

30 August 1863:

The day when John O'Meally the bushranger met John Barnes the merchant



when a family lost a father and the community lost one of its finest citizens.

John Barnes was a merchant who with his family operated two stores that serviced the southern area of the Lambing Flat gold field. One was here in Murrumburrah, the other on the Wagga Wagga road on a property known as Cootamundry, later to become Cootamundra.

Bushrangers and highway robbery had created a threat to running a business on the gold fields. Frank Gardiner, Johnny Gilbert, Fred Lowry and Johnny O'Meally robbed Barnes's store on the Wagga Wagga road, operated by his son John (jnr), on 31 April in what was Gardiner's last known robbery in NSW as he stocked provisions to escape north into Queensland.

The store was robbed again several weeks later when the other gang members came back for more provisions.

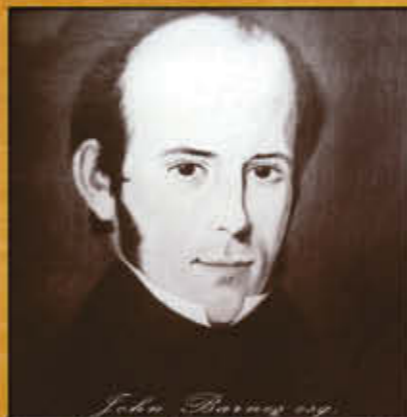
When John Barnes [snr] learnt several months later on 30 August, that the bushranger gang had escaped from an ambush at nearby Demondrille, he immediately feared for another attack on his Cootamundry store.

The bushrangers had lost saddles and other equipment in escaping the surprise raid and they would need to restock these quickly.

Together a store assistant, Barnes urgently saddled up to ride from here to Cootamundry.

As they travelled through Alexander McKay's Wallendbeen property just before noon, they encountered the Gilbert gang preparing to rob the local station storehouse.

Johnny O'Meally liked the look of Barnes' horse and ordered him to dismount. Instead Barnes spurred his mount and galloped for the shelter of the nearby homestead 100m away. Unfortunately he didn't make it. O'Meally chased and shot him repeatedly. Barnes fell from his horse and died soon after.



Live by the gun ... die by the gun ... bush justice for O'Meally

Johnny O'Meally – the man who callously shot John Barnes that day – met his own violent end just several months later on 19 November at the hands of an armed pastoralist defending his property.

The Gilbert gang attacked David Campbell's *Goimbla* property near Eugowra as much out of revenge as anything. Campbell was an active opponent of the bushrangers and they had come to square accounts.

In the middle of a raging gun battle around 9pm the bushrangers set fire to the Campbell's stables and took a brief moment to watch the blaze. While Johnny O'Meally was outlined against the flames Campbell took careful aim and O'Meally fell dead.

John Barnes didn't live to see his original small shop in Murrumburrah diversify and expand into the grand premises we see before us.

Operated by Barnes' sons, Thomas and George, this building became the hub of a network of stores called T & G Barnes's stores across the south-west.

The first step in this expansion came in 1868 with a hay and chaff business in a new building next to their store. Then in 1882, in another new handsome building alongside, the firm added a drapery and grocery department. The original store that sold boots, ironmongery and crockery remained in the older section.

The original cellars constructed using huge pit-sawn timbers lie beneath three quarters of the building that was the T & G Barnes store.

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