

# KANGAROO GROUND

## CHRONICLE

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## In This Issue

- The cover picture (courtesy Harry Butherway) shows railways workers at Eltham c. 1900, and illustrates the first instalment of a new series of articles by Dick Austin entitled *A Railway to Kangaroo Ground* on Page 5.
- Diana Bassett-Smith was present at the recent Federation Centenary Celebration at the Exhibition Building. Read about it on Page 2.
- Barak should have been at the original Federation Ceremony, as Mick Woiwod explains on Page 1 (reprinted from the *Melbourne Age*).
- Read about another well-known aboriginal, Truganini, and her association with Victoria, on Page 4.
- Kangaroo Ground is rich in bird life. Wenda and Peter Fleming have been observing and listening. Wenda provides the first in a series of articles, *Birds of Kangaroo Ground* on Page 9.
  - Norma Muir contributes the material for a charming memento of her grandparents' 1908 Kangaroo Ground wedding on Page 12.
- Ness family members have granted permission for us to reprint the account, published in the *Evelyn Observer* 100 years ago, of the death of James Mess. See Page 10.
- Are there books by local residents? Marjorie Motschall's *Wild Wood Days at Panton Hill* is reviewed on Page 11.
- The Secretary's Spring *Chatterbox*, full of interesting items, is found on Page 13.

## The Next Issue

A special issue devoted to Andrew Ross.

# Let's Remember the Man Who Saw It All

On May 9, 1901, one person alone remained alive who had experienced the entire transformation of Victoria from a wholly Aboriginal world to one dominated by the Europeans. That man was William Barak.

As an 11-year-old in June 1835, he watched John Batman negotiate with his people; he was still around 66 years later when the Colony of Victoria became an integral part of a proud Australian nation.

Unfortunately he face is not amongst the celebrities in Tom Roberts' famous painting of the opening of the first Australian Parliament in the Exhibition Building. That's not to say that he wasn't invited. He was!

Anne Fraser Bon, of Kew, wrote to Joseph Shaw, superintendent of the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station, Healesville, on April 24, 1901 informing him that the federal Attorney-General, at her behest, would be forwarding an invitation to Barak for the big opening.

Anne was no ordinary Australian. For years she'd fought valiantly for the right of Aboriginal people to remain at Coranderrk against the express wishes of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines (BPA), which wanted it closed.

As always, the board had the final say in such matters. Three days later, Joseph Shaw penned his excuse, claiming Barak was too old for such an event (at 77, he was younger than many others who attended on the day).

The board had good reason to refuse the Attorney-General's invitation, for it knew only too well that Aboriginal people believed in their hearts that Coranderrk had been given to them by Queen Victoria, whose son would be formally opening the first parliament.

Barak would have been proud to see the traditional welcome to the country at the centenary of the event to which he was denied entry. It was performed with flair by his descendants, Joy and Jim Wandin.

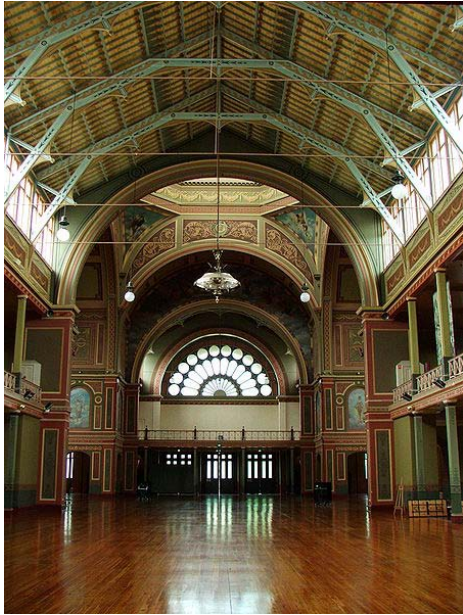
- Mick Woiod

# Centenary of Federation Day

Wednesday May 9th 2001. The day dawned with Kangaroo Ground concealed in heavy fog which soon lifted and by mid morning the warm sun was shining. As I walked with my grandson towards the doors of the gleaming Exhibition Building we could hear a buzz of excitement and see the accompanying smiles on the faces of everyone, the sunshine reinforcing the warmth of the atmosphere. While we stood patiently waiting for security to check our handbags and circle us with the scanners, the chatter was of how times have changed such as the need for such strict measures, of democracy, a government and parliament without bloodshed, one formed by reason and discussion. Of great grandparents who had been involved with 1901 and featured in Tom Roberts' painting. Of ancestors arriving in 1823 in Sydney, 1834 at Portland, of settlers opening up Horsham, and the young people who were present, many in school uniform. Older generations recalling times without electricity, running water, transport and cable trams.

As we walked in and were ushered to our seats I too thought of the changes, the faces of many cultures about us, those born overseas in Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas. The indigenous people so few now of not mixed race. Yet there was to be homage to those who had been here before European settlement. When we had made our way to our seats, up in the balcony facing the stage and just above the main hall, we had a splendid view of the proceedings, the interior of the building pristine in its refurbished state. On our seats, a book of the programme with historical notes, a box of chocolates and a bottle of water and a drinking straw beside each seat. A lot of thought had gone into the planning.

As people settled down a steady expectant murmur could be heard. The Air Force Band struck up with the Federation arch and other renditions. Then in true Australian style Bruce Woodley with his version of *Waltzing Matilda* to guitar accompaniment. Which set the right atmosphere, it has really become our unofficial national anthem. Reasonable pauses between items enabled one to stretch and wriggle. Three hours on a hard seat leaves one a little saddle sore. There were many familiar faces, some of people with whom I have had the privilege of working and meeting. The dressing for this Australian Day



## Truganini in Melbourne?

Most of us remember Truganini as being the last Tasmanian Aborigine. We know now that there were other survivors later than her but, nevertheless, it's hard to believe these indigenous peoples were wiped out seventy-five years after white settlement.

As a boy I went to Hobart with my father, and still remember being horrified by seeing Truganini's skeleton on display in the Hobart Museum. She was terrified of being "cut up" by medicos at her death (like her predecessors), and there is a story in itself about what happened to her body until its recent sacred tribal burial.



Truganini is seen reclining in the foreground in this picture. After George Augustus Robinson had completed his task rounding up the remaining Tasmanian Aborigines and settling them (a group of hundred plus) on Flinders Island, he was called to Melbourne to "deal with the Aboriginal problem" here.

With a couple of Sydney and a few Tasmanian Aborigines (including Truganini) he came to Melbourne where Truganini, and another female and two males, went on a looting rampage towards Anderson (Westernport) and beat two white male whalers to death. Truganini and her female friend were released but her two companions were tried and hung publicly in Melbourne.

Truganini returned to Oyster Cove and later died in Hobart.

- Bruce Nixon

began promptly at 2pm. You know the rest, because of technical advances, Radio and TV.

Proceedings unfolded with little pomp and some ceremony.

We lent over the balcony rail and looked up to see the Firbank Choir in which Christina, Jeremy's sister, was singing. He seemed very proud of the fact.

During the next two hours the 7000 of us clapped, nodded our heads in approval and cheered the conclusion.

On looking up when walking back to the car, the Australian Flag was proudly flying above the dome in the glow of the setting sun.

What the next hundred years hold I know not. But I have faith that the Democratic Tradition established by our founders will grow and the young of today will be able to uphold and build on that fine tradition.

- Diana Bassett-Smith

# A Railway to Kangaroo Ground

The first railway in Victoria (from Flinders St to Port Melbourne) was opened in 1854. By 1888 the Victorian railway network was the most extensive system in Australia. Yet it took until 1912, nearly 60 years after the opening of the first railway line, before the railway came to Kangaroo Ground, and even then it didn't really make it – Wattle Glen station had to suffice.

This is the story of the railways and Kangaroo Ground.

## The Importance of Railways

It is difficult to overstate the importance of railways to a rural town prior to the 1930s. A railway meant agricultural produce and timber could be marketed, whereas no railway meant the cost or speed of transport made products such as timber, fruit and dairy produce virtually worthless. A railway meant goods and supplies could be bought in at a fraction of the cost of bullock wagons. A railway meant that people could travel to other parts of the state, including Melbourne in a matter of hours rather than days. And perhaps most importantly, a railway gave a town status and recognition, it put it 'on the map'.

All this is very different to the significance of a railway such as the Hustbridge line during the past 60 years, which primarily became a commuting line, allowing people to get to work or school.

**1850s** The earliest railway development in Victoria concentrated on connecting Melbourne to ports (both on Port Phillip Bay and on the Murray) and to the suburbs (as they then existed).

A number of private companies built lines to Sandridge (Port Melbourne), St Kilda, North Brighton (via St Kilda), Richmond and Essendon, and the government built a line to Williamstown and its port.

Beyond Melbourne a private company built a line to Geelong and its port, while another company began a line to Echuca Wharf via Bendigo. By 1860 both these companies were in serious financial trouble and, as a consequence, they were bought out by the government (something of an irony when viewed from our side of the 1900s).

Kangaroo Ground, of course, was neither a port nor a suburb, and so did not attract a railway line during this period. By 1860 the closest railway station was Richmond.

**1860s** The 1860s were marked by mergers of some of the remaining private railway companies, which struggled on to open new lines from Richmond to Windsor, Richmond to Hawthorn and Newmarket to Flemington Racecourse. Some companies went backwards: the Essendon line was closed for three years during this decade and the St Kilda to Windsor section of the North Brighton line was closed permanently.

The government continued with the development of lines during this period, sparing no expense in completing the line to Echuca Wharf and building a line from Geelong to Ballarat.

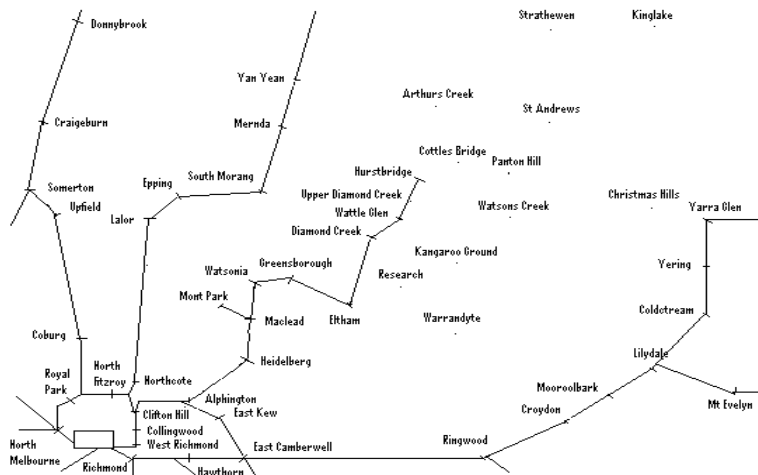
By 1870 the closest railway station to Kangaroo Ground was Hawthorn.

**1870s** This decade saw the collapse of the remaining private operators, selling to the Victorian Railways. This body now concentrated on pushing rail lines to major regional towns, reaching (in anti-clockwise order) Sale, Beechworth, Wodonga, Wahgunyah, Shepparton, Tatura, Inglewood, Daylesford, St Arnaud, Avoca, Horsham, Portland, Colac and Queenscliff by the end of the decade.

There was no expansion of the suburban network during this decade, apart from the line through Dandenong to Sale. Consequently, by 1880 the

**1880s** This was the decade of the greatest expansion of railways in the history of Victoria. 23 rail lines were authorised in 1880 and a further 66 lines in 1884, resulting in railway construction projects in every Victorian electorate. On one day alone, October 1<sup>st</sup> 1888, seven railway lines were opened. It was during this decade that railways started creeping towards Kangaroo Ground.

*(In the following composite sketch map of the railway lines of relevance to Kangaroo Ground, note that not all stations are marked and that some of these lines had been closed before other lines on the map were opened.)*



During 1882 the Hawthorn line was extended to Ringwood and then to Lilydale in 1883. Kangaroo Ground is 26 km from Melbourne and 20 km from Hawthorn. Ringwood, however, is only 13 km away, and Croydon (originally called South Warrandyte) is 12 km. In 1888 this line was extended to Yarra Glen, also about 12 km from Kangaroo Ground. The Yarra Glen extension was a significant achievement for the railways as the trestle bridge that then crossed the river flats was nearly 2 km long, making it the longest bridge in Australia until superseded by the Sydney Harbour bridge.

Meanwhile, in 1884 a railway was opened from Clifton Hill to Alphington, stopping short of Darebin Creek. Although we may recognise this line as part of the line that would eventually reach Hurstbridge, it was at the time completely isolated from the rest of the railway system. In 1888 the rail line was extended as far as Collingwood to the south and Heidelberg to the north, and it was connected to the rest of the system via part of what was to become the Inner Circle line. This line left the Coburg line at Royal Park and ran across the top of the city with stations at North Carlton and North Fitzroy before swinging south into Clifton Hill station via what is now Rushall station on the Epping line. This line from Royal Park to Clifton Hill survived until 1980, although passenger services ceased in 1949. It is now a walking track, but the level crossings on Lygon and Nicholson Streets still remain, as does the tunnel under Royal Parade.

From 1888 Kangaroo Ground people could access the railway system from Heidelberg although, being 15 km away, it was further away than the Yarra Glen line. In 1889 a line from Fitzroy to Whittlesea was opened, branching off the North Fitzroy to Clifton Hill line and heading north. Part of this line still survives as the Epping line. The station at South Morang was the closest yet to Kangaroo Ground – about 11 km. However, as discussed in the *Roads of Kangaroo Ground* articles previously published, getting from Kangaroo Ground to towns to the north west was a difficult journey at that time. By the end of the decade therefore, the closest railways were accessible from South Morang, Croydon and Yarra Glen. The worst option for travellers was to journey the additional 3 km to Heidelberg and then take the roundabout route via Royal Park and North Melbourne.

**1890s** The 1890s were depression years, slowing railways expansion almost completely, the major exception being the Mallee parallel lines, which were well underway by the end of the decade. It was during this decade that the railways began building narrow gauge lines in an attempt to reduce costs. No railway lines were built to bring the railways system closer to Kangaroo Ground during this decade.

This decade has other significance for Kangaroo Ground because it was Ewen Cameron, the Kangaroo Ground-based local member, who chaired the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways through most of this decade. This committee was responsible, under Cameron's chairmanship in 1895, for the Mallee parallel lines policy, which proved a major success. Prior to this, short spur lines were built from existing railways to reach town not yet served by railways. These proved to be expensive to operate and they were the first lines to be closed. In contrast, the new policy was to build parallel lines so that farmers would have a railway within a "fair day's journey", which was originally set to 15 miles (24 km), but later became 10 miles (16 km), thus leading to lines about 30 km apart throughout the Mallee, all running in a NW direction. Nine lines were eventually built to this pattern, and these lines proved to be cheaper to operate and remarkably successful. Four of the complete lines and parts of another three are still open.

(To Be Continued) - Dick Austin

# Birds of Kangaroo Ground

**The sounds of the birds are part of the fabric of our daily lives in Kangaroo Ground.**

During any morning we are likely to hear the loud ringing call of the grey currawong, the quieter warble of magpies and grey butcher bird, the laughter of the kookaburra family, the chock of a red wattle bird and the bell note of the crimson rosella. Many of us have the ping of the bell birds not far away and the lucky ones have the single note of the grey shrike-thrush all year round with their rich melodious song gladdening our hearts in spring. Many gardens are home to the willy wagtails' 'sweet pretty creature' song during the day and also on moonlit nights.

If the bush is not far away we will have many other visitors to our garden and orchard or in the trees about the house. Little birds tend to come in mixed flocks of thornbills, eastern spinebills, silver eyes and honeyeaters with the grey fantail flitting round as an energetic outrider. Also in this group may come the white throated tree creeper, the jewel bird or spotted pardalote, a whistler and a family of blue wrens. During winter one of several robins may be in this group. Most often it is the scarlet robin, dapper in red, black and white, that we see. The rose and pink robins keep more to themselves.

There are many other birds in Kangaroo Ground; for example, the water birds, the raptors and the birds of the night. More often than not in this series of articles we will be looking at only one or two species at a time. To see the wonderful plumage of these birds all one needs is a house as bird-hide, the occasional bird bath (frequently cleaned and replenished) not too far from the house, a little time each day, and a pair of binoculars. And a good bird book would be handy.



- Wenda Fleming

# Kangaroo Ground 100 Years Ago

The following report was published in the *Evelyn Observer*, Friday 11<sup>th</sup> June 1901: -

## FOUND DEAD

We exceedingly regret to record the death of Mr James Mess, a very old resident of Kangaroo Ground, which occurred last Tuesday night under somewhat peculiar and painfully sudden circumstances. From what we can gather it appears Mr Mess, as was his usual custom, was on that evening sitting at the fire in his house with a pair of slippers on, and between 8 and 9 o'clock went outside. As he frequently did this, and often took a walk round the premises before going to bed, little notice was taken of it by his family at the time, but as some time elapsed and he did not return, the family became a little anxious, more especially as they then noticed that he had gone out with only one slipper on. Search was made for him, and as no trace of him could be found anxiety merged into fears for his safety. The search was kept up all night and early the following morning many neighbours joined in and gave their assistance; several water-holes were dragged, as it was thought possible Mr Mess had by some means fallen into one, but no discovery was made until about 11 o'clock, when his son James found his father's dead body lying in a little gully some 15 chains from his house. Owing to several heavy showers having fallen during the night his tracks could not be followed; but it is surmised that the deceased must have been going down the hill (which is somewhat steep) and tripped in some crab-holes and fell, striking his head on a stump. The body was lying face downwards, the face being buried in the mud; the arms were doubled up under the body, and after falling the deceased had not moved much, although it was apparent that his knees and elbows had worked about a little.

The deceased was a successful farmer, and besides the farm on which he resided he owned the well-known *Garden Hill* property. He leaves a wife, five sons and three daughters, for whom great sympathy is felt throughout the district.

A post mortem examination ... found death was due to suffocation.

## Book Review

**Motschall, Marjorie**, *Wild Wood Days at Panton Hill*, Birdwood Press, 1984.

Doyen of local historians, Mick Woiwod, gave this book a favourable mention in his history of Kangaroo Ground. "It took *Wild Wood Days*," he wrote, "to ... capture something of the ethos of women and how they saw the saga of the district life unravelling."

Marjorie viewed the saga from Panton Hill, detailing how gold prospecting brought settlers to the district in the 1850s, how the name Kingstown was changed to Panton Hill, and how early pioneers developed orchards. Her ancestors' role in the saga is fully woven into the texture. Much to my surprise, I found that we shared common ancestors from Clackmannanshire, Scotland, making us third cousins.

Her own personal reminiscences make fascinating reading. The tragic, the comic, the successes and the failures are detailed cleanly, accurately, and without sentimentality. The death of a brother while sheltering under a tree shattered by lightning brings the comments, "How sad we all were. Many tears were shed".

As a six year old child, Marjorie got the mumps. Her face and neck swelled alarmingly and her mouth refused to open. It seemed she might die of thirst under everyone's eyes. An aunt living nearby came and looked at her, fetched from her house a tiny teapot, and used it to gently force water between the dehydrated child's lips.

With a natural writer's skill at structuring and storytelling, Marjorie also knew how to bring characters before our eyes. "What a pack of lazy good-for-nothings I've got around me," her father exclaims as he makes a late entry for his breakfast into the crowded kitchen.



Regrettably the book has no index, but all local readers will find something on every page that relates to a well-known place, person or time in the "saga of the district". Copies are available at the Andrew Ross Museum. Marjorie Motschall died, aged 90, in April 2001.

- John  
Austin

## A 1908 Wedding



In 1908, two of Kangaroo Ground's oldest families, the Wellers and the Wippells, celebrated a wedding. David Weller was the groom and Elvira Mary Wippell was the bride. David's mother, Mary Weller, in excellent copperplate handwriting, provided the following poem for her new daughter-in-law: -

Today thou art entering on an untried life  
With one who soon shall stand by thy dear side,  
And utter solemn vows to be a guide,  
A guard and friend to thee, his sweet young wife,  
Whilst, thou, in murmuring accents, will avow  
Thy readiness to love, to honour, to obey.  
When life's sore conflicts cloud his thoughtful brow,  
O may the Master's presence bless your home,  
And may His own deep peace with you abide,  
In joy and gladness or when griefs betide,  
For sorrow comes to all on earth who roam.  
And when together ye your race have run,  
O may ye hear at last His sweet, "Well Done".

## Spring 2001 Chatterbox

- We submitted an entry in The Victorian Community History Awards. It was done at short notice. We submitted a covering letter explaining what the Andrew Ross Museum is, and added copies of the last four publications of the *Chronicle*. Our entry did not win but achieved mention in the Victorian Government publication, *Victorian Tales, Extract of Entries*.
- Recently I visited the new National Museum in Canberra, situated on Lake Burley Griffin. The building is extremely modern, with vast areas of glass and high domed ceilings. Inside it echoed to the numerous school groups and visitors from distant countries. It was rather noisy with audio sounds overlapping and the hard surfaces reflecting the sounds. However, this was more than compensated by the varied and excellent displays which included the gallery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Migrant History, National Symbols, Explorers, and a very imaginative childrens' exhibition of Cubbies, Space - where one can design your city of the Future, and much more. The facilities are excellent, with restaurants overlooking the lake, guides, shop and cloakroom.
- Congratulations to Claire Watson, Jenny Taylor, Margaret and Mick Woiod, recipients of The Shire of Nillumbik Volunteer Award, for Heritage, Reconciliation and the Environment, and to Gwen Orford of the Eltham District Historical Society for Heritage, who with some 150 recipients attended the Shire Community Centre to receive their award in the presence of family and friends.
- The Museum remains registered for accreditation. There is still much to be done. Your Board has a business plan to work for continuing improvement of the Museum.
- The Bushranger Night will enable members and friends to get together in support of collecting, conserving and displaying the history of our district. We look forward to seeing you there, at the SES Centre, 7pm, Friday 31<sup>st</sup> August. May Leckey and her team are working hard. Do get your tickets now.
- Kangaroo Ground Primary School has given the Museum a Federation Medal. Primary School Students were each presented with one by the Federal Government in recognition of the Centenary of Federation.
- The Nillumbik Tourism Association, is actively working within the Shire and with the Yarra Valley Dandenong Ranges Tourism Association in promotion of a major international touring route which includes the Yarra Valley.
- Kangaroo Ground Memorial Tower Committee is raising money for improvements. Eltham Library has a donation box for gold coloured coins. The target is \$10,000 or 2 kms of coins. You too can help.
- The Nillumbik Reconciliation Group has established a short self-guided walking trail near Watsons Creek Bridge. It's well worth a spring time walk. Watsons Creek is named after James Muray's *Watsons Creek Station* of the 1840s.
- The 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Allan Marshall's birth occurs in 2002. More in our next edition. Did you know that he worked at the Kangaroo Ground Hotel?
- The Nillumbik Heritage Study is proceeding as Council funds become available.

- Diana Bassett-Smith  
(Secretary).



