

Australian Bushrangers

THE CLARKE BROTHERS, THOMAS & JOHN



The Clarke family lived at (Ballalaba, Braidwood) in New South Wales. The head of the family was John Clarke, a convicted criminal, with his wife, Mary née Connell. She had two brothers, Tom and Pat Connell who were also involved in the gang; (They were the bushrangers - many other families in the area harboured them) although they committed numerous 'highway robbery under arms', and supposedly were guilty of, or accessories to murder, they were never charged and therefore it was never proven that they killed anyone. Another of Mary's brothers, John

Connell, stole horses on two occasions and did time for that, he also was sent to prison for 10 years for receiving a stolen goods from one of the robberies, but none for highway robbery.

The Clarkes had three sons, Thomas, James and John, and there were also some girls in the family. While their mother and the girls kept out of trouble - sister Ann being the matron of her maternity hospital in Braidwood - the rest of the family were cattle-duffers and horse-stealers. The father, John, died in Goulburn Gaol while he was waiting to be tried for the murder of Billy Noonang, an Aboriginal.

On 3rd October, 1865, the eldest son Thomas was arrested on a charge of highway robbery, but escaped from the Braidwood gaol. After that he stole horses (including race-horses), stuck up the Araluen mail, robbed the post office at Michalago, as well as some shops and numbers of travellers on the Braidwood and Moruya roads. Earlier in 1865 they surrendered to a well disposed magistrate who let them out on bail. This allowed them to attend the Araluen Races where Tom collected prize money and won the admiration of hundreds of spectators for his riding skills. They later reported to court and were acquitted on insufficient evidence of a robbery in March 1862.

On 12th January 1865, the other son James was imprisoned at Cockatoo Island for seven years. Obviously, he was involved in the robbery of the Cowra mail together with Ben Hall and Johnny Gilbert, but his presence there was not proven; still, some banknotes stolen from the mail were found on him, and he was sentenced for receiving stolen property. This sentence had obviously saved him from the gallows - the fate of his brothers - because otherwise he would have joined his brother Thomas, as the youngest brother John did.

On April 9th, 1866, Thomas, together with uncles Patrick and Thomas Connell and four other criminals, William and Joseph Berriman, Bill Scott and William Fletcher, robbed a Chinaman, who was on the way from the gold diggings at Deep Creek to the bank. They took all of his savings. Several others were held up including a small boy, and after that, they called on Mr. John Emmott, the storekeeper from Moruya to surrender. He wasn't about to lose the £100 and a parcel of gold dust on him so put spurs to his horse to gallop away. Both Thomas Clarke and Patrick Connell fired at him with their revolvers - one of the shots wounding Emmott in the thigh and the other killing his mount from under him. After relieving him of his valuables he and the other prisoners who had already been bailed up were marched in the direction of Mrs. Groves store. Because of his wound Emmott could not walk quickly so the bushrangers pistol-whipped him over the head and left the poor man lying semi-conscious and helpless on the road. It was an accepted fact later at the trial of Tom Connell, that the intervention of John Emmott, saved Tom's life. Tom had intervened to stop one of the bushrangers from causing more harm with his pistol. Tom brought John a hat full of water from the creek. Emmott brought these facts to the notice of the authorities. After his release, 10 years later, Tom was said to have often written to his former victim.

The gang continued in robberies with violence, be it shops, or people returning from the races. Thomas Clarke was not even ashamed to rob women, one of them being the wife of storekeeper James Pollock from the Gulph Diggings. They broke into Pollock's store, Mrs Pollock foiled them by throwing the keys of the safe into the street, they tried to find them with the aid of a candle, but were unsuccessful. The first newspaper report said gold had been taken, but a more accurate account in the Police Gazette said pipes, tobacco, clothing and Wellington Boots. During one of the shop robberies two policemen, Constables O'Grady and Smythe Smith were shot at, and Constable Miles O'Grady, who was severely wounded, died after three hours of agonising pain. After this murder, the Clarke brothers Thomas and John were proclaimed outlaws. O'Grady had insisted on attacking the bushrangers, and walked down the main street shooting indiscriminately. He shot and killed William Fletcher, who had been a bushranger for a day, before getting wounded himself. No one was ever charged with killing Miles.

On the 16th July 1866, Tom and Pat Connell and two others held up Morris' store at Mudmelong. The next day 4 police and a black tracker George Emmott, pursued the bushrangers for four hours through the bush until they camped for the evening at Wyambene. Without any discussions the police opened fire into the camp, scattering the bushrangers in all directions. Pat Connell was killed by Constable Thomas Kelly. Pat was in the company of his brother's Tom and John at the time. The identity of the 4th bushranger is unknown. Pat was buried in the family vault at Jerrabat Gully.



"So ended, in the prime of his life, one of the best horsemen produced in Australia" - newspaper report.

Constable Kelly was transferred, took to drink, and eventually left the force.

On the 9th January 1867, a party of special constables (not police, but given police status by Henry Parkes to capture the bushrangers - they were in fact bounty hunters) named John Carroll, Patrick Kennagh, Eneas McDonnell and John Phegan were taken by surprise, ambushed and shot dead. Their bodies were found near Jinden station in the Braidwood district. It was never established whether three of them were shot by Thomas Clarke, or that the fourth one, Bill Scott, another member of the gang, was later killed by Thomas. (James Griffin, a relative, said that this was what had happened, and that he had held the horses whilst they were shot. However, this is all supposition. For the police to accept his evidence they would have had to grant Queen's Counsel and James could have got off, or only received a light sentence. Instead, he was given 18 years for his part, and the Clarkes were charged with shooting the policeman during their capture.) The coroner's inquest concluded that Scott met his death by foul play, but could not determine the cause of death. No one was ever charged with shooting the special police.

In January 1867, the New South Wales government offered a reward of £5,000 for the capture of the murderers, but the Clarkes still continued robbing travellers and holding up the mail coaches. In the following April, the famous blacktracker, Sir Watkin Wyne led a police search party with Senior Constable Wright and Constables Walsh, Egan, Lenehan and James Wright. Fortunately they received a tip-off by one of the bushrangers' cousins, Thomas Berry, who later collected the reward money and was forced to leave the district for his and his family's safety. On the 7th January, a wild shout-out took place, during which Constable Walsh, John Clarke and Sir Watkin were wounded. Sir Watkin's wound was very dangerous, and later his arm had to be amputated. When Sergeant Byrne turned up with six more troopers the outlaws decided to give up and surrendered. The bushrangers shook hands with Walsh as they surrendered, and said they would have surrendered to him before if he had been there. Tommy Clarke asked to be treated as he should and Sergeant Wright said: "All right, old boy." At the time of their trial the police had gathered a

list of charges against Thomas Clarke, and excluding the murder of five police constables, there were nine robberies of the mails and thirty-six robberies of individuals. The offences committed by John Clarke, excluding murders, were twenty-six robberies.

Their end was predictable, and the one they certainly deserved: Tried by Sir Alfred Stephen, they were sentenced to death, and hanged at Darlinghurst gaol on 25th June 1867, and buried at Haslem's Cemetery, Rookwood.