



# Belated honour for state's first police death

By Simon Kelly, Media and Public Affairs Branch

The first police officer to be killed in Queensland is the most recent to be recognised for making the ultimate sacrifice for the community he served.

Constable Matthew Connolly drowned while trying to cross a flooded creek to deliver medication for two gravely ill women on August 29, 1861.

But he was not initially recognised as a fallen police officer because he served during the interim period of Queensland separating from New South Wales and the creation of the then Queensland Police Force in 1864.

That was rectified earlier this year when Constable Connolly became the 135th name to be included on the Queensland Police Service (QPS) Honour and Remembrance Rolls.

It was a move that was celebrated by family members, with about 70 descendants attending a memorial ceremony in August.

Inspector Brett Schafferius, Toowoomba District Office remains in constant contact with Constable Connolly's family.

"They are absolutely overwhelmed the QPS have given his death the recognition he deserved and are extremely appreciative of the actions taken to make this happen," he said.

"It is extremely rewarding the actions of Constable Connolly, while in service of the people of



Constable Matthew Connolly's name has been added to the Toowoomba Police Memorial.

Queensland, can be recognised even after his death 145 years ago.

"It's a clear indication of the dedication the QPS has towards recognising all police who have lost their lives in the line of duty, no matter when or where," Inspector Schafferius said.

Tony Olsen, Constable Connolly's great great grandson and a retired police inspector, said it was an

honour that Constable Connolly could be recognised as the first officer to have died in the line of duty in Queensland.

"It is wonderful that after all these years his service will not only be remembered across the state, but also in Canberra," Mr Olsen said.

Constable Connolly was originally appointed by a Police Magistrate as the watchhouse keeper at Gatton

with part of his duties requiring him to escort prisoners to Ipswich.

He had finished an escort to Ipswich on August 25, 1861 when a doctor asked that he obtain medication from Ipswich for the gravely ill Lady Joshua Bell and the sick wife of a district Magistrate.

By the time Constable Connolly left Ipswich on August 29, heavy rain had fallen in the region causing high water levels in the creeks and streams.

He arrived at the flooded Sandy Creek crossing near Laidley about 5pm that day where a man who was camped at the crossing told Constable Connolly the creek was too high.

Constable Connolly was determined to continue so he tied two parcels across his chest and entered the water on horseback.

However, after a short distance he and his horse were swept off the crossing. The officer lost control and grip of his mount and they were separated.

The horse made for the opposite bank while Constable Connolly floated downstream for about 300 metres. Bystanders tried to rescue him but he disappeared from view.

His body was found the next day along with the medication, which was subsequently delivered to the sick women. Constable Connolly left behind a wife and six children.