

Albury's Best Known Author

Greg Ryan

In 1888 'Robbery Under Arms' was published by Rolf Boldrewood. It was a cracking story of the exploits of Australian bushrangers. And it was written by a resident of Albury.

Thomas Alexander Browne had been appointed to Albury in 1885 as Chairman of the Lands' Board and later became the local Police Magistrate. Browne adopted Rolf Boldrewood as his pen name. He had been born in London in 1827 and it is believed that he chose his pen name from names in Hampshire in the south of England – there is a parish and village named Boldre and nearby a Boldre Wood and a Boldrewood House.

Thomas Browne arrived in Sydney as a three year old with his parents. He took to a bush life as a young lad which gave him adequate material to begin writing about life in the Australian bush. From 1870 he wrote squatting stories. 'My Run Home,' 'The Squatter's Dream,' 'A Colonial Reformer' and 'An Australian Squire' were published in the 'Town and Country Journal.'

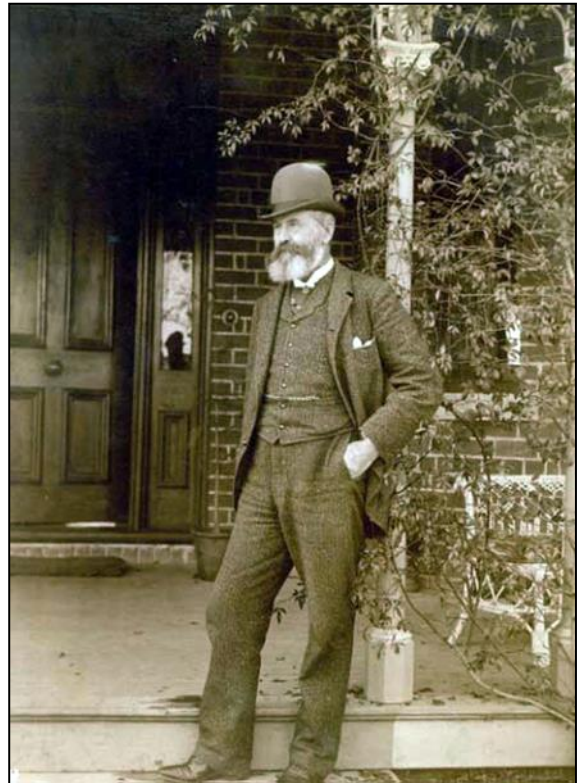
In 1879 'Ups and Downs' was published in London and was favourably reviewed in the leading journals. But his first notable success

as a novelist was 'Robbery Under Arms.' It was first published in 1883 as a serial for the 'Sydney Mail,' so not written during his time in Albury. But Browne's daughter Emily revealed in a letter that while living in Albury, she typed the serialised story into a three-volume edition for publication.

Thomas Browne's first Albury home was 'Morningside' (near the junction of Thurgoona and Elm Streets, now demolished) and by January 1890, the family had moved to 'Raby' at 640 Olive St. The photograph was taken on the front steps of 'Raby' – this house still stands.

While in Albury, Browne continued his writing and completed four novels, 'Nevermore,' 'A Sydney-side Saxon,' 'A Modern Buccaneer' and 'The Crooked Stick.'

Browne's wife Margaret was a keen gardener and in 1893 she published a practical guide to gardening called 'The Flower Garden in Australia, A Book for Ladies and Amateurs,' written in Albury. She wrote it under the name Mrs Rolf Boldrewood.



Thomas Alexander Browne (Rolf Boldrewood) on the front steps of 'Raby' in Olive St, his Albury home.

'Robbery Under Arms' was first filmed as a silent movie in 1920. In the 1957 version, Peter Finch played Captain Starlight, the main character of the book and in the 1985 version, Sam Neill had the lead role.

Thomas Browne died in Melbourne in 1915. Margaret Browne died in 1917, newspapers describing her as a "woman of exceptional intellectual attainments."