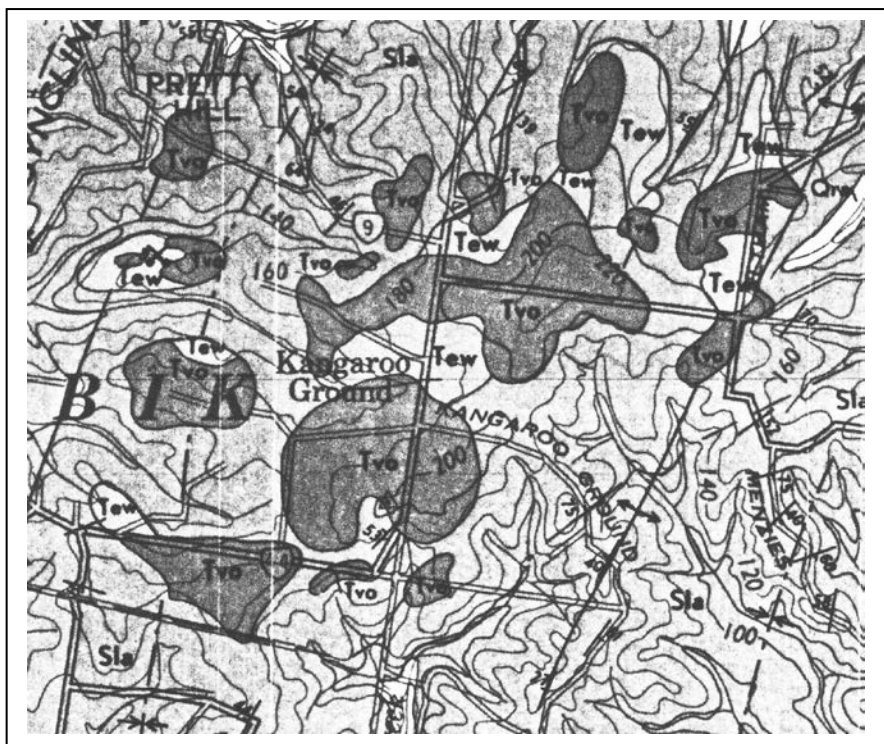
© Pam Ayres



Black Soil, You're Standing on It

Did you know? When you visit Kangaroo Ground, you are standing on some of the oldest, richest, and most highly prized soil in the Nillumbik shire.

Locals refer to it as “the black soil”. Those who built on it in the past faced structural problems when it developed wide cracks in the summer months. Those who cropped it in the past reaped bountiful crops year after year. Nowadays, most of the district's best vigneron and olive growers try to locate their vineyards and plantations on it and believe it produces unique quality yields.



According to a geological survey map of the Yean Yean district, kindly lent by Kangaroo Ground's vigneron/post master Ken King (see illustration), the term for the so-called black soil is igneous soil, the word “igneous” meaning “made from fire and heat”. Some geologists believe such soil resulted from volcanic eruption, probably in the Eocene Period about 55 million years ago.

You can see its distribution (the darker areas labelled Tvo) in the attached map. The intersection in the middle of the map is where the Eltham-Yarra Glen Road intersects with the Warrandyte Road and Donaldson Road.

- John Austin

The Andrew Ross Museum

Established 1993

Accredited 2003

Small Business of the Year Award 2005

Address: School House, Main Road, Kangaroo
Ground
P O Box 1232

Open: Sunday Afternoons 2-4pm,
Thursday Mornings 9am-12 noon.
Closed during Summer School Holidays.

Life Membership \$150.

Coming Soon

The Yarns of Auld Duncan

The staff of the Andrew Ross Museum are proud of their record of placing before its community — almost on a yearly basis — some new and exciting book of local history. Among the titles produced or launched to date have been:

Kangaroo Ground: The Highland Taken

The Last Cry

The Diaries of James Thomas Donaldson

A Boy of the Old Brigade,

Reminiscences of Andrew Ross

Against the Odds

Tread Softly: You Tread on Dreams

Kangaroo Ground: Its Land and Its People

Boat O’Craigo (355 page local family history)

Golden Days on the Caledonian Diggings

The above publications have been possible due to the museum’s knack of working in close harmony with members of its community. Foremost among these have been Bruce Nixon, the museum’s founding chair (now patron) who commissioned and funded the writing and publication of the first four on the list. Among other partners have been the Shire of Nillumbik, the Kangaroo Ground Cemetery Trust and the Research Fire Brigade.

The museum’s next publication, *The Yarns of Auld Duncan*, is scheduled to see the light of day sometime mid-2006. Here’s a brief synopsis:

Auld Duncan, its principal character, is renowned for his storytelling ability. He arrived in Kangaroo Ground in 1848 with the first wave of Scottish settlers. It’s now 1926 and he’s the sole survivor of that wave. The headmaster of the Kangaroo Ground Primary — recognizing him as somewhat of a local treasure — lets his Grade VI kids off early each Friday to listen to Auld Duncan’s stories on the proviso that they compose an essay for the following weeks English lesson.

The old man knows just about everything there is to know about life in Kangaroo Ground and on each visit he tells his little class a new exciting story — stories of his arrival in Melbourne when it is barely four years old, his first days in Kangaroo Ground, life on the farm, corroborees, school days fishing on the Yarra, the building of the Maroondah Aqueduct, the Kangaroo Ground Tower, Chinese miners and much, much more.

The Yarns of Auld Duncan, beautifully illustrated throughout by museum artist, Don Brown, edited by Joan Pickard, will be of similar size and design to last year’s *Golden Days on the Caledonian Diggings* and, like it, will sell at around \$15. The book is shaping up as a must for all those young at heart interested in the saga of Kangaroo Ground. All being well it should be followed later in the year by the long-awaited *Diary of Andrew Ross* which because of its size is expected to run to three volumes.

- Mick Woiwod

Kangaroo Ground Wineries

3. King's of Kangaroo Ground.

Attend any of the Andrew Ross Museum's functions and you'll be able to enjoy some of the best local wines. Read the *Chronicle* regularly and you'll have noticed articles on two of the local wineries that have provided these wines. To prepare a third article, we claimed 20 minutes time from Ken King. Ken of course was very busy. He's also the local postmaster, so we talked while he franked letters, handed out mail and kept an eye on the grape pickers stripping the vines down the hill.



"I bought the land in 1988," Ken recalls. "A resident of Eltham and a member of the Eltham Amateur Winemakers Guild I became fascinated by Kangaroo Ground's black soil while supervising a vineyard

in Donaldson Road. We call the soil "chocolate cake". When a "For Sale" notice went up at 15 Graham Road, I bought the property within 24 hours. Planting began in 1990 and grape sales 4 years later. At first almost all our grape harvest was sold to Diamond Valley Vineyards. I always retained some, however, and did some wine-making in my own garage. When I received the Cellar Door Come to Montsalvat Inaugural People's Trophy for a bottle of my wine in 2002, I decided to build my own winery on the Graham Road site. All wines now are made and bottled on site, making it the closest "working" winery to the CBD.

Ken has a splendid website (www.kkg.com.au) where he sets out more information.

"Kangaroo Ground is unique. An oasis of deep rich volcanic soils, the feeding ground for kangaroos and favoured hunting area of the original inhabitants, the Wurundjeri people. Now vines grow and the kangaroos still graze on native grasses and roots preserved amongst the vines. Owner and Winemaker Ken King planted the vineyard in 1990, selecting the early ripening Burgundy varieties Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. The vines are vigorous but kept in balance by dry growing techniques and three hand prunings per year. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the vineyard is planted on a south slope to deliberately delay the ripening of the fruit, this enables full varietal flavours to develop.

"All wines are made on site so the grapes can be harvested at the optimal time and immediately processed. We believe in capturing the moment when the grapes are at their peak and transferring that instant to the glass."

One of Ken's young sons, also a product of Kangaroo Ground, provided at the age of 18 months the logo (right) for King's of Kangaroo Ground wines.

Recent awards at the Cold Climate International Show 2006: -

GOLD MEDAL – Cabernet Sauvignon 2004

BRONZE MEDAL – Pinot Noir 2003

