

## SERGEANT LUCAS - SMALL TOWN COPPER

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Colleen O'Sullivan 10 February 2014

William Herbert Lucas, first Kandos police officer, emerged not from local legend or family story or memory, but out of the documents of history: a paper trail of certificates, public records and old newspapers. He left Kandos in 1929 and I haven't yet found anyone who remembers him or has written about him. It is hard to assess such a man.

I want to sing his praises but I hesitate. In these days of public inquiry I am more sceptical of public figures who had a responsible role in our community. What if he wore a mask of deception? Then I remind myself of the danger of scepticism.

Perhaps it is possible to judge Sergeant Lucas not just on his paper record but on our expectations of a good police officer. First his discharge of duty – the way he carried out the routine tasks of policing. Second the confidence others had in his ability to protect the community. Third his moral code (or if you like, professional standards) – how honest, fair, incorruptible, tough, dependable and compassionate was he?

Sergeant Lucas' police records show that he entered the police force as a probationary foot constable in 1902 at the age of twenty four, after being raised on a farm and having worked as a shearer and farm labourer. He had an exemplary physical appearance as a police officer: 6ft ½ in (1.84m) in height and 13st 10lbs (87.1kg) in weight. He was single, came from a Catholic family near Yass, of nine children and "esteemed" parents.

Having completed his probationary year Constable Lucas spent his first policing years in Orange where he married Evelyn Maud Hicks in 1903. In 1908 he was appointed to Rylstone and this is where I first meet him – in the pages of the Rylstone News (and later the Kandos News) section of the *Mudgee Guardian*. He too is "esteemed" and he is also "just and fair in the discharge of his duties", "a worthy officer and townsman", "a real solid man in every sense of the word", "a terror to transgressors", "a popular police officer" and with "many good grips to straighten up troublesome men".

I see him involved in community activities: recruiting young men to go to the First World War; raising fifty pounds for Australia Day 1915 (a war effort); attending a Christmas Tree meeting and speaking at Farewell Events.

I think policing duties in those early years in Rylstone were fairly quiet and uneventful but in 1913, in the same year Lucas was promoted to First Class Constable, and seven kilometres away, a cement industry was emerging at the foot of Coomber Mellon Mountain. It brought many new-comers to the area. They were not all the hard-drinking, wild-living, gambling louts that some might have perceived or feared, but they did present a challenge to the local force – in terms of growing numbers, extra crime and distance (no cars or motorbikes for local police in those days).

By 1917 the government seemed to have accepted that Kandos was permanent and that there could be an investment in town infrastructure. In early 1918 a four room concrete police station was constructed in Angus Avenue. Constable Lucas was appointed Police Officer in

charge, and towards the end of the year a portable cell was brought from Wellington and erected on a concrete slab. Lucas no longer had to take his prisoners to the Rylstone lock-up.

Before the end of that year Constable Lucas had demonstrated his substance. In October 1918 the *Orange Leader* reported that a “human tornado” attacked Constable Lucas “tearing the constable's epidermis...[and] his uniform into ribbons, but he bumped the wrong man in Lucas, who came out top dog, and succeeded in putting his man 'In.'” An unsympathetic magistrate fined the antagonist thirteen pounds or four months in gaol.

A month later Lucas recaptured an escaped convict, Edward Dowling, “after a week of hard and persistent work.” Lucas had “chased the prisoner from Sofala to Kandos, and from Kandos to Bogee, in company with other members of the police force, and had come across his tracks on several occasions on the Coomber Mountain, travelling day and night for nearly a week, with an average of two hours' sleep in the twenty four.” The escapee seemed to have eluded them when Lucas accidentally overheard scraps of a conversation between two of Dowling's friends. He successfully set a trap in a Clandulla tent.

There was an expectation in those days that police officers, like doctors, priests and ministers, could be called on anytime of the night or day. In reality, on most nights, small towns slumbered peacefully. Nevertheless First Class Constable Lucas appeared to have a wide range of duties besides protecting the community, keeping the peace, enforcing traffic regulations, making arrests and pursuing escaped criminals.

Those duties included collecting the census; manning lost property, Government Savings Bank and dole payments; rescuing injured people and animals; overseeing Art Union draws; giving evidence at licensing, police magistrate and coronial courts; and crowd control at the local football match or race meeting. “Sergeant Lucas deserves to be complimented on the efficient way he handled the big crowd at the football match last Sunday...the army of cars...the crowd of spectators numbering well over 2500...Supervised by Sergt Lucas everything went off without a hitch.”

Then of course was the mountain of paper-work that accompanied all of those tasks. And these days we think we're overworked!

You might be surprised to learn that when the local Member of Parliament, Captain Dunn, appealed in 1919 for a second police officer at Kandos it was refused by the Inspector General of Police – though an additional officer would be sent along on pay weekends (when the town was at its liveliest!). It wasn't until 1922 that the newly promoted Sergeant Lucas was sent an assistant, Constable Floyd.

How revealing it would be if Sergeant Lucas could be interviewed about his Kandos appointment. I wonder which incidents he would recall. Not the arrests for indecent language, indecent behaviour or being on licensed premises in prohibited hours. They were the most common.

Perhaps he would recall with some satisfaction the time, in June 1924, when he targeted illegal gambling in the town. Five local police officers assisted by regional detectives raided Tattersall's billiard saloon at 10.30pm on Saturday June 14, where they found more than twenty people involved in a dice game called “fives and sixes”. Eighteen were charged with playing an unlawful game and two, Bertie Graves and Oswald Griffin, with being the keeper

and assistant of a common gaming house. Kandos Police Court was crowded when the case was conducted in July.

Lucas might not want to talk about the death in custody in March 1927. He had arrested Stanley Williamson on a charge of larceny and checked him in his cell at 11pm. At 6.30am he found the man suspended from an iron railing over the door. He had twisted the blankets to make a slipknot round his neck. Williamson, an electrician, had arrived from Sydney four weeks earlier to work for a local business. He left a widow and child.

By 1928 Kandos residents could see that their Sergeant was greatly overworked and the town had insufficient police protection. They argued that Rylstone with a population of about 600 people and an average of one court case a month had three policemen while “Kandos and Charbon with a population of approximately 3,500” and 37 police court cases in the previous month had two officers. It did seem inequitable. “We must not think things are always going to go along as smoothly as they have under the control of Sergeant Lucas,” argued Mr Petersen at the Progress Association meeting.

Sergeant Lucas was transferred to Portland in July 1929 and a grateful and sad community said farewell and thanked him “for the good service he had rendered.”

I have no information about Lucas’ police career after Kandos. He was living at 155 Mount Street Coogee when he died on 14 March 1946 aged 67, “beloved husband of Evelyn Maud (deceased) and dear father of Jean, Joan and Arthur”.