

ISSN1324-6437
Volume 32
Winter 2025

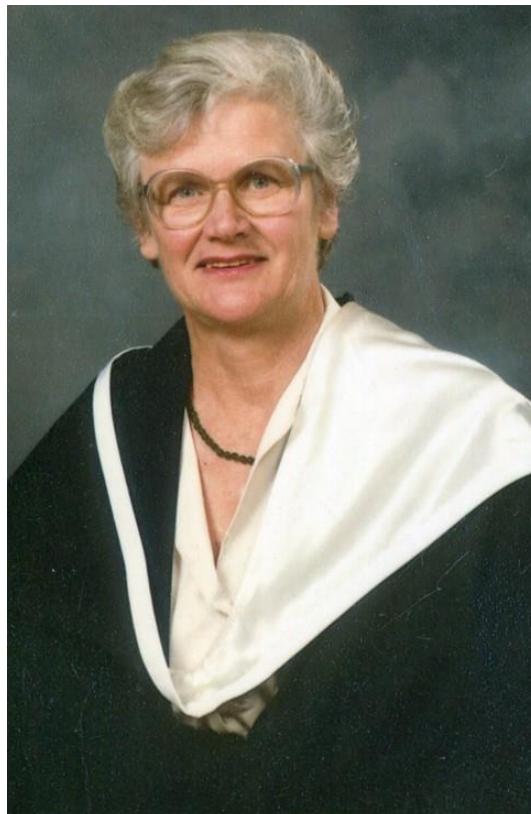
KANGAROO GROUND CHRONICLE

Newsletter of the
ANDREW ROSS MUSEUM INC

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VALE DIANA BASSETT-SMITH

It is with deep sadness that we record the passing, at the age of 96, of Diana Bassett-Smith, a founding member and life patron of the Andrew Ross Museum.

Diana worked tirelessly in the local community and became something of a legend in her own lifetime, known by so many for her involvement in causes ranging from historical and rural groups to the local fire brigade and a life-long association with horses.

As a member of Eltham Historical Society she was among a band of its volunteers who took it upon themselves to transform the former teacher's residence in the grounds of Kangaroo Ground Primary School into the local museum it is today. With a seeding grant of \$1,500 from Museums Victoria the group set up the museum, drawing inspiration from the 'Reminiscences' Ross had written for the Evelyn Observer newspaper and with artefacts gifted from local families including many items from the Ness family. Diana was among those who worked tirelessly to create and stage the three display rooms of the museum, ready for its official opening in March 1993. She was for many years the ARM Secretary and remained a steadfast volunteer and board member until her passing. Diana, along with another museum co-founder, the late, local historian and author, Mick Woiod, were the museum's only life patrons.



Diana, aged 90

Among the many contributions for which she will be remembered, one is constantly on display – the Stevenson vine which now grows vigorously in the front garden of the museum. Descended from its namesake vine which was planted at a property on the Yarra Glen Road by Joseph Stevenson in the 1870s, Diana planted the shiraz in 1997 to ensure the lineage dating back to the district's first vineyard would not be lost.

Diana will also be remembered for the Bassett-Smith Story Writing Competition, held annually for Year Six pupils at Kangaroo Ground Primary School. Set up by Diana with a generous bursary in 2014 the competition is judged by museum staff with a certificate for each entrant and book vouchers for the winners. All the entries are bound and kept by the museum. With great foresight, Diana found a way to record social history for the future with the criteria of 'My Special Place' ensuring the pupils describe their lives, hobbies and interests, providing a view of the changing social landscape for future generations.

Diana's association with Kangaroo Ground began in her childhood, with holidays spent at her Uncle Mel's farm in Henley Road. It was here she developed her life-long passion for horses and in the early 1950s Diana helped establish the Pony Club Association of Victoria (now of Australia) and Riding for the Disabled in Australia. In 1953 she was a founding member and first District Commissioner of the Eltham District Horse and Pony Club and in 1967 Diana was a founder and first District Commissioner of Kangaroo Ground Pony Club.

Diana and her late husband, Peter, moved to their own home in Kangaroo Ground in the early 1960s where they raised a family and enjoyed a country life, breeding and showing Poll Dorset sheep along with cattle and turkeys, whilst maintaining careers and involvement in community causes. Not surprisingly, for someone so involved in helping others, Diana had a successful career in nursing, graduating in 1976, followed ten years later with a Bachelor of Applied Science – Nursing Administration. She was admitted to the Royal College of Nursing in 1993.



Diana, with her husband Peter, circa 2001

Diana's involvement with the local CFA included a role as a founding member of the Ladies Auxiliary, now called Friends of Kangaroo Ground Fire Brigade. In 2014 she received the CFA Life Member Award. Diana always took fire and community safety very seriously and even into her 90s she would carry a chainsaw and rope in case fallen trees needed dragging off the road.

Away from her community work Diana loved spending time with family and friends enjoying the local countryside around her home and feeding the beautiful pet peafowl who patrolled her grounds.

She passed away peacefully in a local nursing home on May 1.

Truly a one-of-a-kind, Diana will be sadly missed.

Jane Cook

Diana's childhood memories of Kangaroo Ground in the 1930s, 'Early Recollections' will be published in the next edition of the Kangaroo Ground Chronicle.

LOCAL ART HISTORY PROJECT

Six key signs along the Heidelberg School Artist Trail in Eltham have been restored, bringing back to life the historic works of one of Eltham's most well-known painters.

Walk in the footsteps of artist Walter Withers (1854-1914) along the Diamond Creek Trail between Wingrove Park and the activity centre on Main Road.

The signs place viewers at or near the locations where six of Withers' famous paintings were created.

The Heidelberg School was a late 19th century group of painters often described as Australian Impressionists who painted outdoors. Walter Withers, who was born in England came to Australia in 1888, where he became a member of the Heidelberg School. He moved to Eltham in 1903 where he painted works featuring the local area until his death in 1914.

The signboards feature a reproduction of the painting and information about the work, helping visitors compare Eltham today with that of the turn of the 19th century.

The restoration was undertaken in consultation with the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and community stakeholders.

Pictured below, one of the restored signs.



Walter Withers
Born England 1854
Arrived Australia 1883
Died 1914



The Silent Gums, 1909
Oil on canvas, 105.0 x 181.0 cm
Felton Bequest, 1909
Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Walter Withers painted this tranquil pastoral scene in the vicinity of this park. He has painted the dairy cattle owned by his neighbour and a local farmer, Tom Orr.

The cattle are feeding and resting in the shade of the tall Manna gums. Withers' daughter, Nan, recalled how her father, for inspiration, often visited Tom. In his later years, Withers painted many landscapes depicting Tom's livestock.

The Traditional Lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People.



Carol Leeson

RECRUITING THE FAMILY TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY

When Tash Sinclair became CFA volunteer with Kangaroo Ground Fire Brigade more than four years ago, she didn't imagine she'd end up serving the community alongside her family.

"My family all see how passionate I am about being a CFA volunteer and how much I enjoy it, and that's contagious," Tash said. When I talk about what I get out of being a volunteer people see the enthusiasm.

But her husband Clayton still needed some convincing to join up. "I nagged my husband to become a volunteer. At the time he was already helping out with brigade events and I kept telling him he should become an official member. So he joined in October 2021. Both of us being brigade members is like having a hobby we can do together outside of our day jobs." Tash and Clayton are both firefighters and often go out on the same callouts. "It happens all the time. I've worked with him for 18 years running a business, so we naturally have good communication with each other before and during turnout," Tash said.

Tash's nephew, Josh Dowling, joined the Juniors at Hoddles Creek, while his mum Jill (Tash's sister) joined Wandin brigade. "Josh is an outdoorsy boy and is enjoying the practical skills he's learning at CFA," Tash said. He's proud to be a Junior and help out at the station.

Tash's mum, Andy, had also been supporting the brigade with social events and was happy to become an official member when she moved into the area at the start of the year. My mum received her member number in the week of Mother's Day", Tash said. "I was rostered on Mother's Day to take the trucks out for their maintenance run and I asked my mum if she'd like a ride in a truck". She jumped at the chance and was very enthusiastic.



She took photos and showed them to the children she teaches at an early learning centre. Andy volunteers in a support role as one of the Friends of Kangaroo Ground Fire Brigade – the name given to the auxiliary – where she helps with events and fundraising. "Mum wants to relieve the pressure on operational members by doing tasks around the brigade.

Tash was the brigade's Community Safety Coordinator for two years and is currently the 5th Lieutenant. She is also one of 695 volunteers who are CFA staff members. Tash began working at CFA as a District Business Manager and has since progressed in the CFA career as Senior Manager Business Services, based at Burwood headquarters.

"I really appreciate the contrast between my work in my employed role and volunteer role. Each presents unique challenges that engage my mind in different ways, and it's incredibly rewarding to know that in both capacities, I'm helping Victorian communities to prepare for and respond to fire.

My family has a culture of helping people and as we are also outdoorsy types, we are all really enjoying volunteering."

Source: Brigade Magazine Spring 2024



Kangaroo Ground Fire Brigade award recipients, from 5-45 years of service presented at the 2025 Awards Night Dinner

PRE-GRID RADIO



This HMV Superheterodyne 5-valve table-model radio was donated to the museum by longtime Kangaroo Ground resident David Graham Snr.

Produced by HMV in Sydney in 1946 and 1947, with a retail price of £43.00, the radio was designed to be powered by a 6-volt, 130 amp-hour lead-acid battery.

David remembers that until Kangaroo Ground was connected to the power grid in 1958, valve radios run by lead-acid batteries were a popular option. His own family sometimes resorted to bringing the car battery in to run their radio.

Like most radios of its time, it can be switched to receive AM radio stations on what was the normal broadcast band, or short-wave band for very long distance listening that could pick up waves reflected by the ionosphere.

The dial shows the radio stations for every Australian state. Shortwave frequencies are marked around its perimeter. Unlike most modern radios, it has a tone control to alter the balance of treble and bass. The direct current from the battery was converted into alternating current by the synchronous vibrator unit. As the vibrator unit might transmit stray signals to the radio, it was shielded in a metal box.

The dial light was operated only while pressing the white button on the left side of the cabinet during tuning of stations, to conserve the battery. It weighs a little over 22kg, making it quite heavy by today's standards; and that's without the battery!

These lead-acid battery radios would have kept Kangaroo Ground families in touch with the wider world with the hourly news bulletins, and no doubt many an episode of *Blue Hills* was listened to on them as well.

Alan Bluhm

FROM SLATES TO LAPTOPS

If Andrew Ross was around today, he would be amazed at the transformation of his little school into the modern centre of learning it is today, with a current roll of over 200 pupils from Kangaroo Ground and surrounding areas.

Ross took up the position of school master in 1851, with a workplace made of timber slab and shingle measuring just 9 x 5.5 metres. It was built on a half-acre plot donated by local farmer James Donaldson and built by Samuel Furphy, father of the novelist Joseph. The building also doubled as a place of worship, where Ross acted as lay preacher when the local minister was unavailable. In the early days, the tiny structure was also home to Ross and his wife, with a corner of the room curtained off for the schoolmaster's living space and the pulpit was used for sleeping. Eventually the community built a small cottage for Mr and Mrs Ross alongside the school. In addition to its role as school, church and one-time teacher's residence, the building was also used as a Court of Petty Sessions in 1857 and served as a post office from 1854 until 1858.

As a man of vision, Ross embraced the challenges of his role and looked to expand the school with boarders. Within a few years he had a couple of staff, extra accommodation and 20 boarders. Seizing the potential, he leased 20 acres for a school farm and in the process created what was probably Victoria's first technical school and first agricultural college, the Evelyn Commercial, Agricultural and Industrial School.

He went on to lease 100 acres of better soil for the farm and, at its peak, the school had around 60 students.



A 'new' school building was erected in 1878, a one room, tongue and groove lined structure measuring approximately 15m x 5.5m. It is still used by the school today for art lessons. The school house was used as a staff residence until the early 1990s. It is now home to the Andrew Ross Museum.

The present-day staff and pupils are accommodated in several much larger, contemporary style buildings, the first newer building was constructed on Graham Road in 1974, still within the boundary of the original school grounds. It has been further extended over the years with additional classrooms added in 2009-10 with the bonus structure of an outdoor, all weather playing area with BBQ facilities for school

functions. The 1974 building was demolished in 2024 to make way for classrooms that better suit modern teaching methods.

Taking up the story, KGPS Principal Laurie Murray reports:

The addition or replacement of a key school building is a significant event for any school so the Education Minister's announcement in May 2021 that we were to receive \$4,330,000 to construct a new administration and classroom facility was a momentous event for everyone in our Kangaroo Ground Primary school community.

Following the announcement, we were very fortunate to have DiMase architects appointed to design our new facility. The architect spent considerable time looking at other significant local structures, particularly the church and general store, before designing a building which is sympathetic to the historic architecture of the Kangaroo Ground district. The gable roof and brick walls have ensured the building blends with old and newer structures on the school site. As one parent commented, 'it looks like the building that is meant to be here'.

The construction of our building was not without mishaps, the most significant of these being the original builder's placement into administration. This triggered an unfortunate series of events which involved the project having to be returned to the Minister to approve additional funding and retendered, something which added more than twelve months to the construction process.

Following the termination of the first builder's contract, a representative from the Victorian School Building Authority visited the semi-demolished admin building and was not satisfied that the power supply was safe so the school was temporarily closed and students were relocated to Diamond Creek East Primary while generators were installed to supply power while the issue was rectified. This was a difficult time for students, staff and parents, however the community focussed on what was to be a wonderful final outcome for all parties.

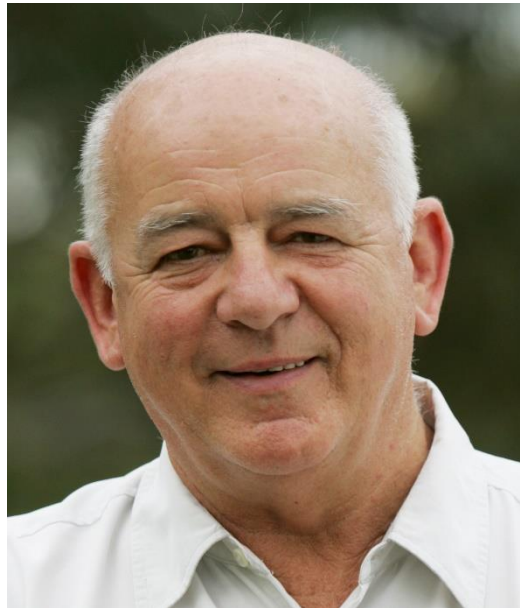
It's difficult not to draw comparisons between our new facility and the old school building which now houses the Andrew Ross Museum. The original enrolments numbering in the 60s have increased to a current enrolment of over 200 students. Nowadays students use iPads and laptop computers rather than slate boards and chalk. Websites and search engines might have replaced textbooks when students look for their information but some things haven't changed. Reading, writing and arithmetic are still at the heart of what we do at school and we still encourage a love of literature and a thirst for learning.

Our school relocated into the new facility ready for the commencement of the 2025 school year. The new facility will see many more generations of students and we hope it will still be there as long as the Andrew Ross building.



Jane Cook (ARM) and Laurie Murray (Kangaroo Ground Primary School Principal)

ANDREW ROSS MUSEUM CHAIRMAN RECEIVES AN AWARD Nillumbik's 2024 Volunteer of the Year



“Today I can help you and tomorrow I may need your help”

Warwick Leeson (Chairman of the Board) of Kangaroo Ground Andrew Ross Museum recently heard about a man struggling to feed his family. Living on rice crackers for months, the man's health declined and he contemplated suicide. Though they never met, Warwick took action, through the Rotary Club of Diamond Creek.

“When you don't have a healthy body, you don't have a healthy mind,” says Warwick, President of the Diamond Creek Rotary Club. “We loaded his wife's car with fresh food – vegetables, fruit, bread, staples.

It wasn't just food, it was HOPE. And there's a hell of a difference”

Hope is something Warwick has quietly delivered for over 50 years. Named Nillumbik's 2024 Volunteer of the Year, he has led committees, served as Nillumbik's Mayor from 2006 to 2008, and played a key role in recovery after the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires. His contributions earned him an Order of Australia Medal.

Warwick paid tribute to the dedication and work of volunteers who he describes as the “unsung heroes” of the community.

Including the volunteers that run the ‘Andrew Ross Museum’ in the old school house in Kangaroo Ground.

One of his proudest achievements! Helping push for the Yarra River Protection Act, recognizing the river's Indigenous heritage.

“Volunteering isn't just about helping others – it strengthens society. If I can inspire others, that's enough for me”

Carol Leeson

ANDREW ROSS MUSEUM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

at Wycliffe, 70 Graham Road Kangaroo Ground

Wednesday 23 July, 10am

Our guest speakers will be Bob and Ann Moloney,
who ran the Kangaroo Ground General Store and Post Office
from 1993 – 2004.



All welcome!

Come along for an interesting yarn about Kangaroo Ground

Light refreshments will be available

RSVP: Carol 0422-307-630

WHO WE ARE AND HOW TO CONTACT US

Museum Board Members	
Chairperson:	Warwick Leeson OAM 0439-347-797 andrewrossmuseum@outlook.com
Vice Chairperson:	David Sharpe sharpies205@aapt.net.au
Secretary/Public Officer:	Carol Leeson 0422-307-630 carolanneleeson@gmail.com
Treasurer:	Rob Shackleton

The Museum is open:
every Thursday 10.00 am – 12 noon
2 pm – 4 pm on the first Sunday of every month or by appointment

**Supported by Nillumbik Shire Council
and Kangaroo Ground Primary School**



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