

HISTORY OF LAW AND ORDER *****

Law and order were non-existent on the Korong field in 1852. Drinking was indulged in freely and bushrangers infested the neighbourhood. Conspicuous amongst the bushrangers were a coloured man, named Black Douglas, and the other named Captain Melville. Life in the tents provided an excellent opportunity for robberies, the fabric of the tent being easily slit with a knife. Captain Melville was captured in December, 1852 and eventually strangled himself whilst in Melbourne Jail, on August 10th, 1857. (Despite the legend about Captain Melville's activities in the area, there is however, no proof available to substantiate the legend.)

Law and order was first preserved on the field by Constable Graham in 1852 and the Police Magistrate, Mr. Webster. Mr. Webster was a corpulent gentleman and tradition has it that on one occasion a highly respected resident addressed Mr. Webster as "Potgut" in a moment of irritation. This remark offended the Magistrate's dignity and earned the gentleman free lodging for a night in the "logs".

Sergeant Cahill, later in charge of Wedderburn Police Station, once captured "Morgan" the Bushranger in a small hut near Wychitella.

An account of the life of another notorious criminal at Wedderburn, J.T. Sullivan, or "Tom" as he wished to be known - is given in the Wedderburn Express of May 16th, 1902.

"JOSEPH THOMAS SULLIVAN" - In the year 1870 the writer of the following letter belonged to the gang of detestable wretches, whose diabolical deeds were published throughout the world as "The Mangatapu Murders". For some years prior to his appearance in New Zealand, he was a resident of Wedderburn, sometime keeping a boxing and dancing saloon, and, when opportunity offered to get near a good paying claim, worked as a miner. He was also a clever bush carpenter, and in good or bad luck, was always kept well dressed by an equally clever wife. During the latter period of his residence in Wedderburn, Sullivan occupied a comfortable house with a neat, well kept garden, on the site now occupied by Messrs. Leck and Craig's store, and when the Wedderburn cemetery was laid out, he was appointed trustee for the Roman Catholic section. On the opening of the Inglewood field, by the brothers Thompson, Sullivan ran a conveyance between there and Wedderburn. He also purchased a block of land half way between these places, where his wife conducted a refreshment house, around which flowers and shrubs were planted as if the place was intended to be a permanent home. However, traffic soon fell off, the place was sold and Sullivan drifted away to his devilish associations in New Zealand. Among the victims of his ruthless gang, poor old Jimmy Battle, was probably known to Sullivan as a digger in 'Poverty Gully', Wedderburn, where he made a few hundred pounds. With this little fortune he went home to Sussex, bought a new boat and gear for his fisher sons, and then returned to the scene of his former success, hoping to make sufficient for a final trip home and further benevolences. In this he was disappointed, and lured by the hope of better luck in New Zealand, the simple, kindly, old fellow hurried there, and to his dismal fate

After the trial and condemnation of the murderous gang, Sullivan, who saved his neck by becoming Queen's evidence, was sent to England by the

authorities to save him from lynching by the diggers, but his portrait, having been displayed throughout Britain, he was soon recognised and found he was equally detested there. Wretched, hunted for his life, perhaps haunted by remorse, the unhappy creature got himself smuggled back to Wedderburn, in hope that those who knew him as an average decent citizen, might tolerate his presence. The good people of the town had no objection to do that and the 'unco guid', did far more. They clothed, fed, housed, and prayed for him, until he 'waxed fat', and innate; vanity and desire for prominence led him to forget the spiritual humanity he professed, and assumed airs unbecoming repentance and reformation. Of course this inconsistency was resented so forcibly by the unregenerate, who didn't believe in faith without works, that Sullivan sought the protection of the local magistracy, who bluntly told him that if he persisted in offensively attracting attention he must abide the consequences. After this rebuff, and finding his wife - who was still in Wedderburn - declined to join him, his compassionate helpers persuaded him to quietly shift his quarters. His subsequent career has been frequently and variously reported, the last I heard some 12 or 14 years ago was of his perambulating New South Wales distributing - for a consideration - prints of the 'Virgin', the 'Crucifixion', the 'Nativity', etc., in hope by so-doing to atone for past misdeeds."

James Flett in his book, "Dunolly", mentions another criminal who conducted his activities in the Wedderburn area. The bushranger was named James Turner alias Gipsy Smith. He was a convict who escaped from Hobart but recaptured and sent to Norfolk Island for 16 years. Two months after his escape from Hobart, Turner chose Mt. Moliagul as his field of operations after his gang killed a policeman at Ararat.

Apparently the lack of an escort for the nuggets of Mt. Korong found shortly before, led Turner to the foot of Mt. Moliagul, where on about October 17th (1856), he robbed all who passed along the Korong Road and tied them up to trees. Despite a reward of £400, Turner and his gang escaped the Dunolly Police. Turner and another member of his gang were captured eventually at Adelaide Lead (near Maryborough).

As Turner's sphere of operations was usually the ranges between Korong and Moliagul, it is highly likely that the so called Captain Melville's Caves may be incorrectly named - perhaps they should be named James Turner's Caves instead!