

Croker Prize for Biography

Entry 1403

**Isaac Henry Boxshall,
Constable 2486**

ISAAC HENRY BOXSHALL, CONSTABLE 2486

Isaac Boxshall was born on 11 October 1853 at Brighton, Victoria¹, the eldest son of 11 children to Thomas and Bridget Boxshall. His father had emigrated as a boy with his parents as part of the group of 'Henry Dendy emigrants' who were brought out from Surrey in England to take part in Dendy's agricultural dreams for the district of Brighton. Isaac's mother had come to Australia as a 15 year old Irish orphan, and had only been 16 years of age at the time of her marriage. She died giving birth to her eleventh child when Isaac was 20 years old. A year later, when Isaac was 21 years old, his father re-married and had another eight children with his second wife Elizabeth, giving Isaac ten siblings and eight step-siblings. However, many of them died in infancy.

Inheriting his father's love of horses, Isaac was able to get work as a groom, and on 27 October 1871 he joined the Artillery Corps². Less than a year later, on 5 August 1872, when he was 18 years old and prior to his mother's death, he joined the Victorian Police Force as a mounted constable³. As he was under age, he gave his age as 21, a fabrication which continued for the rest of his life. Stationed at Graytown, his career did not flourish and after a few months, Isaac had to be cautioned for being absent from his station without leave while attending a party given at a public house⁴. He was again cautioned after allegedly threatening and using unbecoming language to a member of the public. Although the charges were dismissed, the superintendent agreed to transfer Constable Boxshall to another station at some time in the future, stating that "*Boxshall is an active, good sober man but wants age and experience to make him hold his tongue*"⁵.

During all this uncertainty about his future in the police force, Isaac's mother, Bridget, died giving birth to Isaac's youngest sister. It was during this time that he took comfort in the arms of a 17 year old girl, Ann Page, daughter of the well-respected local chemist at Graytown, George Page. Isaac was 20 years old when he and Ann married on 7 May 1874 at Heathcote⁶, and it was then that he added 'Henry' as a middle name.

The following month, on 21 June 1874, Isaac was transferred to Eldorado Police Station in the Ovens District⁷. Gold had first been discovered in Australia in 1851, and by 1870 Eldorado (Spanish for 'The Gold') was a flourishing town with a population of approximately 4,500 people. The police station had a sergeant, three mounted police, and three foot policemen. Less than four months after their move to Eldorado, and the day after Isaac's real 21st birthday, their first child, Annie, was born⁸. Isaac's young wife, Ann, was apparently very sick after the birth and in delicate health, her own family unable to help as they still lived in Graytown. When Isaac registered the birth of the baby (who was born only

¹ Birth Registration in the District of Brighton and Moorabin, Victoria, 1854, page 226, Number 979

² Victorian Police Record of Conduct and Service

³ Victorian Police Record of Conduct and Service

⁴ Victorian Police Record of Conduct and Service

⁵ Victorian Police Records – letter by Snr. Constable C. Byrne 24 January 1874

⁶ Marriage Registration in the District of Rodney, Victoria, 1874, Number 1516

⁷ Victorian Police Record of Conduct and Service

⁸ Birth Registration in the District of Eldorado, Victoria, 1874, Number 22503

five months after their wedding day) he lied about the date of his marriage, stating 7 February rather than 7 May. He also continued the lie about his age, stating 23 instead of 20.

It did not take long for Isaac to get into strife in his new surroundings. Eight months after his move to Eldorado he was fined ten shillings after being found playing cards in a public house when on town patrol duty⁹.

According to Isaac, as a result of the many doctors' and nurses' bills requiring payment after Annie's birth, he ran up many accounts with publicans and storekeepers. His financial affairs became so uncontrollable that he would keep his creditors at bay by issuing them with post dated cheques, which would subsequently be dishonoured by the bank. He had no funds to cover them. He even obtained money under false pretences from his superintendent, Hugh Ross Barclay. On 1 June 1875 Sergeant William Chadwick of Eldorado Station wrote to his superintendent: "*Sergeant Chadwick 178 begs to forward the attached reports from Constable Boxshall 2486 in explanation to the Superintendent's memos 2152 and 2158 attached and at the same time to state that this man is in debt to most of the Publicans and Storekeepers here. It is therefore impossible that he can be in a position to perform his Police duties. From enquiries made the Sergeant finds that there are some of his worthless cheques given months ago to some of the people here in payment of debt but no funds to meet them. He seems utterly regardless of the consequences of his acts, which are a disgrace to the Service.*"¹⁰. Two days later, Superintendent Barclay wrote to the Chief Commissioner of Police in Melbourne saying "*Judging by the Constable's own reports and also by Sergeant Chadwick's, I consider that the conduct of Constable Boxshall has been disgraceful, if not absolutely criminal, and I think it would be for the interest of the service to remove him from it as soon as possible.*"¹¹.

The Chief Commissioner of Police, Frederick Standish, on 5 June 1875, directed that Constable Boxshall be discharged from the Police Force¹². This was attended to by Sergeant William Chadwick on 9 June 1875¹³.

Isaac challenged the rulings of the Chief Commissioner in Melbourne, and obviously using as leverage the fact that his father-in-law George Page, and the Chief Commissioner, both attended the same Masonic lodge, talked the Chief Commissioner into holding an enquiry into his dismissal. This was held in Eldorado on 4 August 1875.¹⁴ Many witnesses were called in to speak of the debts Isaac had run up with them, however, Isaac was unable to call any witnesses to speak on his behalf. The Chief Commissioner confirmed his discharge on 7 August 1875, writing to Superintendent Barclay that "*if ex-Constable Boxshall had not already been discharged I should have ordered his instant dismissal. It is quite unnecessary to await his further defence in writing.*"¹⁵.

⁹ Victorian Police Record of Conduct and Service

¹⁰ Letter from Sergeant Chadwick 178, Eldorado to the Superintendent of Police, Beechworth, 1 June 1875

¹¹ Letter from Hugh Ross Barclay, Superintendent, Beechworth to the Chief Commissioner of Police, Melbourne, 3 June 1875

¹² Letter from Sergeant Chadwick, Eldorado, to the Superintendent of Police, Beechworth, 1 June 1875

¹³ Memo from Sergeant Chadwick 178 to the Superintendent of Police, Beechworth, 9 June 1875

¹⁴ Letter from Frederick Standish, Chief Commissioner of Police, to Superintendent Barclay, Beechworth, 28 July 1875

¹⁵ Memo from Frederick Standish, Chief Commissioner of Police to Superintendent Barclay, Beechworth, 7 August 1875

During these proceedings, Isaac had returned home to his family in Melbourne, perhaps to see if they could help him out of his predicament. It appears that Ann and the baby had returned to Graytown to her family. Isaac at this stage was only 21 and Ann only 18.

Isaac's finances were well and truly in the red, with just a little income being earned by working as a blacksmith. One of his brothers had worked in a butcher shop for six or seven years in Prahran, a suburb of Melbourne. Isaac was living in Brighton and required furniture, and, being unable to obtain credit, he feloniously forged an 'ower' (monetary guarantee) in the name of his brother's employer, George Newnham the butcher, and purchased furniture to the value of approximately £10. It was subsequently delivered to Brighton. When David McLean, the owner of the furniture shop, approached Mr Newnham for the money, it was the end of the road for Isaac. He returned the furniture on the condition that charges would not be pressed.

Mr McLean however, did press charges. Isaac stood trial in Melbourne on a charge of forgery on 15 December 1875. The verdict was 'guilty with a strong recommendation to mercy'. He was sentenced to one year's imprisonment in Melbourne Gaol¹⁶.

After being released early, having served ten months of his sentence, Isaac appears to have returned to Ann and Annie at Graytown and found a job as a storeman. Their second child was born in 1878 before the family all moved to Violet Town, about 80km to the north east. Although it only had a population of between four and five hundred, it was a coach stop between Melbourne and Sydney and the railway had opened there in 1873. Here Isaac found employment as a clerk and at the beginning of 1881 their third child was born. However, she was only to live six hours before dying of convulsions¹⁷.

From this point Isaac's movements are unclear. On 23 February 1884, their first child Annie died of diphtheria in Wangaratta, where Ann was then living¹⁸. Isaac was obviously at the funeral because another child was conceived at this time.

Isaac did not stay for the birth of his fourth child. Family folklore has him leaving long before her birth on 10 December 1884, and baby Ethel never saw her father.

Nothing more was ever heard of Isaac. Ethel was told that her father had died fighting a bush fire three weeks before her birth¹⁹. However on her birth certificate he is shown as being aged 33 and living in Brighton²⁰. Also, when Isaac's father died in 1917, Isaac is listed as being aged 64²¹. He was obviously excommunicated from the family because the newspaper announcement does not list him as one of the children. No details of his death have ever been found.

¹⁶ Public Record Office, Melbourne VPRS 30/P, Unit 475

¹⁷ Death Registration in the Shire of Euroa, County Moira, Victoria, 1881, Number 3086

¹⁸ Death Registration in the Borough of Wangaratta, County Moira, Victoria, 1884, Number 3174

¹⁹ Letter dated 30 January 1965 from Ethel Chambers (nee Boxshall) to her cousin's daughter, Gwenyth Allen, in New Zealand

²⁰ Birth Registration in the District of Chiltern, Victoria, 1885, Number 1558

²¹ Death Registration of Thomas Boxshall in the District of Lang Lang, 1917, Number 9163



Ann Boxshall (nee Page) August 1874