

HATSURO ABE

Monday 28th May 1894, 8 a.m.

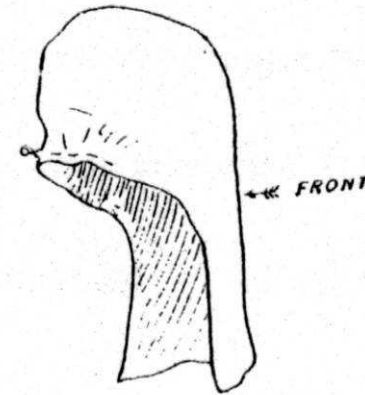
Origins: Japan
Year of birth: 1863
Religion: Church of England
Education: 'R & W'*
Occupation: Pearl diver
Height: 5' 5¼" (166cm)
Weight: 10st 3lbs (65kg)
Place of trial: Cooktown
Offence: Murder
Location of offence: Thursday Island, off north Q'land coast
 (* Police Record of Condemned Prisoners)

Hatsuro Abe was the only Japanese person to be hanged at Boggo Road. Aged 31 years, he lived amongst the Japanese community of Thursday Island where he worked as a sailor and pearl diver. Like George Blantern, the man hanged the previous year, Hatsuro had committed a crime of passion.

He claimed that a Japanese woman, Omatzie, had promised to marry him. He confronted her with the suspicion that she had been seeing other men, and she had said "Well Abe, if you think I am false, let us die together". Such double suicides were a theme in Japanese culture. Abe claimed that he had killed her after she had said this, but he was caught before he could kill himself.

He was found guilty at a trial in Cooktown and brought down to Boggo Road. Like Blantern, he became very penitent at this point. He was baptised one week before his execution, after daily visits from the Reverend Simmons, and even asked the chaplain to send religious books to his family in Japan so that they too could become Christians.

On the morning of his execution he had a big breakfast and went to the gallows. Apparently he was very nervous as he stood on the trapdoor and had to be steadied. Given the chance to speak, he recounted the tale of his crime. Compared to the favoured Japanese method of execution, he thought hanging was cruel. The press reported him as saying "I think your way of killing a man is brutal. Why don't you cut a man's head off?" His final speech lasted a full seven minutes. When it came, death was instantaneous.



The type of cap placed over a prisoner's head during hanging. It was used to save the official witnesses the discomfort of seeing the prisoner's face before and after the execution, to minimise 'rope burn' on the neck, and to ensure the prisoner did not see when the lever was about to be pushed.
 (Image: *Circulars on Capital Punishment*, 1880, QSA)

In the wider scale of things, the execution attracted little public attention. He was a foreign man who had committed a crime against another foreigner over 2000kms away from Boggo Road. A newspaper reported:

No interest was apparent in the sad event, and people walked past the gaol apparently unconscious of what was about to take place within its walls.