

NED KELLY AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY

Australiana collector and researcher Brian McDonald reveals the Library's extensive holdings on the Kelly gang

Edward 'Ned' Kelly would have to be the most renowned of all Australian bushrangers. His iconic armour has become a symbol of defiance and his name has become synonymous with vehemence and commitment.

The Kelly gang, comprising Ned, his brother Dan and confederates Joe Byrne and Steve Hart, began operations after the killing of Sergeant Kennedy and Constables Lonigan and Scanlan at Stringybark Creek, north-eastern Victoria on 26 October 1878.

After committing two bank robberies, at Euroa in Victoria and Jerilderie in New South Wales, the gang went into hiding to emerge at Glenrowan in June 1880, where Ned was captured and the rest of the gang was killed by police. Contrary to popular belief, this was the first and only time the armour was worn—it turned out to be Kelly's Achilles heel. Ned was tried, convicted and hanged in Melbourne Gaol on 11 November 1880.

Ned Kelly has made a resurgence in popularity in recent years due to the Booker Prize winning novel by Peter Carey as well as the movie starring Heath Ledger; but the National Library will testify that Kelly was never far from people's thoughts. Housed in the National Library is a plethora of books, magazine articles, manuscripts, ephemera and photographs pertaining to the Kelly outbreak published during the intervening years. Some of these can be classified as the rarest and most fascinating pieces of Kellyana to be found among the Library's treasures.

The first book ever published about Ned is located here, thanks to the prodigious collector and bibliographer Sir John Ferguson, and is entitled *The Kelly Gang*,

WHAT THEY SAID ABOUT NED!

Looking at the Legend of Ned Kelly through Books



including

AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE KELLY GANG

Comprising a comprehensive list of books, magazines, articles and journals on Ned for the use of librarians, researchers and collectors.

Brian McDonald

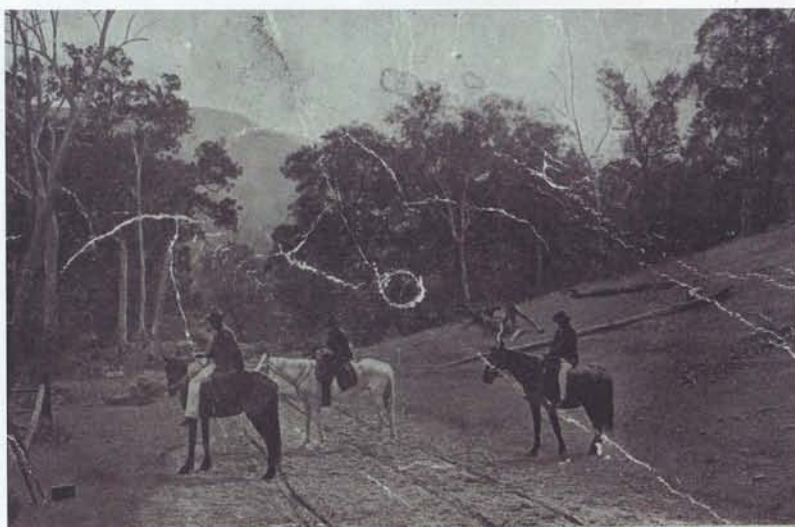
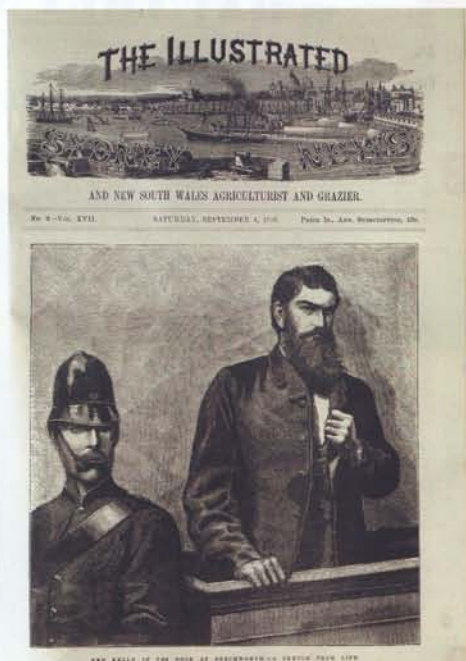
or, *Outlaws of the Wombat Ranges*. This work was printed for the public 16 months before Kelly's capture. It was published under the imprint of the *Mansfield Guardian* in February 1879 and the proprietor, George Wilson Hall, is believed to be the author of this intriguing work, of which only four copies are known to exist. This rare book gives the reader a revealing insight into the Kelly saga. George Wilson Hall knew all the characters intimately, and even insinuates that he visited the Kelly hideout to interview them. This 144-page book is a must for any research on Ned's career and can be made available to readers in the Petherick Reading Room.

Another rare treasure in the Collection is a copy of *The History of Bushranging in Australia, From the Earliest Times*. This was the first book ever published on general bushranging, as distinct from books on crime that incorporated bushranging

Cover of *What They Said About Ned! Looking at the Legend of Ned Kelly Through Books: Including an Annotated Bibliography of the Kelly Gang* by Brian McDonald (Bondi, NSW: Australian History Promotions, 2004)
Photograph courtesy Brian McDonald

right:
Ned Kelly in the dock at Beechworth, a sketch from life, 1880 wood engraving print; 35.3 x 22.0 cm Pictures Collection nla.pic-an8420483

below:
The Kelly Gang—from an original photograph, Steve Hart, Dan Kelly, Ned Kelly [c.1870] gelatin silver postcard; 9 x 14 cm Pictures Collection nla.pic-an14034948



or books on individual bushrangers. (An example of this genre is Michael Howe: *The Last and Worst of the Bushrangers of Van Diemen's Land: Narrative of the Chief Atrocities Committed by This Great Murderer and His Associates During a Period of Six Years in Van Diemen's Land, from Authentic Sources of Information*, printed in Hobart Town in 1818 and one of the rarest books from the founding press. An original copy is also held in the Library's Collection.)

The History of Bushranging in Australia was published by Frearson and Brother, Adelaide in 1891 and was, it is believed, written by Robert Sands Frearson. Frearson and Brother had published four books on Ned Kelly (three before his execution) and these books were the basis of the Kelly component, occupying pages 26 to 69 of the 80-page publication. The other entries on various bushrangers contained in this

work were, however, plagiarised from an 1882 publication entitled *Hunted Down or Recollections of Crime & Criminals of the Australian Colonies from the Early Days to the Present Time. Containing: Convict Life, Bushranging, Murders, Frauds, Executions, and other Terrible Secrets never before Published in the Colonies. And a Graphic Description of Crime, Vice and Cruelty*. A delightfully roguish work that is also available to readers through the Petherick Reading Room.

The Library holds two copies of a wonderful children's 'Penny Blood' entitled *Ned Kelly: The Ironclad Australian Bushranger / by One of his Captors*. This work is attributed to James Skipp Borlase, but according to the bibliophile Desmond Coke (*Confessions of an Incurable Collector*) it appears that several people were involved in writing this book. The collector of 'Penny Bloods' H.G. Turner described this work as 'a gory compilation of melodramatic impossibilities'—and that it is! Nevertheless, from chapter 220 the story aligns with the true history of the Kelly gang from the alleged wounding of Constable Fitzpatrick through to Kelly's execution.

For those wanting to read the 'swashbuckling adventures' that those children of yesteryear read, then this 456 page, double column, 8-point typeface is the one. It is also available on microfilm.

Any research into the Kelly saga should incorporate the *Police Commission: Minutes of Evidence taken before Royal Commission on the Police Force of Victoria, together with Appendices*. This is a massive document that probes the conduct of various members of the constabulary and comprises 720 pages with over 17 789 questions asked of the police and public—and very interesting reading too.

Those who might want to gain an overview of the gang and their activities, are advised to read Charles Henry Chomley's *True Story of the Kelly Gang of Bushrangers*, first published in 1900 with numerous reprints. This would have to be one of the most readable of the early accounts on Kelly and has sometimes been erroneously referred to as one of the 'police accounts' in conjunction with ex-Superintendent Hare and ex-Inspecting-Superintendent Sadleir's reminiscences. This confusion arose due to people thinking that it was his uncle, Hussey

Malone Chomley, who was at one time Commissioner of the Victorian Police Force and had been involved in the Kelly pursuit, who wrote the book. His other uncle was, coincidentally, Arthur Wolfe Chomley the prosecuting barrister at Kelly's trial.

Many of the early books on Kelly tended to be extremely critical of his actions but as time went on some looked past Kelly's actions to reveal his motivations. One of the first authors to present a case for Kelly was Jack Bradshaw. Bradshaw proclaimed himself the 'last of the Australian Bushrangers' and wrote several books that were constantly reprinted with new chapters added to each title published. By the 1920s he had combined all his publications into two titles—one on general bushranging and one relating his own experiences—which he sold door-to-door. His personal reminiscences, entitled *Highway Robbery Under Arms; Sticking up of the Quirindi Bank without shedding of Blood* (cover title—*Highway Robbery Under Arms Without Shedding Blood and Twenty Years of Prison Life in the Gaols of N.S.W.*) is a curious and extraordinary account including his plan to use a snake to bail up the bank clerk at Quirindi. His reasoning behind this idea was that, if he were caught, he couldn't be charged with 'Robbery under reptile'.

Bradshaw's other composite was entitled *The True History of the Australian Bushrangers by Jack Bradshaw Who was Personally Acquainted with Them All*. Care should be taken when reading this account as it does contain numerous inaccuracies. His section on Kelly is extremely scathing of the police, and of previous authors he writes:

The pusillanimous disturbers of the defenceless dead have made up their minds to write up lies which disturb the peace of a still happy home, by laying before the public false and unchristianlike accounts of the poor Kelly lads—false accounts that sting to the heart's core old Mrs. Kelly and her only son and guardian, James Kelly.

Another author to defend the Kellys was J.J. Kenneally's *The Complete Inner History of the Kelly Gang and Their Pursuers*. The first edition was published in 1929 and ran through several reprints with various revisions and additions. For a more subdued account the first and second editions should be consulted, as his third and subsequent

editions become extremely contemptuous of the 'pursuers'.

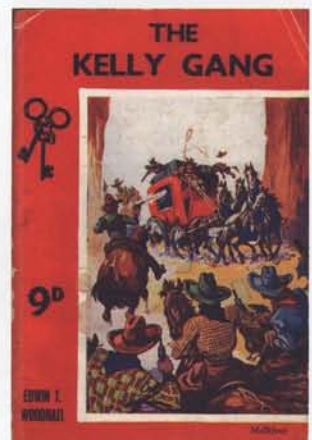
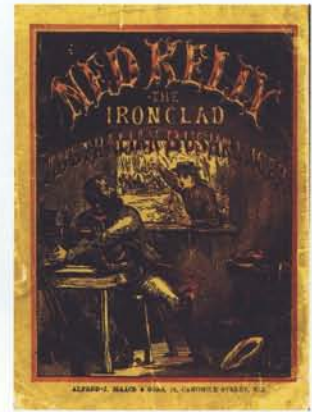
Recent years have seen the publication and reprints of some outstanding, as well as academic works on Kelly. Authors such as Dagmar Balcarek & Gary Dean, Angeline Baron, Max Brown, Keith Dunstan, Frank Clune, Justin Corfield, M.J. Jennings, Graham Jones & Judy Bassett, Ian Jones, Keith McMenemy, John McQuilton, John Meredith & Bill Scott, John Molony, Allan Nixon, Kevin Passey, John H. Phillips and Graham Seal are all represented in the Collection. Each author presents another piece of the puzzle, thus helping to unravel the events surrounding the Kelly legend.

During my researching and collecting of Australia I began to amass a wealth of material on bushranging and so began to compile an annotated bibliography of bushranging books. This is still a 'work in progress', however several years ago I began to specialise in books and magazines on Ned Kelly. The result is *What They Said About Ned! Including an Annotated Bibliography of the Kelly Gang*.

The first part of this work discusses the variety of books and includes, as well as historical publications, Kelly fiction, publications relating to film and stage, books that include paintings and graphic art and it also incorporates juvenile publications. The bibliography contains 797 annotated entries (reprints and title changes are listed under one entry) and each entry supplies all the bibliographic information including the ISBN or Ferguson number where applicable.

Presented as a limited edition of 1500 numbered copies, it comprises 102 A4 pages and contains 129 cover and title page illustrations of which 101 are in full colour. Further information on purchasing this bibliography can be obtained from Australian History Promotions, 17 Dudley Street Bondi NSW 2026 or by email to brianmac@isp.net.au.

BRAIN McDONALD has lectured on Australian history since 1976 and is currently a part-time tutor with WEA, presenting various Sydney history courses. He is also an award-winning professional tour guide who conducts tours around The Rocks and other historic sites within the Sydney Harbour National Park for the National Parks and Wildlife Service.



Top:
Cover of *Ned Kelly: The Ironclad Australian Bushranger* by James S. Borlase (London: Alfred J. Isaacs, 1881)
Photograph courtesy Brian McDonald

middle:
Cover of *The Kelly Gang Rides* by Lucky Doolan (Melbourne: [L. Clapperton], 1940)
Photograph courtesy Brian McDonald

below:
Cover of *The Kelly Gang* by Edwin T. Woodhall (London: [c.1935])
Photograph courtesy Brian McDonald