

MATTHEW BRADY, BUSHRANGER

(1799-1826)

by

Reg. A. Watson



Matthew Brady, whose proper name was Bready, was born in Manchester of Irish parents. His occupation in England was that of a gentleman's servant, probably a groom. He was an excellent rider and perfect in his horsemanship.

Brady was convicted of stealing a basket and some butter, bacon, sugar and rice and tried at [Lancaster](#) on 17 April 1820. He received a seven-year sentence of transportation, arriving in Australia in the convict ship *Juliana* on 29 December 1820.

He rebelled against the conditions in Sydney and received, over time, a total of 350 lashes in punishment for misdemeanours and attempts to escape. In 1823, he was sent to the new penal settlement at Sarah Island in Macquarie Harbor, which had been established for secondary offenders and desperate prisoners.



Remains of Sarah Island 2020. Reg Watson photo.

On 7 June 1824, Brady was part of a group of fifteen escapees from Sarah Island, who sailed a whaleboat around the south coast to the River Derwent and spent the next two years as bushrangers with him as leader and James McCabe as his lieutenant.

The Hobart Town Gazette (22nd October 1825 P.1) describes him as being 5'5 1/2" with dark brown hair.

Brady was considered a gentleman, who rarely robbed or insulted women. On one occasion McCabe tried to force a servant girl to kiss him. As a result, an outraged Brady shot him in the hand and threw him out of the gang.

However, the military considered him a dangerous bushranger, particularly after Brady's gang held up the township of Sorell (population in 1826 of bond and free – 703). There, they captured sixteen soldiers and a number of settlers, a total of 36 men. They then locked them in the small gaol.

Knowing that Lieutenant William Gunn who led a campaign to capture the gang was in Sorell, two of Brady's men, James Murphy and Josiah Bird went looking for him. They understood he was at the home of Alexander Laing so they approached the premises. Knocking at the door, it was opened by Laing's friend James McAra who was dining with him. The bushrangers fired, wounding McAra in the wrist. Finding no Gunn there they then went to the house of the Rev Dr James Garrett. By this time, Alexander Laing had fled his own house, making his way to Garrett's. Upon reaching the house, Laing raised the alarm. Gunn grabbed a shotgun but upon meeting Murphy, the latter fired first, shattering Gunn's right arm and wounding him in the chest. Bird also fired and hit Gunn in the right arm as well.

Having done the deed, the bushrangers left the town and fled to Spring Bay, east coast through Orielton.

Meanwhile Gunn was seriously wounded and while he and McAra received treatment, a J.E. Addison hurried to Hobart Town to obtain medical assistance. Both men were treated by Colonial Surgeon, Scott, who amputated the arm near the shoulder joint.

The township of Sorell was in a panic, many believing that the gang would return, after learning Gunn survived the attack. When the news of the affair reached Hobart Town, there was also panic. Brady and his gang did not return.

On 14 April 1825 Lieut. Governor George Arthur posted rewards for the capture of Brady and his gang of 25 pounds and a conditional pardon which included for any District Constable 50 acres of land if caught in his district.

Van Diemen's Land.



Proclamation.

BY HIS EXCELLENCY Colonel GEORGE ARTHUR, Lieutenant Governor of the Island of Van Diemen's Land, and its Dependencies.

WHEREAS *Matthew Brady, Patrick Bryant, Josiah Bird, William Brown, Michael Cody, Patrick Dunne, James Goodwin, John Gregory, James McKenney, James Murphy, Edward Williams, and William Tilly* (for whose Apprehension Rewards have been already offered), yet remain at large; and have lately added to their Crimes of Murder, and other personal Outrage and Plunder, by a most wanton and unprovoked Attack upon the Premises and Property of WILLIAM FITZINGHAM LAWRENCE, Esquire, at his Farm near the Lake River, and destroying by Fire his House, with all the Barns and Out-houses, several large Stacks of Wheat, together also with the whole of the Wool produced by the shearing of his Flocks for the last three Years; and when leaving the Farm, threatened to fire upon and be avenged of all such Persons as followed them, having previously attempted to Murder the Overseer of the Farm by discharging their Guns at him:—AND WHEREAS many evil-disposed Persons connect themselves with the Offenders, by purchasing or procuring a Market for their Plunder, and, so far from giving any Information that may lead to their Apprehension, receive, harbour, and maintain them, thereby committing a Crime punishable by Death, all which Persons are hereby warned not to entertain the slightest hope of Mercy being extended to them in the Event of their Conviction:—NOW, THEREFORE, for the Protection of the Settlers, and inducing them and all other good and peaceable Members of Society, to co-operate promptly and vigorously with the Government in the prosecution of these Measures, which it is constantly desirous of adopting for the Welfare of the Inhabitants of this Island, and in particular at this important Time—

I DO HEREBY PROCLAIM, that, instead of the Rewards already offered, the Persons who may apprehend and lodge in any of His Majesty's Gaols in this Island, the Twelve Offenders before named, or any of them, shall immediately receive from the Government as follows, that is to say:—For every such Offender, either the Sum of One Hundred Guineas, or, (at his election) Three Hundred Acres of Land, free from all Restrictions:—And that if the Offenders shall be apprehended by Fitmess, or Fitmess shall be of the Party by whom those Offenders may be apprehended, such Fitmess shall receive a Free Passage, in addition to their Share of the before-mentioned Rewards:—AND I DO HEREBY FURTHER PROCLAIM, that any Person giving such Information as may lead to the Apprehension of the said Offenders, shall immediately afterwards receive from the Government, either the Sum of One Hundred Guineas, or, (at his election) Three Hundred Acres of Land, free from all Restrictions:—And that if the Information be given by a Person, he shall receive a Free Passage, and be provided with a free Passage to England, in addition to the last-mentioned Reward:—AND I DO HEREBY FURTHER PROCLAIM, that the Chief Constable of the District in which the Offenders may be apprehended, shall immediately afterwards, receive a Grant of One Hundred Acres of Land, free from all Restrictions, provided it shall be certified by the Magistrates of such District, that he then, and at all Times, assiduously exerted himself to detect and apprehend the said Offenders:—And, for the Purpose of aiding and assisting in clearing the Island of this most heinous Banditti, the Settlers are hereby most earnestly requested both to see themselves, and associate in Parties, under the Advice and Direction of the Magistrates of their Districts, with whom all the Military Parties have been placed in Commutation; or, if there shall not be any Magistrate residing in the District, then of their Chief District Constables:—LASTLY, I do hereby strictly command the Chief and Petty Constables throughout the Island, and particularly Persons holding *Warrants of Arrest*, to be watching and assisting the Magistrates, to the utmost of their Power, by all possible Means, not only in the apprehension of the Offenders before offered to, but also in discovering and communicating, as quickly as possible, the Names and Residences of those who receive, harbour, or maintain the said Offenders, or any of them.

Given under my Hand and Seal at Government House, the First Day of March, in the Year of Our Lord One thousand eight hundred and twenty-six.

GEO. ARTHUR, (L. S.)

By His Excellency's Command,

JOHN MONTAGU, Secretary.

God save the King.

WILLIAM BROWN, No. 228.

5 R. 6J in. light brown hair, blue eyes, 36 years of age, a labourer, tried at Middlesex, April 1818, sentence 14, arrived here in the *Demerary*, 1820, native place London; personal marks, *Balanitis, Adam and Eve, ear and nose, on right ear; ear, nose, and two scars on the left arm.*

JOSIAH BIRD, No. 274.

5 R. 6J in. thick complexion, black hair, dark brown eyes, 41 years of age, a farmer's labourer, tried at Cambridge, October 1818, sentence 7 years, arrived here in the *Ceylon*, Oct. 1819, native place Cambridge; personal marks, *Slight degree of left hand crippled and maimed.*

PATRICK BRYANT, 227.

5 R. 4 in. brown hair and eyes, 28 years of age, a gentleman's servant, tried in Kent, March 1820, sentence 14, arrived here in the *Merita*, 1820, native place County Kildare.

MATTHEW BRADY, 246.

5 R. 4J in. dark brown hair, blue eyes, 27 years of age, a seaman, tried at Lancaster, April 1820, sentence 7 years, arrived in this Colony per *Atlanta*, 1821, native of Massachusetts.

MICHAEL CODY, 210.

5 R. 1J in. light brown hair, blue eyes, 60 years of age, a cooper and glassmaker, tried at Cambridge, March 1818, sentence 14 years, arrived in this Colony per *Demerary*, native of County Cork.

PATRICK DUNNE, 185.

5 R. 6J in. brown hair, grey eyes, 26 years of age, a labourer, tried at Dublin, May 1818, sentence 7 years, arrived in this Colony per *County Down*, 1820, native of County Cork; slightly post-pitted.

JAMES GOODWIN, 416.

5 R. 4J in. brown hair; dark grey eyes, 31 years of age, a seaman, tried at Stirling, September 18, 1818, sentence 7 years, arrived in this Colony per *Lady East*, native of Glasgow, J. G. number, and thistle on right hand.

JOHN GREGORY, 273.

5 R. 5 in. brown hair, grey eyes, 35 years of age, a weaver and cooper, tried at Stirling, March 1821, sentence 14 years, arrived in this Colony per *Lady Haughey*, 1821, native of Glasgow; several scars on both arms and chest.

JAMES MCKENNEY, 61.

5 R. 7 in. brown hair and hazel eyes, 33 years of age, a seaman, tried at County Down, Lent, 1820, sentence 7 years, arrived in this Colony per *County Down*, 1820, native of County Down, post-pitted.

JAMES MURPHY, 261.

5 R. 3 in. brown hair, blue eyes, 20 years of age, a seaman, tried at County Down, Lent, 1820, sentence 14, arrived in this Colony per *County Down*, 1820, native of County Down.

WILLIAM or JOHN TILLY, 125.

5 R. 2J in. dark complexion, black hair, dark grey eyes, 39 years of age, tried in Kent, March 18, 1818, sentence 14, arrived in this Colony per *Merita*, 1820, J. N. T. and double scars on right arm, crucifix and ear, and J. T. on left arm, and scar and maimed on right arm, native place, *Baywater, Lancashire.*

EDWARD WILLIAMS.

About 5 R. 3 or 4 in. light brown hair, light coloured eyes, about 30 or 37 years of age, thin, and walks very upright, coast here by the ship *Lord Sidmouth*.

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“Mountain Home, April 20 1825

It has caused Matthew Brady much concern that such a person known as Sir George Arthur is at large. Twenty gallons of rum will be given to any person that will deliver

his person unto me. I also caution John Priest that I will hang him for his ill-treatment of Mrs. Blackwell at Newtown”.

— 'M. BRADY.'

This was pinned to the door of the Royal Oak Inn, Cross Marsh, now Melton Mowbray, although the inn was located at Kempton.



Governor George Arthur

On 4 March 1826 Brady and his gang of fourteen attacked Richard Dry senior's homestead at Elphin. It was a new moon so the night was particularly dark. Dry was entertaining friends and Brady ransacked the house. A servant managed to run to town and alert Captain Balfour. He and ten soldiers rushed to the house. A gunfight ensued with a Dr Priest being shot in the leg. Priest later died of gangrene, after he refused to have his leg amputated. The bushrangers slipped away into the night. Three days later Brady rode to Thomas Kenton's farm and shot him dead. It was a payback for Kenton setting a trap on Brady. Brady was briefly captured but managed to escape and swore revenge. Days later Brady and his gang captured a boat, intending to sail it to the Australian mainland. Bad weather prevented them crossing Bass Strait, so they were forced to return.

After the sailing fiasco, one of his gang members, an ex-convict name Cowan, betrayed him for a pardon. On 28 March 1826, in consequence of private information, Lieutenant Williams of the 57th Regiment, with 14 soldiers and four armed prisoners, made contact with Brady's gang south of Launceston at the North Esk River. Both parties fired, and during the ensuing gun battle Brady was wounded in the leg. The bushrangers separated as they fled. Two stragglers were caught by local farmers.

Brady and four others made it as far as Watery Plains (15 miles south-east of Launceston). On a Saturday night (1st April) a campfire was spotted and John Batman and party went to investigate. The outlaws all fled into the bush, abandoning their fire. Batman and his crew stayed near the campfire. During the night Batman heard a noise and went out to investigate. He saw a man limping and exhausted in the bush near a shallow creek, and hastened forward to him. It was Brady. Batman induced Brady to surrender and return with him. The outlaw was ill and suffering much pain, and did as he was asked.

On Sunday morning Batman delivered Brady to the Launceston gaol. News quickly spread that Brady was caught and the townsfolk turned out to see the captured felon pass by on horseback.

On Thursday 27 April 1826, Brady and Patrick Bryant pleaded guilty to the murder with malice of Thomas Kenton. The same two also pleaded guilty of stealing four horses from Mr. Lawrence

Brady was duly sentenced to death.

Brady was hanged on 4 May 1826, at the old Hobart gaol, corner of Murray and Macquarie Streets. Four other bushrangers were hanged with him: Patrick Bryant, John Perry, John Thompson and Thomas Jeffries. Jeffries was once part of Brady's gang, but had been expelled by him as Jeffries had molested women. Out on his own, Jeffries had resorted to cannibalism after killing his companion named Russell. Jeffries also was an informer. Having been captured by John Batman he told where Brady would be found, thus prompting Batman to search the area. Brady complained bitterly that he was to die in the company of such a "*monster*".

There were dozens of unsuccessful petitions to halt Brady's execution, and his cell was filled with wine, fruit, cakes, confectionary and flowers from the ladies of Hobart Town. All to no avail.

The *Herald* newspaper wrote of his death:

"There was a hush, broken only by stifled sobs, as the bushranger knelt to receive the last consolations of his faith. Then, standing erect, he bade adieu to the multitude and died more like a martyr than a convicted felon". (feature article 17th April 1954).

Recommended reading: **Bush Career of Matthew Brady** by J.E. Calder (Mercury 16th August 1873)