

## HISTORY GROUP REPORT

Much work continues on the library database. Recently we received a generous donation of several boxes of books from a noted early Australian Native Plant nurserywoman. This donation goes part of the way to filling a gap already identified in our library. Also several books on the subject of roses were received from the library of Garden Writer Peter Alston. We are also in the process of double-checking each entry to make sure it is correctly shelved.

Our PowerPoint presentations on the gardens have been on several outings, making this a valuable tool (not bad for what is really an old fashioned slide show).

Heritage trees details are being crosschecked for accuracy before a draft copy of the brochure is made available for comment. Hopefully it will be ready for George Longley Day. (And you must check out the 'new' photo of George in its frame)

Also of note is the cemetery tour on the 25th of November. This follows the Stoddart headstone restoration project. Check in this edition for further details.

The group has now instituted a regular '5 minute' talk on a topical subject. It is always a fun filled and informative in-depth occasion.

All are welcome at our monthly meetings. 4:30pm first Tuesday of the month. Or join us at our research desks at the Public Records Office on a Monday or Tuesday morning.

**Lorraine Powell – History Group Coordinator**

## JOHN'S JOTTINGS

In 1920 the Mayor of Ballarat asked "pioneers" for "Reminiscences of their early days in Ballarat". John Ross, then 81, recalls: - *"Going to the Botanic Gardens I took a track along the North side of the swamp. What a dismal sight it was to look across the prararic of rushes, no water to be seen owing to the closeness of the growth, the only indication of water about was the awful sound of croaking of frogs and the sight of some Californian pumps where water carters got water to sell at so much a load to the residents of Soldier's Hill and other suburbs round about. Before entering the garden reserve by the North Gate where Bishop's Court now is the place was then occupied by a man who reared pigs and grew cabbages, very few houses were then on the north side of the Lake and very humble. When going along the Garden Reserve from here there was nothing to show much sign of a garden to be seen. However, I discovered Mr Longley, he was alone engaged digging a large circular bed in the centre of the garden. This bed contained a good collection of herbaceous plants and flowering shrubs and a good specimen of Cupressus Lautroliana planted in the middle. To describe all of the class of plants that I saw would make this paper too lengthy. I will write more about our beautiful gardens and our lovely lake at some future time if required."*

Whether he did or not, I do not know, but John Ross was certainly a renowned gardener, in charge of the Ballarat Hospital gardens for 55 years.

John Ross arrived in Ballarat in 1863 and this reminiscence would relate to that time. He had been born in Golspie in County Sutherland, in the Highlands of Scotland, on 28 Jan 1840. Having completed his apprenticeship as a gardener at Dunrobin Castle, he emigrated to Australia at the age of 24 aboard the *Golden South* which arrived at Sandridge, Melbourne, on 8 Jun 1863. He travelled to Ballarat by the new railway (built 1862) and was employed by Walter Craig as a gardener when Craig moved to his farm between Creswick Road and the New Cemetery. Ross then took up the position as Gardener at the Ballarat Hospital and worked there from 1871 until 1926 when he retired aged 85! He died shortly after on 10 Jun 1926, aged 86. In *"Sovereign Remedies"* by Anthea Hyslop there is a picture of him standing in the hospital vegetable garden and another by the large rhododendron tree that used to stand on the Drummond Street side of the Hospital until Yuille House was built. His work at the Hospital drew deserving praise over many years but his garden was gradually reduced and replaced by new buildings.

I believe the rhododendron tree in front of the House in Sturt St. (next to the Olive Grove and St Peter's church) is from a cutting of the rhododendron tree at the hospital which was moved from its original location to another part of the hospital. John Ross was succeeded as Gardener at the Hospital by Roy Mosman's father, E. Moosman (he later changed his original Swiss surname to Mosman.)

**John Ross (1840-1926)  
in full highland garb,  
Ballarat c1870**



*This photo courtesy of gr gr grandson Neil North of Perth, WA, can be seen on the website Sutherland People, by Christine Stokes at [www.countysutherland.co.uk/96.html](http://www.countysutherland.co.uk/96.html).*

Ross was a member of the Horticultural Society, a foundation member of St Andrew's Kirk and the Caledonian Society.

I cannot find *Cupressus lautroliana* in my Botanica, maybe our library has more information.

**John Garner**

## ENGRAVING REPORT

Once again, it has been very quiet in this area of the Friends activities. Mike is coming along in leaps and bounds in his mastery of the equipment and we completed approx 60 labels in July. Hopefully there will soon be more labels for