

# Reward for Courage

## BUSHRANGER MEDALS IN THE NATIONAL HISTORICAL COLLECTION



Photos: Lannon Harley

On 6 February 1865 four young men engaged in a running gun battle with the notorious bushrangers John Gilbert, Ben Hall and John Dunn just south of Goulburn. Eleven years later they were each awarded a gold medal commemorating their 'gallant and faithfull service' to the colony of New South Wales. Two of those medals are now in the National Historical Collection as part of the Faithfull Family and Robert Faithfull collections.

During the 1870s the New South Wales government awarded an uncertain number of gold and silver medals for bravery against bushrangers. Such medals had been promised since the 1860s, ordered in 1870 by Premier Sir Charles Cowper, but not produced until 1875. The 1870 decision appears to have been a response to the killing of bushranger Frederick Ward by Constable Alexander Walker at Uralla on 24 May 1870. At least seventeen medals are known to have been awarded between 1875 and 1901. In general, gold medals were presented to civilians and silver medals to police.

There were, however, a number of anomalies in the award of medals. For example, J McLerie, the Inspector-General of Police, was awarded a gold medal although he had never

personally faced a bushranger, whilst publican Charles Beauvais was only awarded a silver medal despite having grappled with, and killed police-killer William Ruthers (or Rutherford). Very few, if any, of the recipients were of Irish-Catholic extraction, despite their significant role in the suppression of bushrangers. Large landholders, are, however, well represented.

New South Wales was relatively free of large-scale bushranging until the 1860s, when there was an outbreak of activity in the Lachlan Valley. Frank Gardiner (c1830-1903), John Gilbert (c1842-65) and Ben Hall (c1837-65) led the most notorious gangs of the period. From early 1863 to April 1865 the Gilbert-Hall Gang reputedly robbed ten mail coaches, held up twenty-one stores and homesteads, stole twenty-three racing horses, took over the village of Canowindra three times, and killed two policemen. They also attacked the homesteads of prominent government officials and squatters. Hall and Gilbert were both shot dead by police in May 1865.

Membership of the Gilbert-Hall Gang changed rapidly as individuals surrendered to police, 'retired', were captured or killed. John O'Meally (1840-63) and John Dunn (c1847-66)

were probably the best known. O'Meally joined the gang in about March 1862. He was involved in several armed robberies; the attack on Gold Commissioner Keightley's home at Dunn's Plains; and, allegedly the murder of at least two people. O'Meally was shot dead by David Campbell as he, Gilbert and Hall attacked Campbell's home outside Eugowra in November 1863. The silver tea urn and two testimonials presented to David and Amelia Campbell for killing John O'Meally are now in the National Historical Collection. Dunn was with Gilbert and Hall when they attacked the four Faithfull brothers. Captured by police, he was hanged at Darlinghurst Gaol in March 1866.

On 6 February 1865 Gilbert, Hall and Dunn had been robbing travellers along the Goulburn-Bungendore road when they encountered a light wagon containing the four Faithfull brothers William Percy (1844-1924), George Ernest (1846-1910), Henry Montague (1848-1908) and Reginald (1850-82). Ordered to 'bail-up' by the bushrangers, they refused. There is a story that they were more frightened of what their mother Mary would say if they surrendered to bushrangers than of the bushrangers themselves. Armed only

with a rifle and a pistol, they managed to fight off the gang and make their way back to their home, *Springfield*. Ninety-eight bullets were apparently taken from the light wagon they were driving. The only fatality was 'Young Waverley', the thoroughbred horse Gilbert was riding.

Originally the brothers were awarded a shared medal in March 1876 but, following lobbying by their father, William Pitt Faithfull, three duplicate medals were awarded.

These two medals are part of the important collection of bushranger-related material in the National Historical Collection. As well as the medals and the items presented to the Campbell family, this includes the John Hanlon transcription of Ned Kelly's 'Jerilderie letter', a Ned Kelly death mask, and a facsimile of the armour worn by Joe Byrne at Glenrowan in June 1880.

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