

Outback saga of the Eulo Queen

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Queensland may have been named for Queen Victoria, but when you mention "the queen" around Eulo in the state's dusty southwest, it usually means quite a different kind of lady.

Isabel Gray, a thrice-married pub owner, sly-grog dealer, storekeeper, gambler and opal trader of a century ago was and still is know as the Queen of Eulo.

As such, her "kingdom" comprised a town where local landholders mixed with prospectors from nearby opal fields, not always in friendly circumstances.

At one of three pubs Isabel owned at one stage, she was attempting to eject an unruly drinker, dismissing his arguments by roaring: "I'm the Eulo queen - now get out!"

The name stuck - and according to legend without objections from the lady.

The Eulo Queen today is the name of the sole remaining pub in the village of 49 residents; while downing a beer or three on a hot, dusty afternoon, patrons can read several stories, sometimes conflicting, of Isabel's story, posted on the walls.

She was born either in England or on the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius - take your pick!

Her marriage certificate when she wed Scotsman James McIntosh at Warialda NSW in April 1869 gave her birthplace as England.

McIntosh died within months and in March 1871 the young widow married station manager Richard Robinson of Surat, southwest Queensland, giving her place of birth as Mauritius in 1850.

(One story on the pub walls says she was believed to have been the illegitimate daughter of army captain James Richardson and one Priscilla Wright, and was shipped to Australia as a child to avoid family embarrassment).

Wherever the truth lay, 1886 found Richard and Isabel Robinson keeping a hotel in Eulo, then a opal mining centre and an important coach stop between Cunnamulla and Hungerford.

They then acquired another hotel licence, plus a butcher's shop and a general store.

The marriage was sometimes stormy. Isabel is reported to have accused Richard of stealing a chicken from her kitchen for which he spent 48 hours in the cells.

One report says: "About this time the legend of the Eulo Queen began. Although short, Isabel probably possessed some personal beauty with the physical sumptuousness so esteemed by

contemporary males, and a complaisant husband enabled her to operate as a successful courtesan.

"Her bedroom was a scene of great activity. A stock of liquor there helped her to entertain groups of gentlemen with conversation and gambling. More intimate entertainment was available."

Isabel also fell foul of the law in 1990 when a magistrate ordered confiscated 100 pounds' worth of liqueur she possessed in contravention of the Liquor Act.

The Eulo Queen was captivated by the opals brought into the pub by the miners and used them as currency and jewellery.

A fictionalised account of her activities in a book of short stories called *The Eulo Queen* (by C W Wurth, published in 199 by KOA Publications in Cunnumulla) had her involved in some questionable deals between sellers and buyers.

A national financial crisis in 1893 and the 1896 failure of the Queensland National Bank reduced her wealth then she was widowed again with the Robinson's death in October 1902.

One year later Isabel married again - at the age of 52 or 53 although she claimed to be 35 - to a 29-year-old Tasmanian, Herbert Victor Gray.

Her fortunes improved, and in 1913 she sailed for Europe where she lived and bought lavishly. After her return she clashed with Gray who assaulted her and was fined 25 pounds in court.

Isabel herself paid the fine but from then on lived a separate life; Gray joined the Australian Imperial Force in World War I but died before he could be posted to France.

As Eulo's importance faded due to development of better roads and railway travel and a slump in opals, so did Isabel's. By 1926 she was living in poverty at Eulo, surviving only on a widow's pension.

She died in Willowburn Mental Hospital at Toowoomba on August 7 1929 and was buried in Toowoomba cemetery, leaving just 30 pounds in her will.