



The Legend of Captain Thunderbolt - Frederick Ward

The Thunderbolt legend lives on most strongly in the New England district of northern New South Wales and especially around Uralla. Of all the bushrangers who engaged in their illegal and often colourful careers in Australia during the first 100 years of white settlement, Thunderbolt, hero or horse thief, was at large for probably the longest period.

For almost six years and six months he was pursued by regular mounted Police, especially commissioned bounty hunters and enlisted Aboriginal trackers.

Bushrangers were regarded as heroes by the battling small land holders who also recognised their common enemy as the Government and the Law. They considered Thunderbolt to be a victim of circumstance and they sympathised and identified with him. The Police force was over governed by Parliamentary and grossly underpaid, under trained and overworked and supplied with horses of dubious breeding.

Fred Ward finally met his match on the afternoon of 25th May, 1870. He "bailed up" firstly John and Liza Blanch near their Inn, then Coghlan and an Italian hawker, Giovanni Cappusotto. Resenting this action, Cappusotto alerted the Uralla Police Officers Mulhall and Walker.

The Police exchanged shots with Thunderbolt and Constable Walker, gave chase. Thunderbolt was finally cornered in a waterhole in Kentucky Creek some 4 kilometres distant. A coroner's Inquest was held on the body of Fred Ward at Blanch's Inn and he was buried in the Uralla cemetery.

Defiant Scoundrel? Or Gentleman Bushranger?

Thunderbolt began his life as Frederick Ward at Wilberforce near Windsor, N.S.W., in either 1835 or another reference states 16th May 1836. The birth date is not recorded. His father was a convict, Michael Ward, transported to the colony in the "Indefatigable" in May 1815 and his mother Sophia arrived two months later in the "Northampton". About 1846, upon Michael gaining his convict freedom, the whole family moved to the Maitland area.

Fred Ward as a youth, became well known for breaking and training horses. When he was about 20 years of age he fell foul of the Law. Helped by James Garbutt, they drove stolen horses from his brother William "Harry" Ward and Michael Blake's farm at Lambs Valley for sale at the Windsor sale yards. Several of the horses were recognised as being Messrs. Zuill and Reynolds' property. Others were marked with the famous Tocal brand. (i).

Fred Ward and James Garbutt were sentenced to ten years each with hard labour to the infamous Cockatoo Island prison in Sydney Harbour. (ii) On the 1st July 1860 Fred Ward was released on a ticket-of-leave to work in the Mudgee district. While working near Mudgee, he made acquaintance of Mary Ann Bugg, a well educated half-cast aboriginal girl who had been recently widowed. When she returned to the Hunter Valley to take up work at Dungog, Ward followed her. They married some time in September 1861, possibly at Stroud. (iii) After their marriage he borrowed a horse to report the Mudgee Police for muster, but on arriving late he found his ticket-of-leave revoked for failure to "attend muster". In addition he was charged with stealing the horse and was sent to serve the remainder of his original sentence. Two weeks after Fred Ward's return to prison, Mary Anne Bugg gave birth to their first child, Marina Emily Ward. (iv)

Mary Anne Bugg followed Fred Ward to Sydney and assisted him and another prisoner, Fred Britten, to escape from Cockatoo Island. They swam through shark infested water to the mainland on the night of 11th September 1863. The two men headed for New England and stole a double barrelled gun and some pork from a widow on Gostwyck run, near Uralla. Several days later, Sergeant Grainger came upon the escapees attempting to hold up a mail coach at the "Split Rocks" (soon to become known as "Thunderbolt Rock") south of Uralla. Fred Ward was shot through the knee but managed to escape. (v)

The two men separated and Ward alone robbed the tollbar at Campbells Hill near Maitland. He proceeded to pound on the wall of the office and demanded the surrender of the toll money. It was this act which earned him the name "Thunderbolt". (vi)

Thus began the bushranging legend of Fred Ward, also known as Captain Thunderbolt.

The following list records crimes purported to have been enacted by Thunderbolt and his gang over the following years:

- 25 mail coach robberies
- 16 hotels and stores
- 16 stations and residences
- 6 hawkers

Mary Ann Bugg

"Captain Thunderbolt's Lady"

There were two "female bushrangers" Mary Ann wife & chief lieutenant of Fred Ward and "Black Mary" companion of Michael Howe, notorious bushranger in Tasmania in the early 1800's. While much is made of, and written about, the partners of the other bushrangers - little is recorded on the life of our female bushrangers. In the case of Mary Ann, she is responsible for Fred Ward being at large for so long and her distinct femininity probably and her Aboriginal heritage was the reason for Fred's dislike of using firearms. She certainly taught him to read and write. Her skills developed as part of her aboriginality, served them both well in their life in the bush. The blending of Aboriginal and European features in Mary Ann created a remarkable beauty, which was commented on many times in her career.

Mary Ann Bugg was born near Gloucester/Stroud in New South Wales. Her father was a shepherd named James Brigg (who subsequently changed his name to Bugg). He was born in Essex in England in 1801 and on 18 July 1825 was transported for life for stealing meat. He arrived in Sydney on the ship "SOSTRIS" on 26 March 1826, and on 15 January 1828 was assigned to the Australian Agricultural Company as Overseer of Shepherds. He was successful in his duties and in 1834 was granted a Ticket of Leave. This meant he was technically a free man who could own property but could not leave the Colony.

He took up with an Aboriginal woman called Elizabeth and from this union were born Mary Ann and a brother named John. The children were baptised in the Church of England religion in 1839 & later they were sent to a boarding school in Sydney when Mary Ann was 10. Mary Ann learnt to read and write, sew, cook and other domestic skills. She had probably also been taught bushcraft and other Aboriginal skills by her mother during her early days in Stroud. James subsequently took up with another woman, Charlotte Derby, with whom he had a further 6 children. He married Charlotte in 1848 after their fifth child was born. Mary Ann returned to the property in 1845 and was employed in domestic chores.

On 01 June 1846, at the age of 14 (and in common with many girls of the period) she married a shepherd named Edmund Baker and the couple moved to Mudgee. The couple were employed by a woman named Mrs Sarah Ann Shepperd (nee Ward) the sister of Frederick Ward and his brother William. The property was known as the Garbutt property, being the name of her first husband. Mary would have met Ward at the property and possibly some attraction was formed between them over the next few years.

How far such attraction may have developed is not known, for in 1856 Ward and Garbutt were sentenced to Cockatoo Island prison for ten years for receiving stolen horses. They served only four years and were released on Tickets of Leave, returning to the Cooyal Station in July 1860. While Ward had been in gaol Baker had died, so, after a short time, Mary Ann left Cooyal and moved back to Dungog where Fred Ward followed her. Mary Ann later claimed that, during this time, she was married by the same Wesleyan minister who had previously married her, although no Marriage Certificate has ever been found. Fred Ward had to attend regular muster at Mudgee Police Station. In October 1861 Ward borrowed a horse & returned to Mudgee to attend muster. When he arrived he was arrested again, for arriving late for muster, where he had been assigned, and for being in possession of a horse for which he could not prove ownership. He was returned to Cockatoo Island to serve the rest of his sentence plus another three years for the second crime of stealing the horse. Two weeks later Mary Ann gave birth to their first child, a girl named Marina Emily Ward.

The next few months are somewhat of a mystery, however, one account states Mary Ann placed her child in care as soon as Marina was weaned and then moved to Balmain (near Cockatoo Island) where she found employment as a housemaid under the name Louisa Mason. Folklore says that she frequently swam or went to the island with food for Ward and a file so he could cut through his chains. Whether or not this is true will never be known however on 11 September 1863 Fred Ward and another prisoner named Fred Britten escaped by swimming to Balmain and it is believed Mary Ann assisted in this escape. The police were slow to admit of their escape as no one had ever escaped from Cockatoo Island before. After being hidden for several days until the police search ceased, the men moved north, to be followed a few weeks later by Mary Ann. They were reported at Singleton in November and shortly afterwards robbed a hut near Uralla, of a firearm and food. Shortly afterward, both men parted company with Britten going to Victoria. Ward returned to the Hunter region to meet up with Mary Ann. There he held-up the Rutherford tollbar and thus began the "time of the bushranger Captain

mounting his horse left before they could arrest him. They chased him in a south-easterly direction until he managed to evade them in the deep gullies at "Ward's Mistake", near Guy Fawkes (now known as Ebor) only a few miles from his sisters home. When the police reported back to Armidale they were told to forget their report, as Thunderbolt was already dead. However the report was filed and has been identified recently in the police files in Sydney, very much agreeing with family tradition.

Family tradition claimed that Thunderbolt remained in the area for several weeks, being seen at the local Hernani dances several times, before returning to Sydney. Around the Ebor area many elderly residents still tell stories, past on to them, about their elder aunt/mother having danced with Thunderbolt for at least 6 weeks after he was shot. It has been noted that "Fred Britten" and his new bride left by boat for America about 3 months after the death of Thunderbolt in Uralla.

4. Who is buried in the Uralla Cemetery?

It is my personal belief that William (Harry) Ward died on the May 25, 1870 at URALLA under the name of "Captain Thunderbolt" & because of a deliberate miss identification by Will Monkton was buried under the name of Frederick Ward. It must be noted that there are no death certificate to be found for William Ward although his mother's death certificate of 1874 does not have him listed as alive at that time.

Will Monkton was released from jail as a result of this identification. Following the identification both the police & the Dr added the name Frederick Ward to their records. It has been said that over 300 local people on filing past the body, identified the body as that of Fred Ward. This is an important point as the body was not identified by them as either that of Frederick or Harry Ward but as that of Thunderbolt. The statement "It's Thunderbolt alright", was said by all who viewed the body. Many authors have subsequently jumped to the incorrect conclusion that the body was definitely identified as that of Fred Ward, and they mistakenly state this as a fact.

5. What happened to Thunderbolt's loot?

Virtually none of the proceeds of Thunderbolt's escapades was ever recovered. During his career he took about 20,000 pounds, about \$1,000,000 in 2002 money. Following his "death" at Uralla as reported above Thunderbolt remained in the New England area for at least 6 weeks. (Personal note:- I know what I would be doing during those weeks with money hidden in various caves around the area and the police no longer searching for me!!!! This possibly explains why none of his money has ever been found.)

Thunderbolt

By Pannifex & Cummings

There's a graveyard in Uralla
That's in New South Wales you know
Where a highway man lies buried
Many, many years ago.
Thunderbolt his tombstone names him,
He who rides the range at night,
Those who've met him in the moonlight
Say he's Thunderbolt all right!

Thunderbolt! It's Thunderbolt
Riding to Uralla,
From the Moonbi Ranges
As he used to ride of yore;
The past returns to greet him
And his ghostly friends to greet him,
But he needn't fear the troopers,
He is safe for ever more!

People loved this handsome outlaw,
People loved him far & wide,
Tried to guard him from the troopers
When he roamed the countryside.
Housewives used to hang a blanket
As a signal on the line
Red ones said "Look out for troopers!"
White ones asked him into dine!

Came the day that shocked New England
Someone told the p'lice he'd seen
Thunderbolt with pals at Blanche's
Raising glasses to the Queen.
Swift the troopers rode to take him,
Even to this day folk speak
Of the way the troopers shot him,
Shot him by Kentucky Creek.

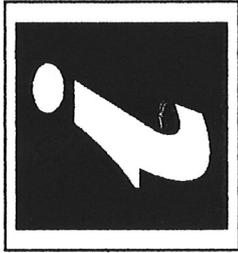
There's a legend in New England
Thunderbolt has never died.
Still he haunts the Moonbi Ranges
And the lovely countryside.
Folks declare that they have seen him
When the moon is on the wane
Riding like a flash of lightning
To Uralla once again!

Compiled by Barry Sinclair, Uralla. Contact me E-mail:- barrymor@tpgi.com.au

For further information on Thunderbolt go to my Web Page
URL <http://www4.tpg.com.au/users/barrymor/thunderbolt.html>

Uralla Visitor Information Centre
104 Bridge Street
Uralla, NSW 2358

Phone 02 6778 4496, E-Mail urallat@northnet.com.au
Web URL <http://new-england.org/uralla>



Compiled by Barry Sinclair, Uralla.

Contact me by E-mail:- barymor@tpgi.com.au

For further information on Thunderbolt go to my Web Page

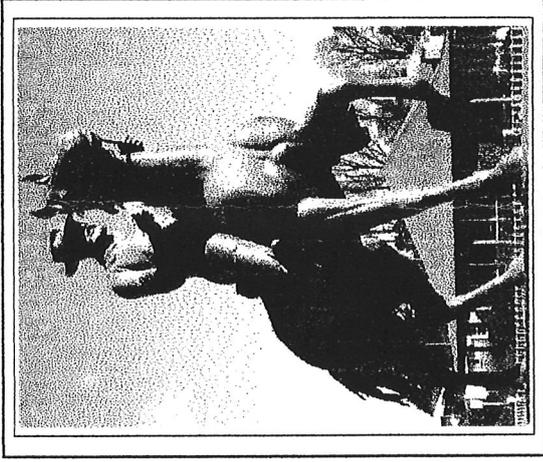
URL <http://www4.tpg.com.au/users/barymor/thunderbolt.html>

Uralla Visitor Information Centre
104 Bridge Street
Uralla, NSW 2358

Phone 02 6778 4496

E-Mail:-urallat@northnet.com.au

Web URL <http://new-england.org/uralla>



Captain Thunderbolt

The Gentleman Bushranger

Family Stories

&

Significant Dates

All material produced in this brochure is Copyright ©.

No material may be copied or in any way reproduced without the express permission of the author.