

KANGAROO GROUND

CHRONICLE

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ANDREW ROSS MUSEUM INC.

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Kangaroo Ground's Roads

A Narrative History - Part Three (Final)

1870 By 1870 bridges had been built over the Yarra at Warrandyte (although this one only lasted six months before being swept away in a flood) and over the Plenty at Greensborough. The new Lower Plenty to Eltham road had been opened and the town of Diamond Creek now had about 500 people.

New laws had been passed during the 1860s allowing the selection of nearly all crown land in the colony not already owned or reserved. The land surrounding the previously surveyed centre of Kangaroo Ground was now being pegged out and bought.

How did Kangaroo Ground's road system cope? There were no problems on the eastern side as the existing road easements gave the selectors a way through the private land. Henley Rd was extended as required, with people selecting on either side of the ridge. The Yarra Track to Yarra Glen was by now a major road and selections respected its route. To the south-east there was a problem with a route to Warrandyte. The Weller Rd easement was too steep, as was access from the Henley Rd easement. The only alternative was an extension of the easement between Section 1 Lots 1 and 4, but the only possible route for this was through Lot 3. As you drive along the Warrandyte Road past *Pigeon Bank* today and the road swings to the right and down the hill you can appreciate the problem – there was really no other place for the road to go.

Land to the north was selected along Dawson Rd, Watery Gully Rd and the Queenstown Rd. There was, of course, no land left to select to the west or south of the original Donaldson Section 19 property.

The problem area was still to the north-west. A map showing how this area appeared in 1870 illustrates the problem.

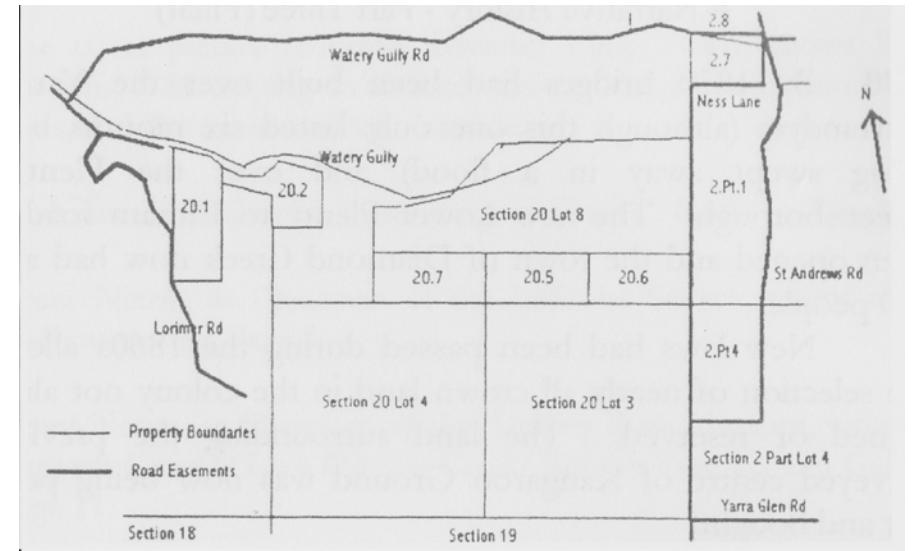


Figure 3: Northern Kangaroo Ground in 1870

Note that road names on this map are the modern names.

Nearly all of the land between the older parts of Kangaroo Ground and Watery Gully has now been selected and there is no longer any method of getting through without crossing private land. The only access to Diamond Creek is via Watery Gully Rd.

Of the section 20 allotments, Lots 1 and 2 were selected by Thomas Jones. He had opened a store on Watery Gully in 1863 to service the gold miners along the gully. Access was up Watery Gully along a track from the Watery Gully Rd/Lorimer Rd intersection. Lots 3 and 4 were some of the original 1848

allotments – *Green Hill* (Thomas Armstrong) and *Pretty Hill* (James Johnston). Lots 5 and 6 were owned by James Mess (along with Section 2 Lot 8), Lot 7 was selected by an A. Carvar and Lot 8 by Walter Wippell.

A few years later, by the time Lots 11 and 12 were selected, a road easement had been driven through the northern parts of Lots 1



A typical road view in the Kangaroo Ground area photographed c 1910 by Albert Jones.

(courtesy Jones/Sly Collection)

and 2, then along the north-west boarder of Lot 8 and then up the hill to intersect with Watery Gully Rd. This new road, now Jones Rd and part of the Wattle Glen Rd, made the western part of Watery Gully Rd virtually redundant and it faded into disuse. You can still see the old gully ford today, but I wouldn't suggest trying to drive up this part of Watery Gully Rd without a 4WD.

1917 It is now 1917. Eltham has a population of 500 people, Diamond Creek has 1,100 people and a new government cool store and the Hurstbridge township is being formed. Kangaroo Ground has a population of 300 people.

In 1917 the final significant Kangaroo Ground road problem was overcome – a road was driven from the main road through to what is now the west end of Jones Rd and Kangaroo Ground had a direct link to Wattle Glen and Diamond Creek. This road involved the subdivision of a number of Section 20 allotments – Lots 3, 4, 7 and 8.

This road was opened 77 years after the first land sale in Kangaroo Ground. Why did it take so long? The answer is the opening of the Eltham to Hurstbridge railway in 1912. A station was built, after significant agitation from Kangaroo Ground people, at the closest point on the line to Kangaroo Ground. The station was located at the intersection of Watery Gully and Diamond Creek in a locality usually known as Watery Gully. After considering naming the station Cameron, the Victorian Railways opened it as Balee. At a later date it was changed to Wattle Glen and a township grew up around it.

The Eltham to Hurstbridge railway line was built 25 years after most other parts of Victoria were connected to the railway system, despite our local politician, Ewen Cameron, being the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Railways. I'll tell the story of how we got our railway in later editions of the *Chronicle*.

- Dick Austin

LaTrobe Bi-Centenary

The Melbourne "Age" recently published this letter written by Bruce Nixon, Andrew Ross Museum President, and LaTrobe Society President, under the heading **In Memory of a Victorian Giant**: -

Two hundred years ago on 20th March 1801, Victoria's first Lt. Governor, Charles Joseph LaTrobe, was born "within the sound of Bow Bells" London. Widely travelled in Europe and North America, LaTrobe came from a strong evangelical Moravian ancestry to govern Port Phillip District from 1839 to 1851 as Superintendent and from mid 1851 to 1854 as Lt. Governor of the new State of Victoria.

Despite enormous opposition from the news-press, squatters, miners and other factions, LaTrobe managed to seed infant Melbourne with some of the most prominent institutions and gardens in Australia. His untimely departure in May 1854 which was largely prompted by the furore over the 30/- miners licence, has somewhat coloured his enormous legacy to our wonderful city. Perhaps, of all our past visionaries Charles LaTrobe must surely be credited for laying such rich foundations for present Melbourne and, at least, doing his best for the dispossessed Wurundjeri and others under his care.

It is heartening to see the Royal Historic Society of Victoria devoting their Conference on Sunday 8th of April to 'LATROBE'S VICTORIA' and the State Library of Victoria and the National Trust, under the patronage of Governor John Landy, launching a new "LaTrobe Society" on this bi-centenary birthday - Tuesday 20th March at 6-30pm at LaTrobe's Cottage.

- Bruce Nixon, Yarra Glen.

Hearts of Oak

Descendants of Kangaroo Ground's pioneering Donaldson family were delighted to see one of Kangaroo Ground's oak trees recently. Enter Donaldson Road at the Main Road roundabout, and after about a kilometre you will see it on the left. A recently unveiled commemorative stone gives its history, which began as an acorn brought to Australia by brothers John and James Donaldson returning from a visit to England and Scotland more than 100 years ago.

About two kilometres from this Donaldson Oak, is another oak known as the Wippell Oak. Nowadays it stands beside the Kangaroo Ground Fire Station. Its history is a tale of resilience and surviving against the odds. It originally grew on higher ground but was carried to its present site by a flash flood. Lying sideways, it somehow put down roots again, developed two trunks, and resumed life at its new address. In the late 1950s, when two right angled corners in this part of the main road were smoothed out, the tree lopping and cropping that occurred left it growing on both sides of the road. In the 1980s, when parts of the tree died, a tree surgeon worked on it and concreted broken parts of the trunk where water had caused rot. One winter's morning, the dead wood attracted two men with a chain saw. Fortunately their efforts to obtain free fire wood were forestalled by Bruce Ness, Captain of the Kangaroo Ground Fire Brigade at the time, who "let loose and told them they had better get out quickly". In more recent times, roadside spraying to eradicate weeds seemed to give the oak a fatal shock, but currently it is in full leafy splendour again.

A kilometre further along the Main Road, at the corner of Dawson Road, grow several fine, straight and ancient oaks. Does anyone know their history or name? The first occupier of the property on which they stand was Samuel Moseley, a fruit grower. Perhaps they might become known as Moseley's Oaks.

- John Austin

Secretary's Report

Diana Bassett-Smith's presented her full, annual report at the annual general meeting in March 2001. Many items included in it are already reported elsewhere in this edition of the *Chronicle*. Other points included were as follows: -

- Accreditation is still on the agenda.
- The cataloguing team continue their invaluable work, registering already more than 6000 items.
- Annual and life membership numbers are growing slowly.
- Welcome donations of photos, artefacts and documents have been received.
- The Museum is now on line with the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges, as part of *Jigsaw Victoria*, and is listed in various publications, directories and tourist maps.
- A grant from the Shire of Nillumbik was received.
- Thanks for valued and varied assistance were given to Anne and Bob Malony, the Kangaroo Ground School, Eltham College, those who maintain the garden so neatly, those who welcome visitors to the Museum each Sunday afternoon, those who are Board members, and any others who contribute to the Museum's welfare.

- Diana Bassett-Smith



Boundary Changes

Nothing in recent years has caused so much consternation, shock and dismay locally as the proposal to redefine Kangaroo Ground's boundaries. When the proposal was first outlined, it seemed that Kangaroo Ground would have areas on almost all its margins chopped off and integrated into neighbouring precincts. Of particular concern to Andrew Ross Museum members was the fact that the proposal would see half the original Donaldson "Square Mile" become part of Research.

If you approach Kangaroo Ground from Research, the land in question comprises everything on your left, once you pass Eltham College, to the corner opposite Weller's Restaurant, to the roundabout at the Warrandyte Road corner, and along Donaldson Road.

Approaching Kangaroo Ground from Research, you might have feelings similar to those described in 1862 by James Bonwick (see the following page).

I recall friends voicing similar feelings 100 years later. "You gain the top of the hill at last and ease into a long straight stretch of road. High hawthorn hedges border the road on the right, and on the left, across hills and valleys, you catch a glimpse of the church on the hillside. Man and nature combined have rarely provided such a prospect as this anywhere else in Australia."

Determined to retain this significant, quintessential tract of land, the Secretary, President, and other Museum members have urged, worked, written, and crusaded tirelessly. Happily, our Chairman can now report that the Nillumbik Shire Council has decided not to lop off this part of Kangaroo Ground.

Expressing his deep appreciation to the Council in a letter, Bruce Nixon wrote, "I'm sure I represent many ratepayers who would relish Council's help to never allow this historic precinct to be subdivided for housing".

- John Austin

The Kangaroo Ground

There are some curious geological oases in Australia, as well as in the Sahara. From amidst a realm of partial sterility will suddenly arise a little garden of beauty. This is strikingly conspicuous in the upland region. There the non-productive palaeozoic rocks prevail, and the débris furnish soil but for the feeble grass beneath the stringy-bark forest; but wherever the volcanic element is found, the change is as sudden as pleasing. Upon the basaltic hills the trees are more varied in kind and luxuriant in growth, and in the basaltic hollows the richest of verdure and closest of herbage give promise of abundant crops to the farmer.

It was such a place as this that met my eye after riding over the shingle roads and through harsh-looking forests of a silicious slate country. Only an occasional attempt at cultivation was made, and that in the most favourable glens, with but gloomy prospects; but a turn in the road brought me suddenly into smiling fields and blooming gardens, with not an acre lost in wood or bush pasture.

In the early days of the colony a man was seeking a "run" for a flock, and was about to turn disheartened from his tour, when he suddenly fell in with this charming spot, and saw its rich grass grazed over by a mob of kangaroos. He returned to tell a tale of this Kangaroo Ground.

But I found a moral oasis as well as a physical one: a good school was there.

It so happened that a Scotchman was lucky enough to buy most of this "ground"; and by cutting up his own section of six hundred and forty acres among his countrymen, and inducing other Northmen to settle, the whole of this fertile district (itself but four square miles in extent) was monopolized by the sons of Old Scotia.

- James Bonwick, *Rambles Of An Australian School Inspector, The Longest Stage Ride In the World, An Adventure In the Desert* 1862.

Nillumbik Citizen of the Year

"You see, John, in all walks of life it is the volunteers who are kept busy." I found this line in a letter I received from a Sydney relative recently. At about the same time as I read this, I received the news that Peter Bassett-Smith had won the 2001 Nillumbik Citizen of the Year award. Peter has certainly been kept busy in many local walks of life. There is hardly a local organization or institution that Peter has not had a hand in establishing, promoting, or serving in some way or other.



Many of Peter's achievements in volunteerism and community service were mentioned at the ceremony at which his award was presented by the Mayor, Cr Margaret Jennings. They include involvement with the Eltham Youth Club and the War Memorial Trust and the Eltham Historical Society - all centred at Eltham. In the Warrandyte area he has been involved with the North Warrandyte State Park. At Kangaroo Ground his voluntary work has benefited the Kangaroo Ground Pony Club, the Kangaroo Ground War Memorial Trust, the Kangaroo Ground Fire Brigade and the Andrew Ross Museum. Readers of the *Kangaroo Ground Chronicle* will be aware that he contributes articles from time to time. Peter also served the community at large as a JP for many years, retiring at the age of 72. Peter's award was received concurrently with the celebration of his 90th birthday. Congratulations, Peter!

- John Austin

Gold

Not far from Kangaroo Ground, gold was found in Andersons Creek near Warrandyte in the early 1850s. Because it was in payable quantities, the government of the day rewarded the finder Louis John Michel (1825-1904) with £1,000. They also paid £1,000 to James Esmond who discovered gold about the same time at Clunes, and £1,000 to Thomas Hiscock for his Ballarat find.

Louis John Michel was born in England but came to Victoria to be licensee of the Rainbow Hotel in Melbourne.

Later, deposits of gold were found at Kangaroo Ground, and Watsons Creek.



Louis John Michel

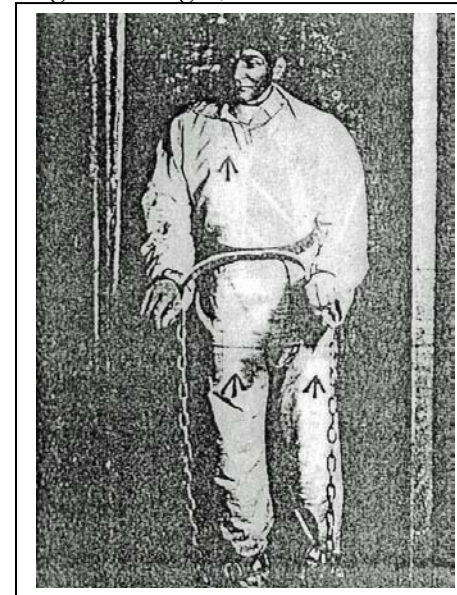
- Bruce Nixon

Kangaroo Ground's Link with the Convict Past

Many older Kangaroo Ground families will remember the June Fry family who lived for years on the Dawson Road and Main Yarra Glen Road corner near Watson's Creek.

June's grandfather, Joseph Harvey JP, FRGS, early in the twentieth century purchased a ship, the convict hulk *Success*, refitted it as a convict wax museum, and sailed with his family to England - stopping at ports on the way to show audiences the wax figures. (This journey to England appeared in the *Guinness Book of Records* as the slowest ever trip from Australia to England.)

June's mother, Mrs Hilda Connibeaere, was a well-known identity in Eltham, Kangaroo Ground, and Yarra Glen and, with her brothers, often came to Kangaroo Ground to play their stringed instruments and piano at concerts there. Her two brothers also showed films for years at Healesville and Yarra Glen. Hilda Connibeaere, who remembered well her slow trip to England as a girl, died at 96 in 1995 and is buried at Yarra Glen.



This picture of a wax convict is unique because no known authentic photos of convicts undergoing punishment seem to exist. A curved welded iron bar fitted to the convicts' waist had hand and foot chains fitted to it, including handcuffs.

- Bruce Nixon

Kangaroo Ground Eccentrics

“What about the women? Why are only male eccentrics written up in the *Chronicle*?” This question was asked outside the Kangaroo Ground Store recently. Accordingly, to redress the balance, here are recollections of three elderly local ladies.

As Mick Woiwod stressed in his history of Kangaroo Ground, due recognition cannot be given to the many pioneering woman of strong character and lasting influence whose lives were rarely mentioned in early local written records.

Of the three elderly ladies recalled here, several showed the spirit and resourcefulness of the early pioneers, as well as knowing more about farming and agricultural pursuits than most of the district’s menfolk. Lucy was one such.

To be a new arrival in Kangaroo Ground in the 1950s was to be issued, at the Kangaroo Ground Store, with a tin knapsack spray with “K G” painted on it.

“Keep it full of water during the summer and if you see smoke, head for it or jump onto a passing fire truck,” you were told. “And take the knapsack with you.”

There were several fire outbreaks in those years. You could be sure, as soon you were on the scene, to see Lucy. Clad in gum boots, a cotton dress, and a handkerchief wrapped around her head, Lucy would distribute the water. Standing on the back of a truck beside a tank full of water, Lucy would refill all the knapsack sprays. As the queue of men passed below, Lucy would bucket the water down from above. Sometimes, in the heat of the moment, not all the water would be bucketed into the opening at the top of the knapsack spray, but in the heat of the moment no one objected to getting a wet back and sloshy gumboots.

Lucy knew all about pasture management, as did a second eccentric, Dora. Dora was also the local authority on animal management. If you needed help with a sick cow, or wanted to know about cattle prices and quality at local markets, Dora was your woman.

Pass Dora’s property and you were likely get a cheery wave as she emerged from the chook shed, a hen whose neck she had just broken dangling from one hand, on her way to prepare the dinner. Visit her socially, and you were likely to be served tea and scones from hands and arms that had recently been plunged into a cow to ascertain how the calf was lying.

One night I was summoned, with a neighbouring farmer, to help Dora with a calving. Could I please bring my wire strainers?

By hurricane lantern light, on a well-known local hillside, an attempt was made to deliver a calf by attaching its head to wire strainers attached to a fence post.

When this procedure failed, a qualified vet was summoned.

“Don’t - er - mention these,” I was told, as the wire strainers were hidden under a nearby hawthorn hedge.

May, a third local lady, lived to a great age. By the time she was ready to sell the house in the early 1970s where she and her vanished family had lived for many years, the house and its management had long got beyond her.

Pass May’s property and you were likely to see her leaning on the roadside gate, watching the modern world go by.

One day some prospective buyers arrived, they viewed everything, they decided to buy, and they were offered cups of tea. May fetched a bucket from under the kitchen sink, took it to a water tank which stood beside a shed outside, filled it, and slung it over the kitchen fire. Cups of tea all around were eventually enjoyed.

Several months later, when the new owners moved in, the outside water tank was drained and cleaned out. Inside it were found the remains of five dead possums.

- John Austin

Kangaroo Ground 100 Years Ago

(as recorded in the *Evelyn Observer*, April-May 1901)

- On the signal “three rings on the telephone bell” sounding from the Kangaroo Ground Post Office/Store, the Union Jack was raised, the *National Anthem* sung, and three cheers given. Thus was Federation celebrated by the children at the Kangaroo Ground School. Each child was then presented with a medal in commemoration of the opening of the Commonwealth Parliament. Afterward the children were “treated to sweets” by the Headteacher, Miss Limerock.
- William Bell Cameron, a son of Ewen Cameron MLA, was farewelled, “to take up a position on a station in the Longreach district of Queensland”.
- E J Coutie, butcher of *Summer Hill*, Kangaroo Ground, “begs to intimate that he will as heretofore continue to sell prime meat at reasonable prices”.
- William Hopkinson of Smith’s Gully “recently dropped across another find in his claim at *One Tree Hill*”. The lump of gold found this time weighed more than half a kilo. Mr Hopkinson referred to it as “another little speck”.
- A meeting of the Kangaroo Ground Band of Hope heard an address on the “deceptive qualities of alcohol”, a song *Wake, For the Night Is Coming*, performed by Misses E and A Crichton, and a recitation *How Do You Do!* given by Master Harold Dawson.
- Sam Smith, proprietor of the Junction Hotel, Kangaroo Ground, urged those on the road to Kangaroo Ground from Yarra (Glen) via Christmas Hills to call at his hotel for “good refreshing stimulants, the best of viands, due attention, and a moderate tariff”

- John Austin

Who’s Been Living on My Property?

Every property in Kangaroo Ground has a history. With a little bit of searching and a lot of good luck, you can uncover layers of interesting information about the place you call home.

The property with the current address 35 Flat Rock Road was owned from 1918 until 1950 by Joseph Procter Bainbridge. For most of that time Joseph (1871-1952) was Registrar of the University of Melbourne. A search in the Bainbridge listings in the Melbourne telephone directory recently brought good luck. Yes, Alan Edmondson Bainbridge, 85 years old, was a son of Joseph. Yes, he remembered well the property at Kangaroo Ground. Yes, he would be delighted to drive out to see it one day and to have lunch with members of the family now occupying it.

At lunch, Alan, a retired chartered accountant, recalled his early years. “My father grew up in Yea. The position of University Registrar meant residing within the university grounds. My father’s wish to provide his six children with access to the sort of country he had known as a boy led to the purchase of the Kangaroo Ground property. Its original owner, Frederick Stone, built a house on it and continued to tend the orchard. As a family, we would occupy the house during vacations, and make frequent Saturday day trips to it. In the 1930s, my father became Secretary of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. He would bring us out by train to spend a day at Kangaroo Ground then return in time to attend the orchestra’s concert at night.”

Fire destroyed the country house of Alan’s childhood. Taking his bearings, however, from the concrete underground tank that remains, Alan was able to explain where house and outbuildings had once stood. His final words were, “Well, I’m so glad to know that the property is now in such good hands”.

- John Austin

Winter 2001 Chatterbox

When sitting in the sunshine, at the Shrine, and watching the Anzac Day March, I was musing over the Anzac Spirit, and one of the comments heard again and again was that they were all volunteers.

Volunteering brings with it a special spirit of pulling together to achieve a common goal.

The Andrew Ross Museum has a common goal to collect, preserve and display the history of the district.

Australians have a proud record of getting things done. We need more volunteers to keep getting the job done.

It costs money so we seek your financial support too.

Many of you have seen what we are endeavouring to achieve, do come in and familiarise yourselves with what has been done and needs to be done. We need people with ideas, imagination, willing hands and cheerful and practical dispositions.

We believe that we are the only Museum situated in a Victorian school that archives school and local history.

The Museum is collaborating with the War Memorial Tower Committee for their 75th Anniversary in Spring 2001.

One half day a week our archivists and cataloguers can be found working steadily on the collection of papers, photographs and relics.

Helpers include Janine Taylor, who lives on Henley Road. Janine juggles family life while studying at La Trobe University and helping at the Museum. Thank you Janine.

History was made on the 26th April with the opening of the Evelyn County Estate, Cellar Door and Black Paddock Restaurant and Tony Smibert Gallery. This complex will be officially opened on

the 18th May. Congratulations to Roger and Robyn Male, who are Museum Life Members.

We welcome Eltham College as Life Members and look forward to collaborating with them in developing a project.

Two classes from Kangaroo Ground School recently visited the Museum as part of their Australian History studies of the Good Old Days. We hope the students will bring their parents to the Museum. Their classroom display of the good old days was a joy to see.

Dr Peter Fleming and his wife Wenda, both retired scientists with writing and publication experience, have joined the Board and will be helping John Austin, our tireless editor.

Fran Bailey, our Federal Member has sent us a replacement Australian Flag as the one we proudly flew before which had been provided by Wayne Phillips on behalf of the Victorian Government disappeared. I hope the new owner is flying it as proudly as others are flying the Australian Flag this Heritage Year. Thanks Fran.

- Diana Bassett-Smith

