

JOHN ROPER

Edited talk by Helen Livsey (presented at A&DHS General Meeting, October 1983 and reprinted from A&DHS Bulletin No 211)

John Roper was born in Gayton Thorpe, Norfolk, England in 1820, the eldest son and third of ten children of Thomas and Frances Roper (née Nurse) of Gemingham Hall. He was educated at King's Lynn, Norfolk, migrated to New Zealand in 1838 and arrived in Sydney in 1843.

He was a member of Leichhardt's expedition to Port Essington in 1844-45 when he was speared by aboriginals and lost his sight in one eye. On this journey Leichhardt named the Roper River in his honour.

He was appointed Albury's first Clerk of Petty Sessions in 1847, and was also postmaster. He became a magistrate in 1854. Elected to Albury's first Council on July 21, 1859, he served as a Councillor until 1862 and Mayor of Albury from February to October 1862. He was president of the Albury and Murray River Agricultural and Horticultural Society, vice-chairman of the Albury Hospital committee and president of the Albury Jockey Club, a member of the Albury Co-Operative store, before he resigned due to insolvency in 1862. He was released from insolvency in 1873.



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He had built the Globe Hotel in 1860, but did not operate it and owned considerable township property including all the land on the north side of Dean Street from the Globe Hotel to Elizabeth Street, a grain store and five room cottage in Kiewa Street, as well as land at Doctor's Point. He also held small parcels of land planted with tobacco and vines. His team of draught stallions and farm machinery were some of the earliest in the district and included a Robinson reaper and binder.

The *Border Post* paid tribute as follows:

Much sympathy is felt for Mr Roper in the trying situation in which the depreciation on real estate has placed him. He is one of the oldest residents in Albury and has done much, both in public and private, to advance the interests of the town he has deserved well of the colonists at large, for it was one of the companions of Leichhardt to Port Essington.

John Roper moved to Merriwa, near Scone, NSW, where he was Stock Inspector until two years before his death on September 15, 1895. He had been a respected townsman, director of a flour milling company and owner of a substantial property *Rosebery Park*. In the Holy Trinity church yard at Merriwa stands a memorial to John Roper, which was built from a subscription fund raised by the *Sydney Telegraph*.

An obituary appeared in *Australian Town and Country Journal* of September 21, 1895:

MERRIWA, Tuesday.—At Rosebery Park on Sunday morning John Roper, the last survivor of Leichhardt's first expedition, died, at the age of 73 years, the cause of death being pleurisy. Mr. Roper was born at Gaytonthorpe, County Norfolk, England, and came to the colony in 1843. In 1844 Dr. Leichhardt, Mr. J. S. Calvert, and the deceased accomplished the famous, exploring expedition from Brisbane to Port Essington, and the River Roper was named after Mr. Roper, in consequence of his having discovered it. In 1847 he was appointed clerk of petty sessions at Albury, and he was made a magistrate in 1854. In 1862 he was Mayor of Albury, and had held the office of Inspector of Stock in this district for a number of years, and he retired from the public service about two years ago.

After his return from Port Essington, John's brother William, Frederick and Walter, and his sister Frances, migrated to Australia. John did not marry but descendants of his brothers still live [1983] in the Victorian country not far from Albury and Mount Beauty as a reminder of the English family who made Australia their home.

More information is available in the Australian Dictionary of Biography:

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/roper-john-4503>