

Finally captured

Ironically, Jimmy and Joe had previously both been employed by the police to track escaped criminals and it was Jimmy's superior bush skills that kept them one step ahead of their pursuers. They even left taunting letters for the police to find.

Jimmy was captured in an ambush on 27 October 1900 but Joe escaped. Four days later while travelling towards the Aboriginal mission at St Clair near Singleton Joe was shot and killed.

The police inquiry into Joe Governors death was conducted from a shed at the rear of the Caledonian Hotel in Singleton. His body was laid out on a table for viewing by interested locals. In a bizarre scene, wax matches were struck against the soles of the bushranger's callused feet, proving his soles to be very tough, Joe had always walked and ridden barefoot. Gruesomely, before his burial, Joe Governor's head was removed at the request of the authorities and sent to Sydney. The rest of his body was buried one metre outside of the Anglican Cemetery at Whittingham a few kilometres South-East of Singleton.

(In 1900 criminals were never buried on consecrated ground)

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Bushranger
Joe Governor



Joe Governor, the man, the legend, the tragedy

Bushrangers, like the American highwaymen, were outlaws who used the vast Australian bush as a refuge to hide from the authorities between committing their robberies.



The last and most notorious of the Singleton bushrangers was Joe Governor. The Thomas Keneally novel (1972) and film (1978) 'The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith' was based on the story of Jimmy Governor, Joe's brother.

Between July and October 1900 Joe Governor and his brother Jimmy were pursued by a posse of 200 police and 2000 civilians, following a terrifying rampage which left a trail of nine bodies over 350km. A reward of £1,000 posted for their capture.

The Governor brothers who had grown up in the Singleton district, were employed building fences for station owner John Mawbey at Breeelong near Gilgandra. The catalyst for the tragedy was an altercation between Jimmy's wife Ethel, Mrs Mawbey and the local school teacher Helen Kurz, over flour rations for the aboriginal workers. That night, Jimmy and another of the Aboriginal fence builders, Jack Underwood, armed with a rifle and two axes, went to the homestead to intervene on Ethel's behalf and demand an apology. There

were no men in the homestead at the time, just the two women and seven children. After a heated exchange where the schoolteacher taunted Jimmy, he and Jacky murdered both women and three of the children. A young surviving witness raised the alarm, resulting in the huge state-wide manhunt.

Although Joe Governor had no part in the homestead murders, he and Jimmy together with Jacky Underwood fled Gilgandra and as such became notorious bushrangers. By September the Governor brothers had separated from Jacky Underwood but their reign of terror continued.

While outlawed and on the run the brothers murdered four more victims as revenge for perceived past wrongs against them and committed around 100 other crimes from assault to stealing food, horses, money and ammunition from huts and homesteads they encountered along the way.

Generally, the early Australian settlers supported bushrangers against authority, supplying outlaws with horses and fresh food and supplies, seeing them as heroes of the time. However, the settlers refused to help Joe & Jimmy elude justice, appalled they had committed such widespread atrocities. Many of the families living in the area abandoned their homes and farms and fled, fearing for their lives.

Singleton in the late 1800s was very different to the Singleton we know today.

According to The Singleton Argus newspaper, the landlord of one of the hotels in John Street, was lucky not to be included in the Governor brothers' death toll. When much younger, the brothers had refused to leave the hotel premises and when the landlord whipped Jimmy to encourage him to move on, Joe & Jimmy then lay siege to the building, bombarding the roof with bricks and stones. The landlord then caught Jimmy Governor and tied him to the fence of the hotel for an entire day. For years after, Jimmy threatened to seek revenge on the landlord and his family.



Joe's body was transported from the dense bushland campsite where he was shot and killed to Singleton on the back of a horse with the pack saddle above. (The pack saddle is on permanent display at the Singleton Historical Society Museum)