

1 MCIVOR GOLD ESCORT ROBBERY – JULY 1853

It was late-morning on Wednesday 20th July 1853 when the gold escort wagon from the Mclvor diggings set out for Melbourne via Kyneton bearing some 3000 ounces of gold and seven hundred pounds in used banknotes, all secured in black strong-boxes. The wagon bearing the gold was escorted by several armed troopers on horseback.

Making their way slowly towards Mia Mia, they found the way blocked by tree branches lying on the road. Once the wagon stopped, the troopers all stood bunched together inspecting the roadblock. Then without warning the sound of gunfire rang out. Several of the troopers were hit and disabled by shotgun blasts. Within seconds several men appeared from the scrub, the strong boxes were removed and carried into the bush.¹ The amount stolen was 2,223ozs of gold and 700 pounds in banknotes.

The location of the holdup was on an uphill slope near a sharp bend, some 6km northeast of Mia Mia and about 10km from the Mclvor diggings (now the town of Heathcote).²

It was probably coincidental that in the same week as the robbery 'Francis Christie' was recognised at the Mclvor diggings.³ The police were duly informed that a convict who had escaped from Pentridge in March 1851 had been seen in the area. Presumably the informant had the ten pounds reward in mind for the capture any of the escapees.

The Mclvor Escort hold-up invigorated the police and they conducted a broad sweep, during the course of which one of the men arrested "*... was taken in bed on the following Saturday at Mclvor Diggings, where he was lying, booted and spurred, with a female as abandoned as himself. He is an ill-looking fellow named Christie, about 26 years of age*"⁴

The press immediately named Christie "*... as the leader of the gang*". However, in the light of later evidence given by one of the robbers, John Francis, this claim appears unlikely.⁵

¹ Sadlier J, *Recollections of a Victorian Police Officer*, Robertson, Melbourne, 1913, pp. 52-55.

² *Geelong Advertiser and Intelligencer*, 25th July 1853, page 2

³ Morton, WL, *Adventures of a Pioneer*, (Ed. JO Randell) Queensbury, Melbourne, 1978, page 100

⁴ *Bells Life and Sporting Reviewer*, Sydney, 6th August 1853, page 2.

⁵ *The Argus*, Melbourne, 26th August 1853, page 5.