

## Australian Bushrangers

### JAMES ALPIN MACPHERSON (alias "The Wild Scotchman")

James was born at Wester Aviemore in Scotland in the year 1841. He was taken to Australia by his parents in 1855, where his father worked for Mr McConnell at Cressbrook in Queensland. Young James did well at school, and at eighteen years of age he was apprenticed to Mr Petrie, the well known stonemason in Brisbane. James enjoyed the reputation of an intelligent, hard working young man. He was also popular as a member of the Debating Class in the Brisbane Mechanics School of Arts, and well known as a fluent speaker and a diligent reader.



There was a mystery about how he had come to be a bushranger - a mystery never solved. A son of decent parents, with a solid education, trained by the prominent Mr Petrie, who used to be very particular about the choice of his students, a young man with a bright future ahead, who spoke several languages and was well respected, could have certainly done better for himself than to have become the leader of an evil, bloodthirsty gang of wretches! Unfortunately, at the age of twenty-two he changed the course of his life, took to the roads, and became just that. He began with sticking up Wills' Hotel on the Houghton River, and then went to New South Wales, promising to fight a duel with the head of the police force, Sir Frederick Pottinger. It is known that he did exchange shots with Sir Frederick and some troopers, and received a slight wound. A warrant had been issued for his arrest in New South Wales, but by then he was back in Queensland. Here he and his gang made their presence known by robbing the mails, sticking up travellers, stealing race-horses, and breaking into homes in isolated places, where they helped themselves to the hard-earned money and assets of poor workers, received after shearing seasons or annual musterings. The name of James Alpin Macpherson was forgotten, as he used alias's like "Scotchey", "The Wild Scotchman", "Scotia", "John Bruce", "Mar", or "Kerr". The inevitable happened in 1866, when he was captured and sentenced to twenty-five years imprisonment, but he was released after serving only eight years. Once again he became James Alpin Macpherson, and worked as a stockman, never to be in trouble with the law again.

When he was thirty-seven years old, he married Elizabeth Hoszfeldt, the seventeen year old daughter of a German settler from Isisford. She bore him four sons and two daughters. Her husband died in a riding accident in 1895, aged fifty-four. He was buried in an unmarked grave in the Burketown cemetery in Queensland. The historians call him "Queensland's only bushranger", but by some people he was remembered as "the Robin Hood of the Burnett". Perhaps another Elizabeth knew why. One night, an attack by fourteen bushrangers was launched on her home deep in the bush, where she was alone with her new-born son. The eyes of their leader mellowed as they lit on the baby, and he ordered his men to leave the house without touching anything. He asked permission to hold the little boy, and when he left, he had tears in his eyes. Later the young mother found a thick wad of banknotes tucked

into her baby's cot. Though he was usually spoken of as a wild, reckless person, she knew that he was capable of tenderness and reason, and she wished that he wouldn't have lived such a worthless life.

And time went by...., but the two never met again. Still, whenever she prayed, Elizabeth Lawrence wouldn't forget a prayer for the soul of one James Alpin Macpherson.