

# Wilkinson Hanging

*Geoff Romero*

It was a cold crisp morning. The first day of winter, 1 June 1881. There was no rain. The condemned man sat alone in his cell at Albury Gaol. In previous weeks he had heard the sounds of the carpenters building a scaffold. Every hammer blow, every stroke of the saw a reminder of his fate.



An early 1940s view of one of the guard houses on the wall of the Albury Gaol. The gaol was demolished in 1947 and bricks used for Housing Commission flats built on the site.

He had been convicted of the murder of Mary Pumpa, 22 years old, and her father. She had a child of two. Her father ran a wine shanty on the road to Jindera. The convicted man had stayed too long drinking. He left but returned with the intent of armed robbery. He shot the young woman twice and then her father twice. The man died instantly, she did not. The young woman was taken to Albury hospital. The perpetrator was tracked to Jindera and arrested. Four chambers of his six-shot revolver had been recently fired. The police took him to Albury hospital where his victim identified him before she succumbed to the injuries, he had inflicted on her.

On 11 April 1881 the Chief Justice of NSW, Sir James Martin, sentenced Wilkinson to death by hanging. Wilkinson told the court that he had no recollection of his crime.

The hangman and his assistant arrived at the scaffold at 8.40am. Thirty people were already present to witness the execution. The Albury Gaol was located on Thurgoona Street below

Western Hill (now called Monument Hill). Screens were erected around the scaffold, which was at the north side of the gaol, to prevent those who had gathered on the hill from witnessing the prisoner's final moments. That morning Wilkinson received a visit from Father Dunn and joined in the prayers recited by the priest. He appeared composed and accepting of his fate.

The first sign of nervousness in the condemned man was a slight tremor when the sheriff arrived at his cell at 9am. His duty was to take possession of the condemned man. Pinions were applied and the Sheriff led Wilkinson across the prison yard to the scaffold. They paused briefly at the foot of the stairs then both steadily and firmly climbed the steps to the platform eight feet above the ground. The executioner solemnly placed a white hood over the head. He then placed the rope around the neck of the condemned man and tightened it. The Sheriff gave the signal, the hangman released the bolt and punishment was swiftly completed. Death was instantaneous. Dr Andrews, the Government Medical Officer, certified life extinct.

The hanging of Henry Wilkinson was the only execution carried out in Albury.