

24/3/1985

Joe Flick lies buried face-down in the Gulf Country, his grave marked only by

The lonely bushranger of Lawn Hill

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ABOVE: The grave of Senior Constable Wavell, shot dead by the outlaw Joe Flick at Lawn Hill Station on October 27, 1889.

THE light in the eyes of these bush children shone with the excitement as they cajoled us to walk through the bush to see "the graves".

"We'll show you where Joe Flick is buried. He was an outlaw and they buried him face-down to the Devil," said the excited ringleader, seven-year-old Mal McCosker.

"He shot a copper and a tracker and they are all buried here, but Joey Flick hasn't got any writing on his headstone. He was an outlaw."

"Come on, we'll show you."

The enthusiasm of Mal, his mates Robert Steele, 11, and Robert's brother, Ken ("Little Frog"), 8, smothered our protestations at the walk of "a bush mile or so" through the timber to find the historic last resting place of these local folk heroes.

The barefoot boys gestured excitedly to significant landmarks in this tragedy of 1889, facts handed down through generations in this remote part of Australia — Lawn Hill Station, near Burketown, in the Gulf Country.

"Flick came down the back of the house there at night and was wounded and hid up this gully," Little Frog related.

"But they burnt him out and shot him over there and that's where he's buried."

Through the timber, up a creek bank, a

few false leads and there was stark testament to law and order in Queensland's pioneering history.

The boys had seen it before and told more of the story as they busied themselves pulling weeds from around the graves — but not that of "Outlaw Flick".

After investigations we were referred to the popular northern journalist and author John Anderson, who had "discovered" the graves and researched the romance and tragedy behind them.

John, in his book *Bagmen Millionaires*, related the story:

IN 1889 the owner of Lawn Hill Station, was Mr F.H. Hann. The chief character of the yarn, Joe Flick, was the son of a white man and an Aboriginal woman. He was born at Burketown and was raised as a white man; but as he grew older he manifested the special bush skills unique to the Aboriginal race. As a young man he was a noted stockman and his skills were in demand at local stations.

Despite Flick's prowess as a bushman and the respect it earned him in some circles, the half-caste was subjected to ridicule about his mixed blood. In the mustering camps on the stations he suffered the taunts of being a "creamy", "yeller feller" or "brindle".

In early September, 1889, when Flick

rode home from a droving trip to find his father thrashing his mother, he, being a fit young man, turned the tables and gave his father a brutal hiding.

ABOUT this time Flick was courting an Aboriginal girl who worked as a housemaid at the Brook Wayside Hotel on Beames Brook, south of Burketown.

The girl suddenly broke off this relationship and Flick believed that the owners of the hotel had persuaded her not to have anything more to do with him.

Set on revenge, he waylaid the owners and savagely attacked them before they managed to fight him off. Flick was later arrested for this assault and charged with attempted murder. He was placed in the Normanton lock-up — most probably, in those days, just manacled to a log — but escaped to the bush where he was very much at home.

Some time later Flick was recognised by an Aboriginal houseboy at Turn Off Lagoons, north of the Lawn Hill homestead.

Flick surprised the houseboy in the bush near the house and threatened him with "pointing the bone" if the boy did not tell him where the police were. Flick also wanted the location of the police horses.

At that time Senior Constable Wavell was at nearby Corinda Police Station laid up with a bout of fever and dysentery. He was being treated by Mrs Anderson at

piece of rusty pipe

Turn Off Lagoons and she told Wavell about Flick's visit and his threats to the houseboy.

That night as the policeman and Mrs Anderson talked, they heard a noise at the back door. Mrs Anderson took it to be her husband returning from work and called to him as she opened the door. She saw a horseman galloping away and heard him coo-ee.

She went back inside and said she was sure it was Joe Flick.

Only a day before Senior Constable Wavell had received reports that Flick had stolen a horse and committed a series of thefts in the Gregory area and he had been ordered to search for him.

ON the morning after the incident with Mrs Anderson, October 24, Wavell discovered his troop horse, Railway, and another he had bred himself, shot dead in the police barracks horse paddock.

Enraged at the shooting and despite his poor health, Senior Constable Wavell borrowed some horses from the Andersons and set off after the outlaw.

Mrs Anderson begged him to be careful, telling him she had a dream which told her he was going to be killed. Her warning must have had some effect on Wavell because, before he left, he wrote out his will and tidied up some personal papers and insurance certificates.

Accompanied by an Aboriginal tracker, Wavell arrived at Bannockburn at 3.30 p.m. on October 25. Here they found a Mr Symes, who had spent a sleepless night after his house had been pelted by stones. Symes had fired a shot and heard someone hoot and gallop away.

Early the next day Wavell and his tracker found fresh tracks which led them across the Nicholson River towards Lawn Hill Station. Wavell met Constable Gunn on the road and the policemen exchanged horses and Wavell collected another tracker.

They followed Flick's tracks until dark, but Wavell's health was deteriorating.

AT mid-day on October 27, they sighted Flick, who was alone with a loaded pack horse. The outlaw dropped the lead-rope on the pack horse and galloped off towards Lawn Hill Station, seven kilometres away.

As he neared the homestead, he turned and fired a shot at Wavell and the tracker.

Reaching the homestead, he leapt from his horse and ran into the kitchen and barricaded himself inside.

Wavell and the two trackers surrounded the house and opened fire; but Flick, from his vantage inside, was an accurate shot and kept them pinned down.

Wavell, in a questionably courageous move, then walked towards the house calling on Flick to surrender. When he was 30 metres away, Flick appeared at a window and shot him through the chest. Senior Constable Wavell was dead when he hit the ground.

Station workers came to the aid of the two faithful blacktrackers and kept Flick pinned down in the homestead all after-

noon. About sundown the station owner, Mr Hann, and a man called O'Shea and an Aboriginal boy named Nym arrived on the scene.

Flick was well known to Hann because he had broken in horses on Lawn Hill. Hann had a reputation as a fair man and was well thought of by the Aboriginals. He thought he could talk Flick into surrendering.

He called on everybody to cease firing and walked towards the kitchen, quietly assuring Flick of fair treatment. Flick agreed to come out if Hann would go to the door. Hann did as he was bid and, as he opened the door, Flick shot him in the chest, narrowly missing his heart.

Before Hann fell, he got off a shot at Flick, but missed. The men outside opened fire again and allowed the wounded Hann to crawl to safety.

That night, although a watch was kept on the building, Flick escaped down the cliff face at the rear of the house amid the confusion of a storm.

At daybreak the men charged the kitchen, only to find spent rifle cartridges, bloodstains and a piece of bloodsoaked rag. Obviously Flick was wounded.

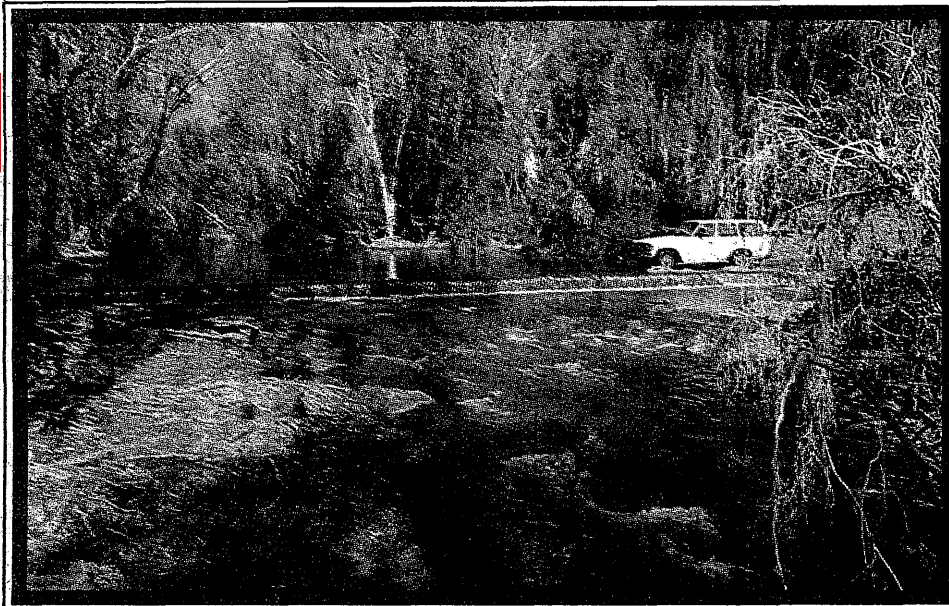
THE courageous Hann sufficiently recovered from his wound to lead the party in search of the outlaw. They followed bloodstains and footprints along Lawn Hill Creek.

Less than a kilometre from the homestead a shot rang out and the boy Nym fell dead, shot through the heart. Flick then unleashed a furious fusillade; but the search party had taken cover at the first shot.

Hann thought Flick would head for the



ABOVE: The murdered Aboriginal boy Nym lies buried at the base of a tree (background). The grave in the foreground is that of an Aboriginal woman, Jenny, who died in 1894.



LEFT: River crossing near Lawn Hill Station where Senior Constable Wavell and an Aboriginal tracker followed the trail of Joe Flick.

rugged Lawn Hill Gorge — now a National Park — where it would be impossible to find him, so he ordered the grass along the creek to be set on fire to flush Flick out.

When Flick rushed from his hiding place he was mown down by a wild barrage of shots.

Flick is buried face-down in a grave beside that of Senior Constable Wavell. Flick's grave is marked only by rusted steel pipe and bears no headstone or epitaph.

On Wavell's tombstone is the inscription:

"This monument was erected by the comrades (in conjunction with the Queensland Government) of Alfred Wavell, a Senior Constable of the Queensland Police Force, who was shot dead whilst bravely performing his duty on the 27th October, 1889. Aged 37."

The Aboriginal boy Nym is buried nearby beside an Aboriginal woman. His grave is marked:

"Nym, black boy who was shot by Joe Flick, 28th October, 1889. A faithful boy was Nym."

This is probably Queensland's most remote police grave. It is silent testament to the bravery with which our pioneers opened up this harsh country. □