



Senior Constable Chris Trimble



Senior Constable Maurice Moore with his wife Heather

MURDERS AT THE WHITE HILLS.
ADJOURNED INQUEST.
 A coroner's inquest on the bodies of Lopez and Edward Barnett, was held at the Charlie Navelock Flat, White Hills, on Monday. The following evidence was taken:—
 Edwards sworn: Am a blacksmith, residing at White Hills. On the morning of the 1st inst. at 10 o'clock, was awakened by a great noise. Got up and found that the buildings were running. Got as far as a large t

Murders so ghastly residents

Carolyn Webb

White Hills was Australia's wild west: a bustling gold rush town of 6000 people afflicted with gold fever at its peak in 1858, awash with drinking holes and tent homes. There was also a lot of death: one newspaper reported there was up to one murder a week.

Some might say nothing could shock the residents of White Hills. But it was a double murder so horrific that saw the town implode. Rioters tore or burnt down most structures; today none survive.

In scenes not out of place in a Quentin Tarantino film, thug William Brook was robbing the Gumtree restaurant when he shot and killed owner Charles Lopez. In his dying moments, Lopez stabbed and badly wounded Brook.

Young cop Senior Constable

Edward Barnett rushed to the scene Saturday 3 August 2019 only to be shot by Brook. "Oh God, I am shot!" the *Mount Alexander Mail* reported Barnett as saying, as he "staggered a few yards and fell".

Meanwhile, the badly wounded Brook was arrested and left to bleed to death in the police office, as thousands fled by, abusing him, according to the *Mail*.

"But for the energy of the police there is no doubt he would have been dragged out, and summary punishment been inflicted on the spot," the article reads.

Brook died 16 hours later.

The double murder had gone largely forgotten until recently, when veteran policeman Chris Trimble learnt about the gruesome crime on the goldfield.

Only undulating scrub and a farm dam remain of White Hills, now

'[The police] are still the only family of Edward Barnett.'

Senior Constable Chris Trimble

called Havelock, just north of Maryborough – a two-hour drive north-west of Melbourne.

Trimble's wife Tania Kerr was researching local history and found newspaper accounts of the murders. The couple became absorbed by the case, inquiring in vain after relatives in Barnett's native Ireland.

Kerr has written a small book detailing the 1858 murders.

According to the tale, Brook's head was removed from his body as a souvenir for the coroner, but the head rolled down the sloping stage of

burnt town down

the pub and dropped among onlookers. No one knows what happened to Brook's head or torso.

Trimble realised that it fell to him to look after the legacy of his predecessor Barnett.

"We [the police] are still the only family of Edward Barnett we could find," he said.

He successfully pushed for Barnett to posthumously receive the Victoria Police Star, awarded to officers seriously injured or killed in the course of duty.

This week, Acting Chief Commissioner Wendy Steendam presented the medal to Senior Sergeant Paul Huggett, the officer in charge of Maryborough police station, where it will hang on a wall. "[The star] recognises the unique and often unpredictable dangers of police work, and the very often terrible sacrifice that members pay

in the course of serving Victoria Police, and by extension, all Victorians," Acting Chief Commissioner Steendam said.

Trimble said Barnett's death was eerily similar to how his friend and colleague, Senior Constable Maurice Moore, was murdered in 1986.

On September 27 that year, Moore had ducked out of the Maryborough station about 2am to get milk from his home.

After Moore didn't respond to his radio, another officer found his body in his divisional van, parked in a local street.

"He'd come across a person stealing a car ... and stopped to question him, and got overpowered and murdered with his own revolver," Trimble said.

Moore's medal at Maryborough police station will now be accompanied by Barnett's.