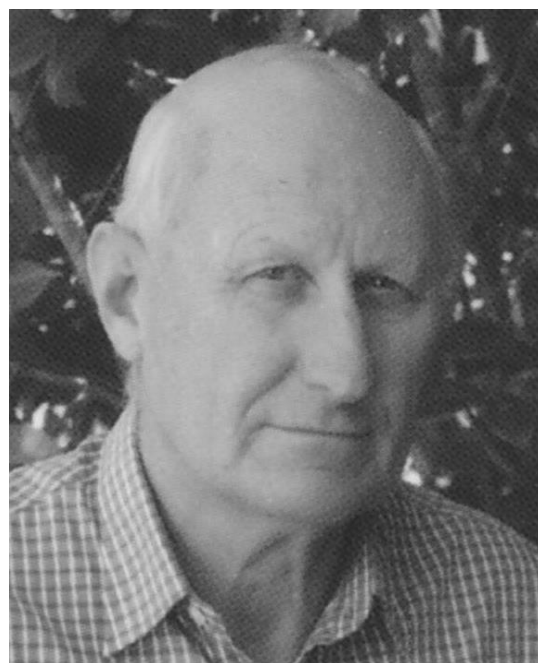
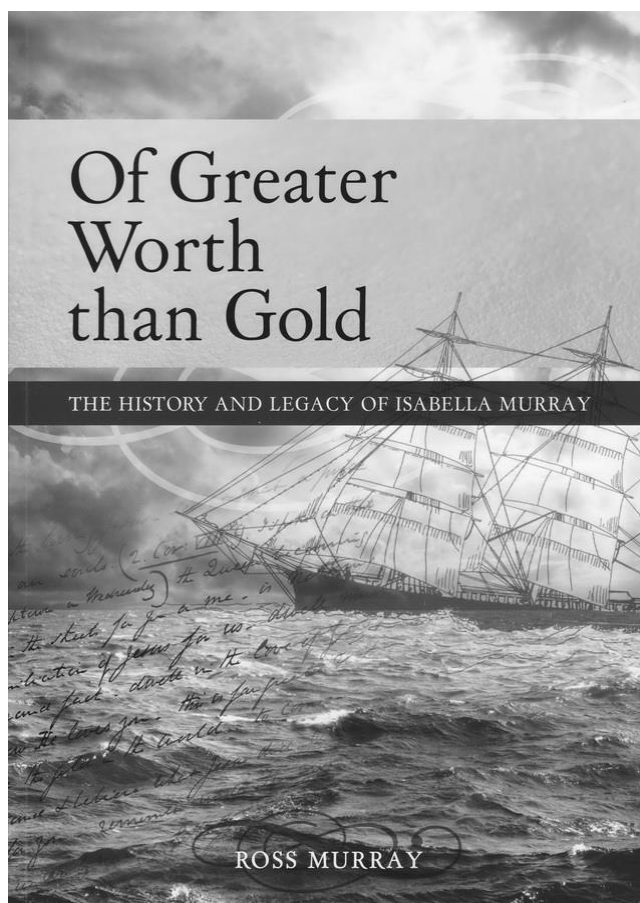


Ross Murray, *Of Greater Worth than Gold: the History and Legacy of Isabella Murray*. Taree NSW: Ross Murray, 2012, pp 96, illus., ISBN 978-0-646-57720-3, RRP



Ross Murray

Ross Murray was born on the Manning, in Taree. He taught History, English and Studies of Religion in schools in the Upper Hunter and Tamworth before retiring to Tuncurry in 2004. He augmented his historical skills by completing the highly regarded local and applied history course at the University of New England. He is also the President of the Murray Clan Society of NSW.

Although this is a family history, it has been researched, written and produced in a thoroughly professional manner – a labour of love in the best sense. It is a very attractive book, not only because of its graphic design but also because it is a superior example of the genre in its substance. Its greater appeal arises also from the way Murray has contextualised his study. The Scottish heritage of his immigrant ancestors is traced back two centuries and analysed very helpfully as a

case study in the dynamics of Scottish emigration and of Australian immigration. The importance to these people of their faith is not avoided as in some family histories. It is seen in its properly central relation to the lives of the people. Interestingly enough, however, the two famous contemporary Murray descendants celebrated in text-boxes in this book are both Roman Catholics rather than Free Presbyterians – poet Les Murray and Justice Murray Gleeson. Back in 1984, Les Murray remarked to the reviewer, rather acerbically, that the Scots on the north coast had a tough religion of extreme Calvinism, adding that the men only had culture when they were drunk but the women couldn't drink, so they had no culture but religion. Whilst I am sure this reflects Les's personal experiences, and no doubt contains truthful insight, it is hardly fair to all the pioneers introduced to the reader in this book.

Ross Murray is well read in “the literature”, as serious scholars are wont to say. So the primary research on his own family is confidently placed against the broader backcloth of the so-called “lowland clearances”. He also provides a rich account of the shipboard experiences of emigrants, including his own ancestors. The faith and word-view of the matriarch Isabella are explored deeply, in relation to changes in Scottish Presbyterianism in the 18th and 19th century. There is also a reproduction and the transcript of a long letter to Isabella Murray in Australia from a Christian friend at home. The chapter concerning settlement on the Manning is relatively short but, again, presents the family story in context and Murray is unafraid to deal honestly with the displacement of the Biripi people, so it is not just the usual story of the triumph of white pioneers over adversity.

This book is very thoroughly and helpfully illustrated with photographs, many of them in colour, documents and tables. It might then seem churlish to complain of the lack of maps of Roxburghshire and the Manning valley to show the location of the many places mentioned in the text. Fortunately, the reviewer knows some of the places (including The Bight) because of his wife's Manning River roots.

MALCOLM PRENTIS