

First Fingerprint Success 1906

James (Henry) Craig, alias Robert Colquhoun, was the first criminal to be identified by his fingerprints in Queensland. He and George E. Mahony, were no strangers to the insides of jails in the southern states. They worked their way north and in January 1905, blew the safe and made off with £9 and four bottles of whiskey from the store of E. Cullen at Kangaroo Point. A few days later they blew open the safe at the Nundah Railway Station.

The Kangaroo Point robbery was their undoing. Acting Sergeant James Murphy noticed a fingerprint on a beer bottle found at the scene of the crime. He summoned the police fingerprint expert Acting Sergeant Duncan Fowler. Fowler could see one good print with a clear ridge and called on police photographer Constable James Donovan to take an photograph of the latent fingerprint. This proved to be more difficult than at first thought because early photography depended on good available light and neither the weather nor the bottle were very co-operative. Finally, at 6am on a bright morning, after 10 days of trying, Donovan achieved a good photograph of the beer bottle fingerprint.

In the meantime James Craig and George Mahony had been arrested and their impressions of their fingerprints taken. Amongst their belongings police found a suitcase containing a full kit of burglar's tools and two loaded revolvers.

Acting Sergeant Duncan Fowler set about comparing the inked right thumb prints from both Craig and Mahony with the photograph of the fingerprint from the bottle. He found enough points of similarities (or identity) between Craig's inked right thumb print and the latent bottle print to be able to say that it was Craig's fingerprint on the bottle.

The fingerprint evidence along with the tools and revolvers found by police, backed up the case against Craig and Mahony and both were found guilty to the safe breaking offences and each drew sentences of five years for the shop burglary and ten years for the railway station crime, to be served cumulatively. The latent right thumb print belonging to James Craig found on the beer bottle, is the first fingerprint ever recorded at the scene of a crime in Queensland.

