

Australian Bushrangers

FREDERICK WARD (alias "Captain Thunderbolt")

Frederick Wordsworth Ward was born at Wilberforce in the Windsor District of the Colony of New South Wales in about 1836. (As no record of his birth exists, the exact date is unknown) He was the son of former convict Michael Ward, who was



transported to that colony in 1815, and his wife Sophia who followed him out to the colony two months later. Not much is known about Michael and Sophia's early married life, but they had ten children; William "Harry", Sophia Jane, Sarah Ann, Amelia "Emily", Edward B, Joshua, George E, Esther P, Selina Maria and Frederick Wordsworth (alias Thunderbolt).

In 1846 Frederick's parents moved to the Maitland area and at a very young age he was engaged as a groom and station hand on several properties in the lower Hunter and Paterson River districts. Over the next few years he acquired an incredible knowledge of the country spreading from his birth place, north to the Queensland border and beyond.

When Frederick was about 20 years old, he was working as a groom and horse-breaker on Tocal Station, near Maitland, New South Wales when he suddenly resigned. At this time his older brother, William, was involved in a large scale horse and cattle stealing business with Michael Blake and brothers, John and James Garbutt. Whether Fred was involved in the racket is unclear, but James Garbutt was said to have employed him to help drive 75 horses down to Windsor. After they were sold it did not take long for some of the horses to be recognised, and Garbutt and Ward were arrested. Both men were sentenced to ten years with hard labour; Garbutt for stealing the horses and Ward for "receiving".

After serving four years at Cockatoo Island, Frederick Ward was released on a ticket-of-leave on 1st July 1860. He went to the Mudgee district and there found work on Cooyal Station. During this time he met and fell in love with a half-caste woman known as Mary Ann.

Mary Anne Bugg was born at Gloucester on 7th May 1834 to James Bugg and his Aboriginal wife, Elizabeth. Mary Ann was baptized at St John's Church of England, Stroud, on 24th February 1839, and after receiving some five years of education in Sydney, her speech was described as being fairly refined. Mary was described as being a remarkably beautiful woman, five feet two and a half inches tall, dark sallow complexion, black hair, brown eyes and a nose "slightly cocked".

At the age of 14 years Mary Ann married Edmund Baker, a shepherd, employed by A. A Company, the same company who employed her father. The couple moved to the Mudgee district, where sometime later her husband died. Shortly after meeting Frederick, Mary returned to the Hunter Valley to work at Dungog and he followed

her. Mary later claimed she had been married to Ward by a Presbyterian minister in 1860, which would have been around this time.

Frederick Ward's position as a ticket-of-leave holder required him to report regularly to the police station in an appointed district. He was well overdue when he borrowed a horse in September 1861 and rode back to Mudgee to "attend muster". On arrival he found his ticket-of-leave had been revoked and he was arrested and charged for stealing the horse he was riding.

Before he could arrange witnesses for his defence from the Hunter Valley, he was tried and returned to Cockatoo Island to serve the remainder of his sentence, plus an additional three years for horse stealing. Two weeks after his return to gaol, Mary Ann gave birth to their first child, Marina Emily Ward on 26th October 1861.

Frederick was not happy about his unjust treatment and because of his rebellious behaviour spent many terms in solitary confinement. But this ended on 11th September 1863 when he and fellow inmate, Frederick Britten, escaped from the island prison. The authorities were baffled as to how they made their escape, but it appears Mary Ann had been instrumental in the planning, which enabled both men to swim to their freedom. A reward of fifty pounds was offered for their capture, while meanwhile, Mary Ann who had been employed at Balmain, less than a mile from the prison, was hiding both men in a disused boiler until the search for them died down.

The two escapees then stole two horses and rode straight to the Uralla district. Here they carried out a robbery and stole a double-barrel shotgun. Shortly afterwards during an exchange of shots with a police party, Ward was reportedly shot through the knee. It was about this time that the two men parted company and Ward headed for the Hunter Valley.

On the 21st December 1863, Fred held up the tollbar house at Campbell's Hill between Rutherford and Maitland and from that point on the name Frederick Ward ceased to exist, but a daring bushranger emerged in the New England District, calling himself Captain Thunderbolt.

Mary Ann or "Queen Yellow Long" as she was some times called, left her employment in Sydney after a safe period and joined her husband in the Hunter Valley. The couple then made their way up into Queensland to Dareel Station on the Moonie River and from there headed west to Currawillinghi Station, on the Culgoa River. The couple and their now two children settled here and after a short time Fred was employed as overseer. After some six months, Fred and some of the station hands drove a mob of cattle down to a market in the Hunter Valley and on his return learnt that the police had been informed of his whereabouts. From that point on, Fred's period of bushranging inactivity ceased.

At this time Thunderbolt did not act on his own, but with several accomplices, possibly former employees of the station. They were a bloke named McIntosh, a 17 year old known as "The Bully", and a young 13-14 year old named John Thompson.

By the end of March, a party of police from Bourke, led by Sergeant Cleary, discovered the gang's camp. Several shots were fired, one of which is believed to have wounded Thunderbolt, but the four members of the gang managed to escape. The police, however, did manage to find several stolen horses, but more importantly was the bushranger's wife, Mary Ann, and their two children. In her attempts not to be taken in, Mary Ann fought tenaciously and the police were described as having to use desperate measures to apprehend her.

They took her and the children to Willbie Willbie station and then continued to search for the gang. But at 5 p.m. Thunderbolt and his mates held up the station and after helping themselves to a quantity of gunpowder, station stores and supper, left taking Mary Ann and the children with them.

However, Mary Ann and her children did not stay free for long. A short time later they were arrested and Mary Ann was convicted under the Vagrancy Act and sentenced to 6 month's gaol. After serving only two months, Mary Ann was released due to her advanced stage of pregnancy, and returned at once to find her husband.

Although Thunderbolt was occasionally shot at by the police, he very seldom returned their fire and relied on the magnificent horses which he rode, to get him out of trouble. His philosophy was that a racehorse was a better weapon than a revolver, and usually only had one chamber loaded for safety reasons.

While Mary Ann was in prison, young Thompson was captured by the police in a shoot-out at Walford's inn at Millie, in which he was severely wounded. After recovering from his injuries, John Thompson was tried at Tamworth on 27th June 1865, and sentenced to thirty years gaol. The other two accomplices, McIntosh and The Bully, were never heard of again.

Frederick lay low around Warwick until June, and then returned to New South Wales where he joined up with Mary Ann, just in time to see the birth of their third child. Frederick engaged another part Aboriginal woman to look after Mary Ann during her confinement. They also recovered their other two children for whom Fred was said to be "passionately fond of". Their camp site at this time was on Mr. Parnell's station at Wallabadah, where they were reputed to have stayed for five months.

In around August, Thunderbolt next teamed up with a Patrick Kelly and Bandy Legged Jemmy, but after many robberies, they went their separate ways in early January, 1866. At this time Fred collected his family from Wallabadah and headed north-east.

Early in February, the police found several of Thunderbolts camp sites and in one raid shot him in the leg as he was escaping. On another raid Mary was helping her husband into the saddle when the horse he was mounting fell on him, crushing his injured leg and hurting his back. During these police raids they were also separated from their Aboriginal servant and while Thunderbolt and his family headed south to the Mount Royal Ranges, she after a week, went to the police station in Stroud

claiming that she had been held prisoner by the bushranger for ten months. She led the police to numerous former camp sites and whether she was truly helping the police or not, certainly kept them busy while Thunderbolt and his family left the district.

On the 25th March 1866 a party of police headed by magistrate, Mr Garvin, rode upon Ward and Mary Ann's camp just as she was helping him onto his horse. Fred got away but Mary and the three children were taken in. They were left at Mr. Hooke's station and a constable and blacktracker left to keep an eye on them, in the hope that they would lead them to Thunderbolt. This is exactly what Mary was doing, but the police caught up with her too soon and she was recaptured and conveyed to Stroud to face a charge of vagrancy.

She was convicted and sentenced to six months in Maitland Gaol. Fortunately for Mary, her sentence was remitted, but by this time she was suffering the effects of tuberculosis, possibly contracted from her previous term in prison. She was cared for by friends in Maitland, and after her health improved, left her two older children with friends in Singleton and went in search of her husband. This would be the last time she would see them and nothing is known of what happened to them in later life. She finally caught up with Frederick and for the next three months they lived quietly together. Then on 6th January 1867, the police caught up with them once more near Allyn Vale. Once again Fred escaped while Mary Ann was taken into custody, and following a petition written by her, was later released.

Mary Ann's arrest at this time must certainly have affected her husband, for on the 3rd February 1867, he conducted the only robbery in which he was ever recorded to have been intoxicated.

Mary Ann had often scouted for her husband and sought information, often riding for miles disguised in men's attire. Now due to her ailing health, Mary Ann is believed to have introduced her husband to Thomas Mason, a fifteen-year-old orphan, who would be able to carry out the role she had performed. Mary Ann had also left her baby with friends in the Hunter Valley and after she caught up with her husband they headed for the Borah Ranges near Elsmore.

In October Thunderbolt had several lucky escapes. In the first a fine black horse he was leading stopped a bullet from a trooper meant for him and in a second incident he was in the act of putting on his boots when surprised by two troopers who were approaching their camp on foot. Frederick bolted wearing only one boot and managed to loose them in the scrub. The latter two troopers about an hour later saw the trio on horseback conversing just off the road near Paradise Creek. The police made a rush at them firing their revolvers as the three dispersed. Mary Ann was struck and wounded, but the troopers chose to take after Thunderbolt. After a long chase in which many shots were fired by the ensuing police, Fred managed to elude his pursuers. Young Mason, meanwhile, panicked and fled in the opposite direction travelling upwards of a hundred miles a day until reaching Mr Dungar's station, 30

miles from Millie. Here he abandoned his horse as it was completely knocked up and was soon after captured.

Following the news of Mason's arrest, Thunderbolt and his wife headed south and set up camp in a cave on Bell's Mountain near Muswellbrook.

About five weeks later, Ward went to the house of a man named Bradford, on the Goulburn River. He informed them that his woman was very sick, and he wanted to see her comfortable during her declining hours. Mrs. Bradford accompanied Ward to their cave retreat where Mary was found lying helpless and speechless under a shelter of boughs. Mary Ann was taken to the Bradford's house and because she was clearly dying, a messenger was sent to fetch a priest and to inform the police. The Reverend White arrived just before she died on the 17th November 1867, and administered the last rites. An autopsy revealed she had died from "acute inflammation of the lungs".

Ward committed numerous robberies over the next few years, stealing from the mails and bailing up travelers on the roads in the district. He was described as a brilliant horseman who always tried to avoid confrontation if he could. Some of his associates during that time were William Travenor, William Monckton, and William Henry Simmons. During the last year and a half of his bushranging career, Thunderbolt chose to operate alone and not accept the responsibility of an accomplice.

On Wednesday, 25th May 1870, Thunderbolt finally met his dramatic end. On that afternoon he bailed up an Italian hawker named Giovanni Capasotti, and robbed him of £3-13-6, jewelry, a small nugget of gold and a watch and chain. Next a stockman who came along was relieved of some tobacco and a few shillings. While Thunderbolt was still holding the two men at gun point, a young man named Coglan came riding up leading another horse by the reins. Ward let his two earlier victims go and proceeded to try out the two grey horses, as he wished to take one of them.

Meanwhile, the hawker had gone to the nearest station and after borrowing a saddle and bridle, set off for the Uralla Police Station. He arrived at around 4.00 p.m., and after informing Senior-constable John Mulhall and Constable Alexander Walker, the two police galloped off in search of the bushranger.

The police finally found Thunderbolt and after several shots were fired and a long chase in which Senior-constable Mulhall's horse knocked up, Constable Walker

finally caught up with the bushranger at the junction of Kentucky Creek and Chilcott's Swamp. Thunderbolt's horse was worn out, so he jumped off and swam to the other side of the creek. Walker was keen to cut off any avenue of escape for the escapee and placing his revolver to the head of Thunderbolt's horse, shot it dead. He then traveled along the creek for about 100 yards, crossed the creek and rode back to where Ward had been, only to find that he had crossed back over. Ward was exhausted and this time stood his ground. The trooper called on him to surrender. Ward replied; "No; I'll die first". Constable Walker cried out; "You or I for it", and with that spurred his horse into the creek. But the trooper's horse stumbled, allowing Thunderbolt to make a dive at him and try and drag him from his horse. In the struggle that ensued, Walker placed his revolver at Ward's chest and pulled the trigger. The bullet passed through his lungs and with a cry of pain. Ward collapsed into the water. He quickly rose again and tried to pull the Constable off his horse once more. With all barrels emptied, the trooper now used his gun like a club and struck Thunderbolt over the head. The bushranger sank beneath the surface of the water. Walker dragged him from the creek and believing all signs of life had expired, went to get a horse and cart to retrieve the body. On his return Walker could not find the Thunderbolt's body. The following morning they returned and found Ward had crawled a little distance into the bush, and was still alive, but he did not survive the trip into Uralla and the dreaded bushranger, "Captain Thunderbolt", was dead. Frederick Ward's body was buried in the Uralla cemetery where his grave can still be seen today. Constable Walker, for his bravery, received the reward of £400 and was duly promoted.

Ward's career had seen him involved in more than eighty major hold-ups and robberies, which netted him almost £20,000. Much of this money, however, was in cheques and half notes, useless to a bushranger. It is interesting that the reward of £400, did in no way match the value of several of the race horses which Thunderbolt rode, which were in excess of £1000.

But questions have arisen as to the true identity of the man shot by Constable Walker. Family descendants have suggested that it was his half brother Harry, as it was he that had been shot in the knee during an exchange of shots with the police and not Fred. It was this injury that William Monkton used to positively identify the body as that of Fred Ward, and not the marking that Thunderbolt was known to have had such as the large mole on the back of the second finger of the left hand.

On the Saturday after Ward's supposed death, two troopers from Uralla were attending a race meeting at Glen Innes, when they noticed a horse that belonged to Thunderbolt tied up at the track. After watching the horse for some time, suddenly a man jumped onto it and left before they could stop him. The police gave chase and

pursued him in a south-easterly direction, finally losing him at a place called "Wards Mistake" near Guy Fawkes. (now called Ebor) This was incidentally only a few miles from his sister's home.

When the troopers reported back to Armidale, they were told to forget their report as the bushranger was already dead.