

29th January 2012

SEARCHING FOR A PHOTO OF ANDREW ROSS

Now that the diary of Andrew Ross has been published, many who have read it are possibly wondering what the man who wrote it looked like. Did he record in his diary ever being photographed and, if so, might a photograph still exist somewhere after more than 100 years?

FOUR PHOTOS

Ross makes four references to being photographed. In October 1860 and in October 1865 he visited photographers in Melbourne. In November 1868 he had his photograph taken at 225 Oxford Street, London. Most interesting of all is an event he recorded in 1873 at Kangaroo Ground: "...photograph of School children, selves, etc., taken".

THE INHERITORS

Ross died intestate and there was no inventory made of his possessions. Widowed and childless, his next of kin were his brother Alexander and his sister Elizabeth. If any of his possessions passed to his sister Elizabeth, then they would not have survived. The last surviving of Elizabeth's eight children, a daughter, incinerated every paper, portrait, photo and memento relating to her parents and siblings.

I believe Ross's diary escaped the flames because Ross gave it to his brother Alexander. Alexander, one year younger than Ross, lived and worked for many years in Australia. The diary's contents had relevance and recollections that only Alexander would appreciate.

ISBN 13246437
Volume 18
Summer 2012

KANGAROO GROUND CHRONICLE

Newsletter of the
ANDREW ROSS MUSEUM INC

www.andrewrossmuseum.org.au

Email wcleeson@primus.com.au 9712 080

CONTENTS

Articles

Searching For a Photo of Andrew Ross

Local Head Teachers and Principals

Vale Peter Oyston

The 1962 Bushfires

Vale Clair Watson

Exhibition Information - Our Coin collection

ALEXANDER'S DESCENDANTS

Ross recorded his brother Alexander's last marriage in his diary in 1882. Alexander, in his 60s married Maria Biddlecombe, a much younger girl in her teens, and they had sons William and Frederick. Frederick disappears from the record, but William and his descendants have been traced.

ANDREW ROSS'S NEPHEW, A PHOTOGRAPHER

By 1911 both Alexander and his young wife had died, he in 1907 aged 92, and she in 1909 aged 45. Their son William Alexander Mitchelson Ross is found "at home", however, at Yeovil in the 1911 Census. William names his occupation as photographer. He has a wife, Rose Wilhelmina Langdon, whom he married at Yeovil, Somerset, England in 1908, and they have a son, Harold William A Ross born in 1908. A search in birth records then shows that a second child was born to William and Rose in Yeovil in 1913, named Gwendoline Rose Ross.

A search in a registry of British photographers shows William listed as a photographer at Yeovil, Somerset in 1910 and 1911, and at Shrewton, Wiltshire in 1931.

These discoveries about Andrew Ross's nephew William provide some encouragement. Firstly, William, aged 13 when his uncle died, would have remembered his uncle. Secondly, photos that

belonged to his uncle were likely to have been preserved and copied by the nephew who became a professional photographer. Accordingly, the search then is directed to finding William's heirs.

Photographers of Great Britain & Ireland

1840 – 1940

Studio Details

Ross, William Alexander Mitchelson

Shrewton

Wiltshire

England

From 1931 -

LIVING DESCENDANTS OF WILLIAM ALEXANDER MITCHELSON ROSS

William, the photographer, died in 1957, and his two children, Henry and Gwendoline, died in 1994. Searching for records relating to Henry has not been feasible: there are far too many individuals named Henry A Ross; however, several facts relating to Gwendoline Rose Ross have been found.

Gwendoline married Richard Brough at Salisbury, Wiltshire in 1939, where their son Michael Derek Stanley Brough was born in 1946. Their daughter Diana Rose Pauline Brough was born in 1944 at Tonbridge, Kent.

Exhaustive searches through British telephone directories reveal that both Michael and Diana are still alive. Both have been contacted, and each has been asked for any information he or she might have regarding any mementos, especially photos, of Andrew Ross. A copy of the “Kangaroo Ground Chronicle” was sent to Diana to verify my credentials and to provide an account of the book launch of the Andrew Ross Diary. Five letters were sent, in all, and there were no replies.

Sadly, the end of the search has been silence. Neither Ross family member has chosen to reply, or even to refer me to somebody who could help. So although the Andrew Ross Diary survived and is now available for us to read, it seems unlikely that we’ll see a photo of Andrew Ross.

By John Austin

An Excerpt from the “Definitive Guide to Aussies”

- *Historians believe the widespread use of the word ‘mate’ can be traced to the harsh conditions on the Australian frontier in the 1890s, and the development of a code of mutual aid or ‘mateship’. Alternatively, Australians may just be really hopeless with names*
- *Whether it’s the opening of Parliament, or the launch of a new book, there is no Australian event that cannot be improved by a sausage sizzle.*
- *Likewise, there is no food that cannot be improved by the generous application of tomato sauce.*

LOCAL HEADTEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

Following the museum’s recent, highly successful launch of *The Diary & Reminiscences of Andrew Ross* and a subsequent visit to the museum by some sixty ‘Ross House’ students from Eltham College — an article on local schools and schoolmasters and their benevolent influence upon their communities might be considered appropriate.



Museum chairperson, Warwick Leeson, School Principal, Laurie Murray & local Federal member, Senator Rob Mitchell at the formal opening of the four new classrooms.

A fine example among these is Laurie Murray, the present Kangaroo Ground principal walking in the steps of Andrew Ross and other holders of the position who have worked wonders of late in transforming our 136 year-old museum building and its adjacent classroom to the way they looked the year they'd been built. Not only that but whilst that had been underway, Laurie had overseen the iconic roofing and resurfacing of the school's outdoor basketball court in a way that now allows its use for a wide range of other school activities. On top of all this, Laurie and the school council have smoothed the way for the addition of a further four ultra-modern classrooms overlooking the school oval. In celebration of all of this, the school council last December invited museum volunteers across to the formal opening of the above new classrooms during which the school's 150-odd students put on a most impressive presentation. The people of Kangaroo Ground have every reason to feel proud of their 'state of the art' school.

Another local teacher who comes to mind is the late Peter Oyston, the first dean of the Melbourne School of Arts, who last November wrote and directed the marvellous play that the museum had organised to accompany the launch of the *Ross Diary & Reminiscences*. Following in the tradition of the two earlier plays that he'd written and directed for the museum, the performance proved a resounding success.

Understanding Andrew Ross as having received all the notoriety that he'd deserved with the launch of his magnificent book, the museum decided that it was now time for his wife, Mary Anne, to be celebrated seeing as how she'd received scarcely a mention in her husband's voluminous works. Titled *The Squire of Kangaroo Ground*, Peter's play addressed the omission by allowing Mary Anne every opportunity to make the point that, as sewing mistress at Kangaroo Ground for 25 years, it had been she who'd had to assume the key teaching role whilst her husband had been making a name

for himself in the wider Yarra Valley. With Deborah Lawrance in the role of Mary Anne, Peter Oyston's thought-provoking play certainly allowed Mary Anne full voice to belatedly convince her community that behind Andrew Ross stood a truly remarkable nineteenth century gentlewoman.

Well done, Peter!

This brings to mind another local female school mistress in the form of Julia Flynn, who taught at Christmas Hills for a decade or so after 1902. Julia, as a 19 year-old city girl, had soon found teaching the wild young lads of Christmas Hills a difficult challenge, half of them being unruly wards of the state in the habit of presenting her with tins that when opened would contain either snakes or blue-tongued lizards. Slowly after her first few months Julia managed to get on top of her class by setting them stacks of homework and belting hell out of those who hadn't responded well enough the following morning and rewarding those who had with prizes and outings, songs and music, and all the imaginative and aesthetic stimuli that she'd seen to be missing in their lives.

Although a student herself at first, some twelve years later this young Christmas Hills teacher became her department's first female inspector of schools, and eventually its chief inspector.

Throughout her later years in the Department, she made herself a force to be reckoned with, as witness this insightful stanza of verse appearing in the *Argus* of 22 September 1928.

*Proud man henceforth it is your doom
To be on needles and on pins;
Lest on all top-most rungs the room
Be occupied by Julia Flynn's.*

Despite extreme opposition from within the male dominated hierarchy of her department, Julia had forced her way up to the top, opening up, in the process, the first avenues for the later advancement of women's rights.

Robert Joseph Harris

Robert Joseph Harris, also of Christmas Hills is another fine example of a head-teacher performing beyond the norm in that when he commenced teaching in Queenstown in 1860, his classroom for the ensuing fourteen years had been a large room in his own home, known to his wider community as Common School No 128. When this closed in 1874, Harris was given a further two schools to contend with, without the basic amenity of even a proper class-room at either to teach within.

For the following two years, Harris taught mornings at the Watsons Creek School and afternoons at Christmas Hills. The 'school' at Watsons Creek, which the department paid £5 for (it being the former single-roomed hut of local miner, Albert Hunt), measured just twelve feet by ten feet (3.6m x 3m). On 31 March 1875, the distraught head-master had written to the Department:

'I have the honour of herewith drawing your attention to the state of the building now used by me as a State School at Watsons Creek. The floor is the bare earth which is of a spongy nature and in winter is always damp, the walls are of slabs so ill-fitted that in places the hand and arm may be passed between them which naturally makes the place very draughty. The roof is of bark which affords no protection against the weather as every shower of rain converts the room into a Shower Bath. I have received notice from several of the parents that unless something is done to make the room weather tight, before winter sets in they will be compelled to withdraw their children from the school as the present state of the building would endanger their health.'

And, as the winter of 1875 had run its full course, Harris had become totally disenchanted with the unsuitability of Albert Hunt's 'hut' for use as a school at the Watson Creek end and had gone full time at

Christmas Hills, where he taught a further five years in the front bedroom of the general store. Later, when the present Christmas Hills School was opened in 1880 Harris transferred to Panton Hill Primary where for a short time his assistant was Frank Tate, who in later years would transform the entire nature of primary education across Australia and pave the way for the subsequent opening up of High Schools across Victoria.

Other than in teaching, Harris's main contribution to local posterity can be said to have been his son, Robert Charles Harris who, soon after completing his primary school years, had risen to become editor and proprietor of Andrew Ross' newspaper, the *Evelyn Observer*, a role that he'd perform for a further forty-seven years.

The contrast between these early local schools and today's fine establishments is indeed stark, but even Kangaroo Ground has had its hard years. In the 1880s when the aqueduct had been under construction, navy children had swelled numbers to the extent that over 100 children had been crammed into the heritage classroom adjacent to the present Andrew Ross Museum. Hard times too in the years leading up to 1907 when Arthur Gidgeon Jamieson, known to all and sundry as 'the Flogger' had held sway in that classroom until the day that he'd picked on the local member's daughter and had been immediately sent packing.

Over the past decade, Australia has been building a clever country largely due to its extremely innovative primary school system. During the recent formal launch of the Kangaroo Ground Primary School's four new classrooms, its young students put on a presentation for museum volunteers the equal of any secondary school in Victoria.

A print of 'Wallaby Dreaming' by Peter Oyston – purchased in memory of his support of the Andrew Ross Museum.

A print of the 'David Clark' ship, kindly presented to the Museum by Lance Pymble of Sydney who is a descendant of John Barr and John Arthur who both came to Melbourne in 1839 aboard that ship. It is a print of the only known image of the ship, a water colour done in

Vale PETER JOHN OYSTON 20.06.1938 - 9.10.2011

I have known Peter Oyston, the quintessential Australian, for thirty years in his mud-brick 'Wallaby Dreaming' home on the banks of the Yarra in the Bend of Islands. An artist whose specialty was seascapes which he could paint so believably that you felt that you could dive straight into their waters.

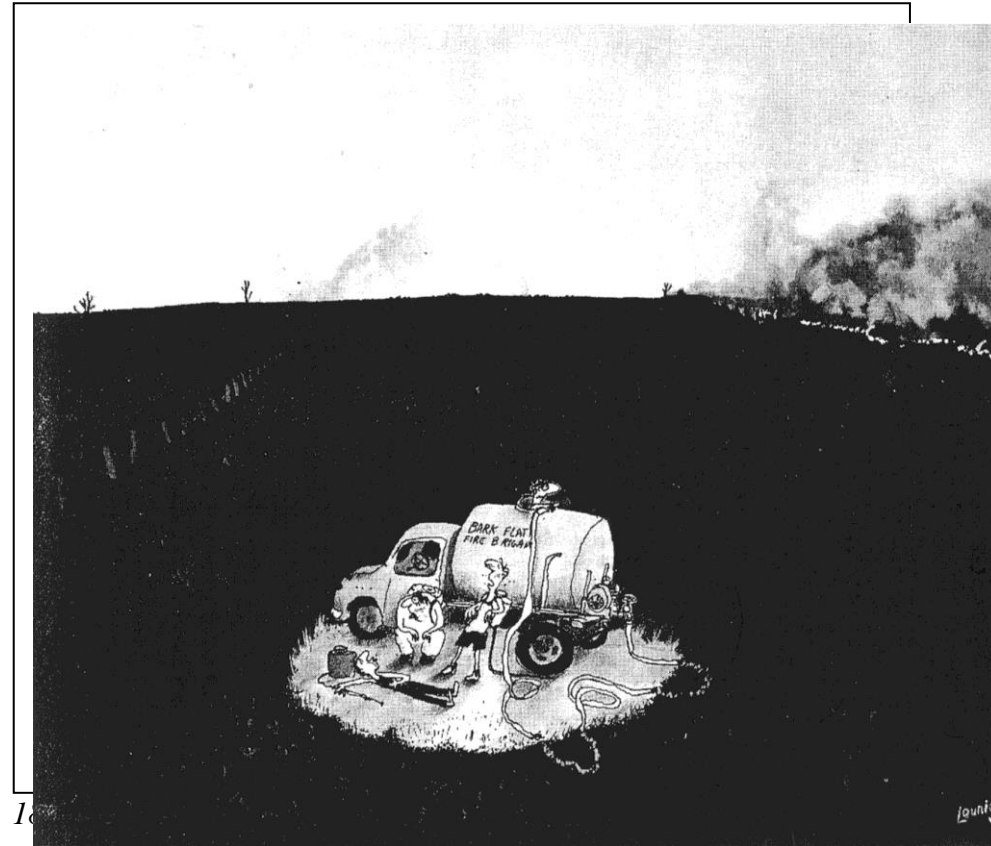
For most of his life, Peter worked as a producer and director of theatrical drama, both here in Australia and in America and the UK. – a master of Shakespearian plays. Until last year he taught drama at Monash University. Earlier this year, I asked him to write and direct a play for the Andrew Ross Museum in Kangaroo Ground which subsequently played out at the Eltham Little Theatre to a packed house - he called it the 'Squire of Kangaroo Ground'.

You know, Peter was a great-grandson of Peter Lalor, the leader of the miners at the Eureka Stockade – for years, he flew the Eureka Flag outside his 'Wallaby Dreaming' home in the Bend of Islands. His daughter Dominique, is the celebrated opera singer. For years, his mother was a lead-player in the long running television series, 'Prisoner'. Over recent years he has put a huge amount of energy into the Nillumbik 'Open Studios' program – which showcases local artists work.

He was the first Dean of the Melbourne Producer's and Director's Guild.

By Mick Woiwod.

New Paintings Acquired by ARM



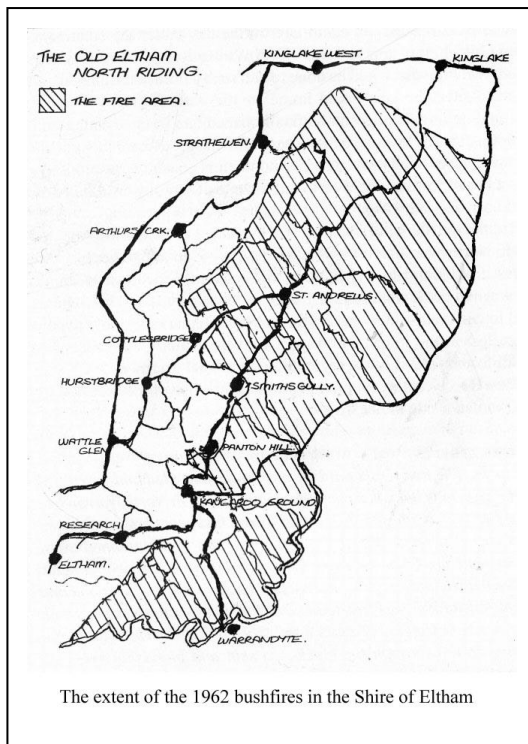
The 1962 Fires. Often it was very much like this. Small crews of volunteers in make-shift tankers with sometimes their radio transmitters on the blink

Courtesy Michael Leunig

THE 1962 BUSHFIRES

This 14 January 1962 marks the 50th anniversary of one of the worst fires to have passed through Kangaroo Ground and to have devastated the then Shire of Eltham. It had started at about 11:00 on the morning of Sunday 12 January 1962, accidentally lit by young rabbiters trying to smoke out a ferret along Osborne Road in the Christmas Hills. Later in the day the fire had cut south across Christmas Hills taking out a few houses in its path and from there had travelled down the escarpment and up towards Steel's Creek. From Steel's Creek it had crept north towards Kinglake.

The spring of 1961, like those of 1938, 1850, 1913, 1925 and 2008, had been amongst the driest on record (just 104 mm at Eltham; 58 mm at Yarra Glen). By Tuesday 14 January, the fire burning in the drought-stricken Kinglake Ranges — had been quickly whipped up by strong north-north-easterly winds and, as the day had progressed, the temperature had risen to around 40 degrees Celsius. With the wind strengthening, the fire moved towards St. Andrews and Panton Hill on a front that had encompassed the northern bounds of



Christmas Hills, the Parish of Sutton through into Nillumbik.

Looking back on it today, its surprising how poorly Kangaroo Ground and other brigades were serviced for such a major outbreak. Until 1958 Kangaroo Ground hadn't either a fire station or a fire truck. In November that year all landowners in the district had been levied £1 apiece to purchase land for a station and with the late

Bruce Ness in charge this saw its volunteers set to with a will and erect what more recently have become the amenities of the Kangaroo Ground Tennis Club. The brigade had then applied to the CFA for a fire-truck to put in their finished station only to find itself at the bottom of a long list. And so, on the fateful day, all it could muster were a few privately owned trucks, a land-rover, knapsack sprays and beaters all of which were of course to prove of little avail against the enormous outbreak approaching. Other local brigades were no better equipped. Research had a ex-world war II Blitz-wagon with a dodgy radio, Christmas Hills an elderly Dodge truck fitted out with a farm water-tank.

All that any of these brigades could hope to do was to save the towns and an odd house or two along the way. All of Kangaroo Ground and more than half of the then Shire of Eltham burnt that day with 178 homes lost, yet surprisingly only two lives lost, both of them in North Warrandyte by firemen believing that water tanks could provide them a safe haven.

Volunteers had been bussed in from Melbourne but still it had to be mainly hand held beaters against an impossible fire with an even larger outbreak in the nearby Dandenongs. Afterwards had come the inevitable post-mortems, some believing the fire could have been stopped in Kangaroo Ground had there been more than just a few fire-fighters in place along its roads. Others were critical of the role of police forcing the evacuation of homes that might otherwise have been saved.

Nevertheless, throughout the hills, brigade volunteers had performed in traditional style but, as with Black Saturday 2009, a systemic failure at central control had seen the fire continue on into the outskirts of Mitcham.

A major outcome of the 1962 and subsequent 1969 bushfires had been the setting in place of the present Kangaroo Ground Emergency Operations Centre in Ness Lane, opened in 1988, aimed at building closer liaison between the various arms of bushfire and emergency confrontation. An entirely regional initiative, hoping that it would

make it possible for every eventuality to be covered and dealt with in future fires.

By Mick Woiwod

Vale Clair Watson

Memories from Mick Woiwod and Diana Bassett-Smith

Clair worked industriously as a volunteer with the Andrew Ross Museum for a least 10 years between 1995 and 2005. Each Thursday morning she'd roll up in her little car and park it in the museum driveway and be prepared to cheerfully undertake whatever tasks might be required of her. Mostly in those early years it would have to do with collating the thousands of pages of documents, research notes and press-cuttings that today make up the museum's paper records where her instructions would be to number each sheet consecutively before depositing them in their appropriate vertical file. On other occasions it would be off to Officeworks with boxes of records to be photocopied.

Towards the end of her days with the museum, the big worry would come when it came time for her to drive home. Finding herself unable to successfully turn on the museum's front lawn, she'd insist upon backing out into Main Road traffic with her head barely visible above the steering wheel and trucks thundering by around her. Clair would also make herself available for duty in the museum to fill a gap of a Sunday. Clair was a very independent lady who had happily lived alone on the riverside farm in the Bend of Islands for forty or more years.

Clair was the daughter of a Belgium Ambassador, and shared her experiences of growing up in the middle east when she became the next door neighbour of Peter and Diana Bassett-Smith in the 1950's. Clair was involved with the Kangaroo Ground Pony Club along with her daughters Mandy and Sue. She was the first Treasurer and known for her efficient, canny book keeping. She shared a love for

reading and gardening, and was proud of her trees. She loved to sit under their shade, or inside before a warm fire, on a cold night sniffing the clean misty air and listening to the rippling Yarra. Yes she loved her area at the end of Oxley Road. She was a good friend and fine example to many.

EXHIBITION INFORMATION - Coin Collection

A small collection of copper coins, in use from the time of settlement in Kangaroo Ground to the present day, has been commenced.

This collection was started following the production of the Andrew Ross Diary and remarks made by school visitors to the Museum as to "What is a farthing? What is a halfpenny (pronounced hapepenny) and what does a penny look like?"

We have now, a few copper coins, (not valuable ones) on display, which were in use from the past to the present day.

Coins, as many are aware depict our history. There are coins from King George IV 1822 to Queen Victoria, Kings George V and George VI to Queen Elizabeth II.

Our early coins were minted in England, before the Sydney and Melbourne Mints were established. Until 1916 the Melbourne Mint minted only gold sovereigns and all Australian coins between 1927 and 1967.

Planning for the Royal Mint in Canberra began in 1959 and Australia began producing its own present day coinage of cents, on the 22nd of February 1965 then when the initial demand for decimal coinage was satisfied the Melbourne Mint was closed.

It is now the home of the Marriage Registry and Royal Historical Society of Victoria – leased to the private sector since 2001. The mint was built between 1869 and 1872 to the design of architect J.J. Clark who also designed the Old Treasury Building, Melbourne. The Note Printing Branch was where the Catholic University is in Victoria St, but has been in Craigieburn for the past 30 odd years.

Today you may be holding history in your pocket or wallet. Why not look at your loose change and see for instance that on the one dollar coin, the Queen's head is on one side, known as the obverse

and the other side, known as the reverse side, features a moment in history such as Federation.

If any reader would like to take a more active interest in this addition to the museum exhibition please let the committee know. All ready we have had reports of old coins dug up in the garden and I am finding the story of coins fascinating and little did I realise the history that I sometimes have in my hand. Diana Bassett-Smith