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KANGAROO GROUND CHRONICLE

Newsletter of the
ANDREW ROSS MUSEUM INC

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KANGAROO GROUND RURAL FIRE BRIGADE TURNS 125 IN FEBRUARY 2017

On Saturday, 6 February, a meeting was called at the Eltham Council Chambers (then situated at Kangaroo Ground) for the purpose of forming a Bush Fire Brigade. Those wishing to become members pledged themselves to turn out and fight a fire within a 6 mile radius (9.6km) of Kangaroo Ground. In the event of them not being able to attend themselves, they could send a substitute; if they did neither they would pay a fine of five shillings (50 cents) – in those day a considerable sum.

The important thing about the meeting is that it was probably the first Bush Fire Brigade to be formed in Australia.

If you have any photographs relevant to the Kangaroo Ground RFB, we would appreciate it if we could have a copy or permission to copy them.

To celebrate this milestone, the Kangaroo Ground Rural Fire Brigade is holding three events in 2017, to which everyone connected to the Kangaroo Ground Community is invited.

1. Official Function at the Brigade to be held on Sunday 26 March 2017.
2. Fire Ball to be held at 'Stones' in Coldstream on Friday 4 August 2017.
3. A Community Fair to be held on the Kangaroo Ground oval on 29 October 2017.

Look out for further details closer to the EVENTS.

TWO BROTHERS AND THEIR GARDENS

In Waterdale Road in the Melbourne suburb of Ivanhoe, a Moreton Bay fig tree, a small grove of peppercorns, and the bole of an ancient red gum stand wedged between the footpath and the car park of the Ivanhoe Aquatic Centre. They are the remnants of two luxuriant gardens between the footpath and the car park of the Ivanhoe Aquatic Centre. They are the remnants of two luxuriant gardens established in the 1850s by Scottish settler brothers John Donaldson (1827-1905) and his brother James (1832-1916).

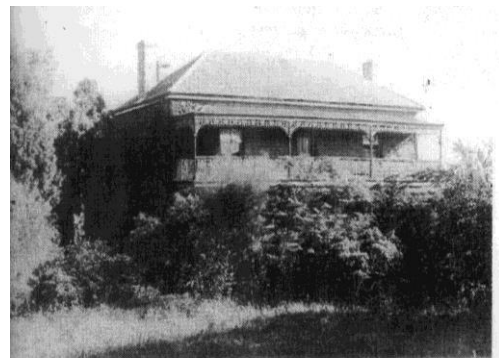
Their older brother Alexander and sister Isabella had arrived in Melbourne in 1840 to reconnoitre land on which the family could settle. The next year John and James, their parents James and Isabella, and another sister Margaret followed them and settled on 640 acres of land purchased at Kangaroo Ground, approximately 30 kilometres to the northeast of Melbourne. They named their property Kangaroo Hall.



'Bellevue' Ivanhoe. Courtesy G. Donaldson

Having both farming experience and capital, the Donaldsons soon achieved a modest prosperity, marred only by the occasional depredations of bushrangers. In 1850, in order to extend the family's holdings and facilitate the transport of their farm produce and cattle to the Melbourne markets, another property was purchased at Ivanhoe.

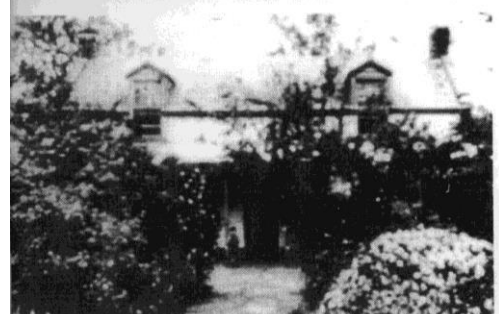
This comprised 102 acres, for which James Donaldson (senior) paid a substantial sum of 313 pounds. The land sloped gently from its eastern boundary on Waterdale Road to the Darebin Creek on the west. The northern boundary was the present line of Beatty Street, and on the south the present line of Ford Street. Shortly after the death of James (senior) in 1856, James (junior) and John Donaldson moved permanently to Ivanhoe, the rest of the family remaining at Kangaroo Hall.



WELLINGTON HOUSE

In that year a small house was constructed approximately 50 metres back from the Waterdale Road frontage. Named Wellington House, it comprised four rooms on the ground floor and two rooms upstairs, lit by dormer windows. The bluestone walls were white-washed. Apart from the encircling verandah, it was little different from the farmhouses with which the Donaldsons would have been familiar in their homeland. A letter written home to Scotland in 1857 describes the cosy wallpapered interior of the house, the substantial stone barn, stable and coach house, and the well, 18 feet deep and 15 feet in diameter, lined with stone and waterproofed with Roman cement.

This well provided drinking water and also irrigated the garden of just over two acres, which was laid out between the house and Waterdale Road. Some specimen trees were planted. The two front corners were marked by Moreton



Top: Bellevue House in 1958, shortly before demolition.
Middle: Wellington House, with aviary in foreground.
Bottom: Wellington House (detail of front of house)

Courtesy Heidelberg Historical Society

Bay fig trees, and a Norfolk Island pine was planted on the south side of the house. Other trees were planted or retained for their shade. Peppercorns were planted randomly around the front garden and farm buildings, and some eucalypts were kept in order to provide immediate shelter, or on account of the venerable age.

The garden was divided by a wide gravelled path which led straight from the front gate to the front door. It was bordered by trees, massed shrubs and flowers. James Donaldson was a passionate gardener and propagator of plants. His favourites were pansies and peony roses, for which he won many prizes, and such was his enthusiasm that he even had pictures of them painted. Shade houses of laths nailed to wooden frames were built to grow ferns, as were arbours to support jasmine and wild roses. A chain of ponds following the fall of the land was made for water-loving plants. An orchard was established on sloping land behind the house, together with three netted enclosures for vines.

James Donaldson's interest in the natural world extended to birds and animals. Adjacent to the south end of his house, and almost its equal in size, was an aviary constructed of wire netting fastened over a wooden framework. The only information we have about the feathered inhabitants is that they were exotic. That being the case, the residents of the small menagerie James established in a clearing beside the orchard were definitely not. A small family of kangaroos lived there for many years, one old man kangaroo reputedly assuming proprietorial rights of the fruit in respect of anyone attempting to pick any.

BELLEVUE HOUSE

In 1857 James Donaldson's brother John built his house on the portion of the Ivanhoe property left to him by his father. It was sited approximately 80 metres south of Jame's house, and a similar distance back from Waterdale Road. In contrast to Jame's Scottish-cottage-with-verandah style, John's house which he named Bellevue was of an impressive double-storey symmetrical design, constructed of finely cut bluestone, with a hipped slate roof, and a cast iron verandah across both levels of the front wall. At a later date a brick billiard room was added to the north side of the house, with long windows giving access to the garden. Weatherboard extensions at the back provided extra bedrooms for John Donaldson's large family which eventually numbered 16 children, although not all would have been living there at the same time.

John Donaldson's house, like the garden surrounding it, was of a grander design than that of his brother. Bellevue House was screened from the road by a high cypress hedge, and entered through gates opening into a broad gravelled drive, which swept round to the right across the front of the house, then down past the billiard room to the stables at the rear. John shared his brother's love of birds, for directly in front of the house, and midway between the house and the front boundary was a huge circular aviary. Measuring 28 feet in diameter, the floor was sunk several feet below ground level and was accessed by a flight of steps.



*'Bellevue' Ivanhoe
Courtesy G. Donaldson*

The apex of the conical roof was 15 feet above the floor, beneath which was a stone-lined water tank which provided an unfailing supply of water to house and garden. The lawn surrounding the aviary was studded with flowerbeds. Further garden beds were laid out on either side of the house, and were accessed by brick paths.

The prize tree in the garden at Bellevue was an oak grown from an acorn collected in the park at Windsor Castle. This was just one of the botanical specimens brought back from Britain, when in 1889 James and John Donaldson, John's second wife Isabel, and their daughter Margaret made a tour of their homeland. Much of their time in Scotland was spent visiting relatives, but throughout their travels, botanical gardens and plant nurseries were their most frequent destinations.

A few historic sites such as the Tower of London were also included in their itinerary, but these took second place to the horticultural attractions. They were most impressed by the palm house at Kew Gardens – as much by the singing birds which inhabited it, as by the palms. It may well have been the inspiration for John Donaldson's circular aviary with the conical roof, a small-scale adaptation of the original grand design. In Edinburgh they visited the botanical gardens on several occasions, and also the Dundee cemetery on account of its garden setting. At Floors Castle, the seat of the Duke of Roxburgh south of Edinburgh, they were shown over the gardens, where they were particularly impressed by the hot houses, special praise being reserved for the 'magnificent' rhubarb. When they visited Glasgow the brothers' ornithological interests were well catered for by the natural history exhibit in the museum.

SOURCES OF PLANTS

However, their keenest interest was reserved for the private nurseries where plants were gathered by professional collectors from across the world, in areas remote as China and central Asia. In London they visited the Chelsea nursery of William Bull, (or 'Mr .Bool', as James referred to him in the phonetic spelling of his diary, reflecting his Scottish pronunciation). Bull's nursery specialised in tropical plants. He invented a case for transporting coffee plant seeds from their native Liberia to other areas around the world which were suitable for their cultivation. James was more interested in Bull's orchids than his coffee seeds, but it is not clear whether he made any purchases. At Chelsea they also visited the Royal Exotic Nursery, then owned by James Veitch and Sons. This firm had existed since the 1850s and specialised in newly discovered, rare and exotic plants. Here James purchased orchids and gloxinias.

At Forest Hill, in the southeast of London, they purchased begonias from the nursery of John Laing and Son. There was much concern as to whether they were sufficiently 'advanced' to face the rigours of travel to Victoria, and regrettably we do not know whether they proved to be or not. Similarly, when in Edinburgh they purchased pansies, James favourite flower, from John Downie's nursery, which was famous for having its own palm house. Once again we do not know if they arrived safely.

The importation of seeds and the propagation of plants did not begin for the Donaldsons with their trip to Britain. As early as 1853 they had written home to their family in Scotland requesting that they send out mustard and caraway seeds. They also requested gooseberry and mulberry seeds, and there was much discussion as to the best method of cultivation. A splendid quince tree existed at Bellevue until its demolition. The Donaldson children attributed the quince's furry fruit to the fact that the cemetery for their pet cats was located at its foot.

AFTER THE BROTHERS

James Donaldson died in 1916. His first wife Jane Thomson had died in 1877, but his second wife Caroline Tiley lived until 1930. There were no children from either marriage. Wellington House was inherited by a niece. The land was gradually subdivided, and in the 1950s the remaining block on which the house and garden were located was sold. The site is now occupied by the Ivanhoe Aquatic Centre.

John Donaldson in later life took up farming in the North Island of New Zealand, where he died in 1905. He too had married twice, his first wife, Anstruther died in 1864, and his second, Isabel, in 1931. Bellevue House passed to one of his sons, also named John, who lived on the family's farm in New Zealand. By 1958 it was found to be no longer practicable to maintain the house, and it was reluctantly sold.

After years of neglect, the ivy-clad bluestone walls, the untamed garden and collapsing aviary behind the overgrown hedge, had achieved a state of romantic decay which would have made the perfect setting for a gothic novel. But in the space of a week, bulldozers swept it all away, and suburbia marched onwards.

This article appeared in the Australian Garden History 27 (4) April 2016. Acknowledgement: Tim Gatehouse is a retired lawyer who is interested in the pre-gold history of Victoria, architectural history and. More recently, the history of gardening. His articles on these subjects have appeared in various journals.

THE SOMME OFFENSIVE

1ST July to 18th November, 1916

The British army suffered almost 60,000 casualties, a third of whom were killed. When exhaustion, and the cloying mud of a particularly wet autumn, caused the offensive to be abandoned in November, the allied forces had managed to advance only 12 kilometres.

The major contribution of Australian troops to the Somme offensive was the fighting around Pozieres and Mouquet Farm between 23 July and 3 September. Participation on the Somme put the first strain on Australia's voluntary recruitment system and led to the first unsuccessful referendum to introduce conscription.

This poem was written by Connor Fallon, an 11-year-old, captures the heartbreak and futility of war.

BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Evening has come, but quickly falls away,
We are back in the trenches, gunshots fire all day.

Wounded men we cannot find,
We sadly have to leave them behind.

The Brits and French are by our side,
So we are thrice as strong when we fight.

Finally I receive news from home,
Their words are a small delight.
Hopefully I don't drown in sorrow,
For tomorrow I, again, have to fight.

Barren lands we battle on,
Through dead bodies and burnt trees.
Thankfully my mates are beside me,
Furiously scratching with fleas.

At last we hear a rumbling sound, a plane that drops bombs for our country,
I hear a sigh of relief and a very loud 'YIPPEE',
For we have not had a bomb drop for what feels like a century.

The smell of cigarettes makes my taste buds zing,
So I pull one out for myself, feeling like a king.

My mates and I crack a joke, our socks are completely soaked.
We wring them out and hang them to dry,

But who needs socks when you're about to die.

Author: Connor Fallon, 11 years. (Grandson of President and Secretary of A.R.M.)

WHO WE ARE AND HOW TO CONTACT US

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The Museum is open:
every Thursday 9.30 am – 12 noon
Sunday
Open 2 pm – 4 pm by appointment

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