

KANGAROO GROUND

CHRONICLE

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John Bell (1848-1934) and Elizabeth his wife née Charlton
(1859-1952)

In This Issue

- Cover picture. The 1886 Bell-Charlton wedding is believed to have been the first conducted in the present K G Church building. For many years the Bells occupied *View Bank*, a property on the hill above the Eltham College site. Charlton descendants are planning a 2002 reunion at Kangaroo Ground.
- *Pigeon Bank* changed hands recently. Read a little of its history beginning on Page 1.
- How did St Andrews get its name? What links it to Weller's Restaurant? The article beginning on Page 3 answers these questions and is rated M For Mature Audiences.
- Dick Austin continues his series on Kangaroo Ground's roads on Page 5, explaining why they are so haphazard.
- Eccentrics - we've had a few. Sometimes they save lives. Read about one of them on Page 7.
- Youngest contributor, Sarah Tearle aged 20, researched and compiled *Kangaroo Ground 100 Years Ago*. Page 9.
- Oldest contributor, Peter Bassett-Smith aged 90, provides an article on Page 10 with the intriguing title *Why Wattles?*
- Some strange happenings at the K G Church, on Page 11.
- Diana Bassett-Smith's regular *Chatterbox*, beginning on Page 12, will inspire, enthuse and activate all readers to continue their generous support during the coming year.

Historic Homesteads

Pigeon Bank



There have been writers at *Pigeon Bank*. The children of Marion Bishop, the occupant of *Pigeon Bank* until recently, buried time capsules whenever house or garden renovations involved excavations - bottles containing written messages and children's secrets. Marion's cousin and the former occupant of *Pigeon Bank*, Vera Jackson, left a very useful and extensive paper trail above ground - written recollections, letters, family papers and several publications. Vera and Marion's ancestor, Ewen Hugh Cameron, helped to frame the laws of the land - he was Victoria's longest serving member of the Legislative Assembly.

The *Pigeon Bank* homestead was already 25 years old when Ewen Cameron, a giant-sized Scotsman, moved into it in 1874. Little is known about its first owner and occupant, Francis Rogerson. It is believed that the shingle roof, remaining in the present house, is part of Rogerson's original building, and is thus the oldest surviving structure in Kangaroo Ground.

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The Rogersons were related by marriage to another Scottish pioneering family of the district, the Bells. Ewen Cameron's wife Agnes, was a daughter of the Bell family. *Pigeon Bank* was the home of Ewen and Agnes Cameron and their eleven children until 1915.

Commanding extensive views of most of the district and across to the Dandenongs, the hilltop residence and its acres of farmland seems to have been eminent in all respects during the Cameron tenure. Victorian premiers, governors, and renowned painters were amongst the guests entertained there. Three times the prize given by the Agricultural Society for the best kept farm in the district was awarded to *Pigeon Bank*.

At the turn of the century *Pigeon Bank* consisted of the present house - much as it is today, plus separate kitchen and wash house, dairy with separators, apple room, storerooms, additional small bedrooms situated off the back of the verandah, also barns, hay shed, vehicle sheds, stables, cow sheds, slaughter gallowes and horse works.

Following Ewen Cameron's death in 1915, the property and contents were sold at auction. Gordon, a son of Ewen Cameron, became its owner briefly in 1919. Subsequent owners were Mr and Mrs Matthews 1922, Captain Brumfield 1932, Senator Guthrie 1955, Peter McCracken 1959. A Cameron grand-daughter Vera Jackson and her husband were its occupants from 1968 until 1979 when it was bought by a Cameron great-granddaughter Marion Bishop and her late husband Ian. By this time the property's original 32 hectares had shrunk to 5.

This year, *Pigeon Bank*, 450 Warrandyte Road, Kangaroo Ground, welcomes new owners and a new chapter in its history extending into the new millennium.

- John Austin

Pubs and Guns

There was information and a recently discovered photo of Mary Weller in the last edition of the *Kangaroo Ground Chronicle*. Today, Weller's Restaurant incorporates the building Mary and her family operated as an hotel in the 1870s and 1880s. In the early 1860s, Mary's sister Elizabeth (Mrs John Cork Knell) began a similar venture at Queenstown. The Knells' hotel was known at first as the Caledonian Hotel. Elizabeth became sole licensee in 1868, following the death of her first husband. The hotel was renamed St Andrews after her favourite part of Scotland. Apart from breaks of only a few years, Elizabeth, her second husband Robert Smith, and one of her sons continued as licensees until her death at the hotel in 1911. Her obituary notice in the *Evelyn Observer*, occupied several columns.

Today, patrons of the St Andrews Hotel and Weller's Restaurant may not know that two sisters, Elizabeth and Mary Band, were involved with their creation. There were several Band brothers too. The following is the story of the shooting accident that ended the life of one of them.

FATAL GUN ACCIDENT

—Φ—

The *Evelyn Observer*, 23rd February 1883

A magisterial inquiry was held on Tuesday 20th February 1883 by John Bell Esq., J P, on the body of William Band, of Queenstown, who was found dead at Wild Dog on Monday 19th February.

Elizabeth Smith, of Queenstown, being duly sworn, said: I know deceased now lying here; he was my brother; he is 51 years of age; saw him last alive three weeks ago; he was then in his usual health; he has never shown signs of insanity; never heard him threaten to commit suicide; nor did he ever attempt it; he was used to firearms, and was generally very careful with them; he was not quarrelsome.

Jane Dugdale, sworn, said: I am the wife of Robert Dugdale; I reside with my husband at Wild Dog; I know deceased; I live about 200 yards from his house; I last saw him alive at 8.30am on the 19th inst.; he then came to my house and borrowed a gun; he said he wanted to shoot a hare; I don't know whether they gun was loaded or not when I gave it to him; he went towards his own house; about a quarter of an hour afterwards I heard a gun go off, and about ten minutes afterwards my attention was drawn to deceased, who was lying opposite his own house, just inside the panels; he appeared to be dead, and had a gun-shot wound in the head; I sent word to the police; he frequently borrowed the gun from me to shoot hares; he was sober when he borrowed the gun; he took a pair of scissors to sharpen for me when he took the gun, and brought them back a few minutes before I heard the gun go off.

Constable Hayes, sworn, said: I am a Constable of Police stationed at Queenstown; on Monday the 19th inst., Frederick Miller reported to me that a man was lying on the roadside at Wild Dog with his brains blown out; I went at once to the spot and found the deceased, William Band; he was lying on his right side, and a double-barrel gun was lying at his feet; I carefully examined the body and the surrounding locality; I found a large gun shot wound to the head, the brains and portions of skin and hair were lying scattered round the head; his hat was lying 7 yards from the body with a large hole in the crown, and portions of hair and brains were adhering to it; the rim inside was black as if burned from power; I examined the tracks leading to and from the panels; saw no other tracks but those of deceased; near the panels saw an impression on the sand that would be caused by the stock of the gun, and immediately above saw an impression on the panel, it appeared to have been freshly done, and corresponded with the hammer of the gun; upon the position of the body and the impressions made on the sand, deceased might have been getting through the fence when he met his death through the gun exploding; I examined the gun and found one of the barrels loaded and at full cock, the other appeared to have been recently discharged.

The Magistrate, on considering the evidence, found that deceased came by his death through a gunshot wound accidentally received while getting through a fence with a loaded gun in his hand.

The Roads of Kangaroo Ground

A Narrative History - Part Two

1854 The area around Kangaroo Ground had changed considerably by 1854. Eltham now had nearly 300 people, two hotels and a flour mill and there was now a bridge over the Plenty at Lower Plenty. Also in this year the Caledonian gold rush resulted in a dramatic increase in population in what is now Smiths Gully and St Andrews. Whereas Kangaroo Ground should have benefited from this influx of people, it was in fact, a barrier to their movement. Drays and horse-drawn vehicles could not use the track along the Ness Lane easement and so their only option through Kangaroo Ground was to negotiate access through private property, or to head for Watson's Creek to the north-east and then cut back.

Consequently, people avoided travelling through Kangaroo Ground at all, instead heading along the Diamond Creek, up Watery Gully to a ford, and then followed the ridge above the gully to a point not far north of Kangaroo Ground. At this point the track intersected with the track to Watson's Creek (now Dawson Rd) and the Ness Lane easement track. This ridge track from the Watery Gully ford was soon to become Watery Gully Rd. It was never surveyed and had no significance for Kangaroo Ground people. It was, however, a major all weather access route to the major population centre to the north of Kangaroo Ground and to Yarra Flats.

1857 By Eltham had 200 dwellings and 500 people. The Eltham Road Board had been elected, dominated by Kangaroo Ground people, and one of its first tasks was to address the problem of the minor highway that was by-passing Kangaroo Ground to the

north. A new road was driven through Section 2 Lots 1 and 4 as an alternative to the Ness Lane easement (refer Figure 2). This road left the original road where the Emergency Centre is now located and did a zig zag behind where the fire station now stands, before climbing the hill and intersecting with the Watery Gully Rd, Dawson Rd, Ness Lane, St Andrews Rd corner.

At the same time, Ewen Cameron, opened a hotel at this intersection on crown land. A number of other businesses were also established at this intersection.

Figure 1 shows the northern part of Kangaroo Ground in 1857. Modern road and place names are used.

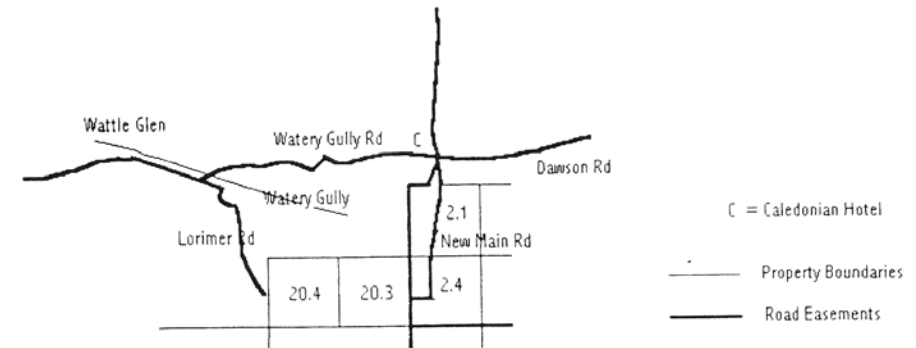


Figure 1: Northern Kangaroo Ground in 1857

Looking at this map you can see the 5-way intersection with the Caledonian Hotel open for passing traffic. Of course, the old 'Ness Lane' route became redundant from this time onwards. Note also that what we now know as the Wattle Glen Rd didn't exist beyond the Lorimer Rd intersection.

(To Be Concluded)

- Dick Austin

The Telescope

Recalling and reading about local eccentrics can provide amusement. Recalling and writing about this one actually fills me with gratitude, for he saved my life.

It was 1956. The Olympic Games were being held in Melbourne. Television was arriving. Newly settled in Kangaroo Ground myself, I asked my kindly elderly neighbour Percy if he was excited by these history-making events. No, the Olympic Games meant little to him. He used to play tennis at Wattle Glen, but that was many years ago. He doubted that he would ever install one of those TV things. He'd been to a talkie at a picture house at Diamond Creek in the 1930s. The flicker had hurt his eyes and the sound had given him a headache.

When his farm work was done, and when his wife Minnie had rendered their little farm house as clean and neat as a new pin, they would take turns to peer through a telescope, looking up the valley to see what was happening on my farm. Our telephone would ring. Did we know that a branch had fallen across the fence in the hill paddock? Did we know that the dam had sprung a leak again? Did we know that someone was looking at one of those cows we'd had delivered yesterday? This last item of news proved to be incorrect. One of the cattle was a Fresian cow, and her black and white marking had been mistaken for a man in a white shirt examining a black beast.

News of a leaking dam was helpful. Many years earlier a dam wall had been built across a gully by the draught horse and scoop method. The dam thus created contained millions of litres of water. It also contained many yabbies. The yabbies liked to borrow holes in the dam wall, just at or above water level. Whenever heavy rains suddenly raised the water level in the dam and increased the

pressure of the water flooding into these holes, leaks would develop. Unless plugged quickly, the leaks would develop into cascades, and then whole sections of the retaining wall would be carried away.

A report from Percy and Minnie with their telescope that our dam had sprung a leak therefore prompted instant action. I would charge down the hill, in waterproofs and gum boots, and trudge along the inside of the wall, stamping heavily around the leaking area until the leaking stopped. This would normally be enough to prevent further damage. The dam's overflow trench would gradually carry away the sudden increase in water, and the pressure on the retaining wall would return to safe levels.

On one occasion, however, I became a plug myself. In pouring rain, trudging heavily above a leak on the inside of the dam wall, I felt a section of the wall give way beneath my feet. In an instant I had been sucked into the opening. A survival instinct prompted me to spread my arms out. My head was above water. My arms were pressed against the bank on either side of the leak. The leak had now developed into a man size hole. I was the man in the hole. There is nothing, every nerve in my body now screamed, stronger than the force of water. I could make feeble efforts to try to extricate myself, but my efforts seemed more likely to enlarge the hole and suck me in further. I could do nothing, except feel the size of the hole and the force of the water gradually increase.

"Oh, here you are. I wondered what you were up to. We were looking through our telescope, and Minnie said..."

Here, standing above me was Percy. Clad in layers of waterproof capes, leggings and sou'westers, this old eccentric was the most welcome sight I ever beheld.

- John Austin

Kangaroo Ground 100 Years Ago

- Mr Thomas McKenna of Watson's Creek presented himself to a meeting of the Eltham Council at the Kangaroo Ground Hotel with a request. Could he be given approval to mine under the road at the back of Mrs Weller's Hotel? He explained that the road in question was an unused one and the tunnel he wished to put in would be a considerable distance below the surface. Permission was granted.
- W J Everitt, the blacksmith, advertised a new piano box buggy for sale. He also "begs to intimate that owing to the expiry of his lease, he has removed his business to the shop adjoining the late premises".
- It was a busy summer for clearing sales at Kangaroo Ground. The Armstrong family held one prior to leaving the district. Another was held at *Wippell Dale* "by order of Mr T Smith who is Relinquishing Farming". Cattle, horse, pigs and poultry were to be sold at *Wippell Dale* and lunch provided.
- Some Warrandyte residents had a complaint. "Old age pensioner residents have had to go to K G for their pay. It was perfectly impossible for the great majority of them to walk this distance, and it was rather an anomaly that they should have to hire a conveyance."
- The death occurred of Alexander Lamont White, aged 20, "after a long illness", and the disappearance of Henry Perry, aged 35, of *Summer Hill*. Police and local residents searched the bush unsuccessfully for the latter.

- Sarah Tearle

Why Wattle ?

The great Swedish botanist, with the Latinised name of Linnacus, created the binomial system of naming plants. In 1753, he established the generic name for what we call wattle. The shorter version of this is Mimosa, which is the common name in Europe for the Silver Wattle *Acacia dealbata*.

Along came Willdenow, who in 1806 reclassified Australian wattles -as *Acacia*. These now number some 600 - 800 sub genera.

As a boy travelling home from boarding school by steam train in Spring, I remember seeing near Seymour, large areas of naked trees from which the bark had been stripped. We were told the bark had been taken and bundled off to South Africa for use in tanning hides. The name of the trees is Silver Wattle or *Acacia*, (a similar fate befell the Golden Wattle of South Australia).

Later while in London I remember seeing the " Flower Girls " of Piccadilly Circus, selling bunches of mimosa which had come from the South of France. Sadly the blooms were dull, shrivelled bobbles and not the fluffy bright "wattle gold " of Adam Lindsay Gordon that "trembled twixt shadow and shine". Rapid transport has remedied this.

But why wattle ? Why do Australians still use the term Wattle? *Mimosa*, from the Latin and Greek *mimos*, relates to sensitive. It is wonderful to share the joy of children when they touch one of the subtropical species of *Mimosa*/ Wattle and see the leaf fold together before their eyes.

The term wattle goes back centuries, to the O.E. word *watol*, meaning flexible (intertwined) branches. In 1789 Governor Phillip referred to the early settlers using young flexible saplings and clay to construct the shelters. These are known as wattle and daub, the saplings used *Mimosa*/*Acacia* were called WATTLE.

- Peter Bassett-Smith

Interruptions to Worship

The Presbyterian Church building at Kangaroo Ground dates from 1878. Regular Sunday worship services have been conducted there in the 19th, 20th, and now 21st century. The word “uninterrupted” seems to belong in that last sentence, but in fact there have been one or two remarkable interruptions.

It is 1903. The Widow Dawson shepherds her large flock of eleven children into the Church and towards the Dawson pews. What’s this! The pews have been encircled with barbed wire. Harold Dawson, one of the sons, and his friend Donald White, in protest at being made to attend Church every Sunday morning, sneaked in the night before and fenced off the pews with barbed wire.

It is 1963. It is a hot Sunday afternoon in March and a special anniversary service is in progress. The sermon has just begun, and the preacher is making his first point on his chosen New Testament text. Suddenly footsteps are heard in the porch. A voice calls down the aisle, “Fire at the Smith’s”.

All adult males sitting in the pews rush out. Cars are started quickly. The Smith property is not far away. The fire is extinguished. The men folk return to the Church, breathless but just in time to sing the final hymn.

The explanation? The young Smith boys, also unwilling Churchgoers, were left at home while the parents attended the special anniversary afternoon service. Familiar with burning off procedures, they attempted to burn off some reeds around a dry dam.

All of which explains why the word “uninterrupted” should not appear when the next history of the Kangaroo Ground Presbyterian Church is written.

- John Austin

Autumn Chatterbox

I hope you all had a Merry Christmas and a safe and enjoyable New Year.

Reading the *Herald Sun* of the 28th of December 2000 I came across the following quotation: -

History is the record of an encounter
between character and circumstances.

- Donald Creighton, Canadian Historian (1902-1979)

At the museum one can encounter the writings of the character Andrew Ross and the circumstances which brought him to Kangaroo Ground. His writings have indeed recorded the history of the time he was involved with Kangaroo Ground. The encounter with his diary led Mick Woiwod to further this history.

The Eltham Historical Society’s encounter with such as Bruce and Joy Ness and others led to the formation of the Andrew Ross Museum. Our Chairman Bruce Nixon encountered the water colours of Governor La Trobe, resulting in the publication of a magnificent book displaying La Trobe’s encounters of areas through which he travelled. Now Bruce has formed the La Trobe Society.

History is continuous and one encounter and experience leads to the coming together of different characters, different events and the recording of history through different eyes and circumstances. John Austin is recording history for us of various local characters, and events which have led to the growth of this area and who were early settlers.

Can you add to our history? We would like you to.

On Saturday 30th December, family and friends of Joyce Harris gathered at the Kindergarten Hall at the S.E.S. to wish

Joyce a Happy 80th birthday. Joyce is a regular supporter of the museum and we wish her well in the years ahead. She and her late husband Emie came to live in Kangaroo Ground in 1959, originally as weekenders, in the area now known as the Environmental Living Zone. Joyce and Emie lived in Richmond, he worked at Vickers Ruwolt and Joyce had a mixed business. They were looking for a weekender and checked out Warrandyte, when they saw the advertisement for a shack on a block of land overlooking the Yarra Valley and the price was in their range, even better it had dropped to half, £375, by the time they saw it. They bought, then in 1962 it was wiped out in the January bushfire. They rebuilt and made it their permanent home in 1968. Emie still went to work but was never late from Kangaroo Ground, but had been regularly late from Richmond. They raised their family, Dawn, Lorraine and John who attended the local schools and like so many Joyce was "taxi driver" to them, as even today there is no public transport. Ernie and Joyce were married for fifty-eight wonderful years. After Emie's death, Joyce still continues to live in their much loved environment among the trees and with the songs of the birds to welcome the day, an environment she says she "would not change for anything, -too many friends, and good neighbours, which you don't get in the suburbs today". Now a grandmother of eight and great grandmother of five, Joyce still comes and helps at the museum whenever an extra pair of hands is wanted.

The Eltham Historical Society held its Christmas party with a BBQ at 728 Main Road Eltham, now the home of the Society - Cr Dianne Bullen of Mt Pleasant Ward unveiled the new Sign Board.

January 24th Visitors from New Zealand, George and Denise

Donaldson and their son John came to lunch. Then we drove to the Donaldson Oak, where they were delighted with the boulder and inscription on the plaque and amazed at the size of the tree. We then drove on to the Museum where they spent time reading the inscriptions and looking at photos, John took out a life membership. We came home for afternoon tea being joined by John Austin who kindly drove them back to their hotel. We were able to clarify some names for the photo album.

The Shire of Nillumbik has again been generous to the Museum with a grant of \$300. Which goes a long way towards the distribution of the *Chronicle*.

Peter Bassett-Smith celebrated his 90th birthday on the 25^h of January and on the 26th the Shire presented him with the Citizen of the Year award. Well done!

The museum is gradually becoming a tourist stop. Canadians from British Columbia enjoyed our display. The Nillumbik Tourism Association gave us a free ad, a quarter page, which is much appreciated.

The summer has been hot and the rain spasmodic and fickle. The other day it was raining at Yarrambat and the Bend of Isles whilst Menzies Road was still as dry as a chip. Our home rainfall for the year was 29.71 inches. 743mm. And the KG Store, 799.9mm or 32 inches. The Store had nearly half an inch more for the year. Wycliffe are the official measurers for Kangaroo Ground.

Annual membership payments will be due again and remainder notices sent with the notice of the Annual General Meeting, so put on your thinking caps as ideas and suggestions for the well-being of the Museum are welcome.

- Diana Bassett-Smith

