

# The Kelly Story

Hero or criminal? That's the question that still remains unanswered even today, 118 years after Ned Kelly was hanged in the Melbourne Gaol. His story is one of the most interesting in Australian folklore and still causes debate among the experts. Here's a brief account of the Ned Kelly story.

Ned's mother was Ellen Quinn, the daughter of an Irish potato farmer who met John Kelly after he had been transported to Victoria as a convict, charged with stealing pigs. Ellen's parents disliked John Kelly so the two lovers ran away to Melbourne and were married. Not long after they were married John and Ellen moved to Avenel to avoid the police whom John Kelly had been in trouble with previously. Soon he was in trouble with the police again, this time accused of stealing a young cow and butchering it. Eighteen months later John Kelly died and his wife was left with six young children to bring up on her own. Edward (or Ned as he became known) was the eldest, aged 12. There were two other boys, Jim and Dan, and three sisters, Maggie, Kate and Grace, and in an effort to get away from the constant hassles with the police, Ellen Kelly and her family moved to Greta West, not far from Glenrowan. Ned learned to hate the police after listening to stories his mother and his uncles told about harsh treatment of the settlers, questionable justice and prison life.

Ned grew up to be a rough lad and he was arrested when he was 14, charged with assaulting and robbing a chinaman however the charge was dismissed when the police could not prove their case. By the time he was 16, Ned joined up with Harry Power, a comical bushranger who was a friend of the Quinn family, Ellen Kelly's relatives and it was rumored that Ned had helped Harry Power in several robberies. Eventually Power was arrested while he was sleeping in his hut at King Valley and was sentenced to 15 years in gaol. Some time later Ned Kelly was to serve his first gaol term, charged with knocking a neighbour over with his horse, and was sent to Beechworth prison for six months. But prison did not teach young Ned a lesson. He had an altercation with a Constable Hall at Greta which resulted in Hall being thrown to the ground. Ned was subdued by the local bystanders and was eventually sentenced to three year's gaol, working on prison hulks in Port Phillip Bay.

After his release from prison Ned led a somewhat normal life, working in a sawmill but the police still kept a close watch on the Kelly family. Ned's brother Dan was suspected of horse stealing and the police sent a Constable Fitzpatrick to the Kelly homestead to arrest Dan. Fitzpatrick was half drunk, a fact that annoyed Ellen Kelly so much that she hit the policeman with a shovel. During the scuffle, Ned arrived and shot the constable in the wrist before he and Dan escaped into the bush. Police reinforcements soon arrived and Ellen and two others in the house at the time were sent to prison for three years for their part in the disturbance.

This incident enraged the police even more and they were determined to bring the Kelly family to task. After escaping into the bush to avoid the police, Ned and Dan were joined by Joe Byrne and Steve Hart, the four men working



an old gold claim while they hid in the bush. A police posse consisting of Sergeant Kennedy and Constables Lonigan, Scanlon and McIntyre was sent after them and made camp in the bush close to where the Kelly gang were hiding at Stringybark Creek in the Wombat Ranges. Two of the police went off into the scrub searching for the Kellys while the other two stayed in the camp. Ned Kelly soon learnt of their plans and ambushed the police in the camp, killing three of the officers after a short fight. Constable McIntyre escaped by leaping onto a horse as it galloped off in panic and returned to Mansfield to report what had happened.

The incident now meant that the gang had to remain hidden in the bush but they were helped by local people who were sympathisers with the Kellys and kept them informed of the police's movements. Now fully fledged outlaws, Ned and the others held up a sheep station at Euroa, keeping the occupants hostage for two days while they robbed the National Bank in the town. Returning to their hideout in the Wombat Ranges the Kellys laid low for a while but Ned soon became restless and began to plan another bank robbery at Jerilderie, just over the Murray River in New South Wales.

This raid netted the gang 2000 pounds, a huge sum in those days, resulting in both the Victorian and New South Wales governments offering a reward of 8,000 pounds for their capture. But the gang were once more safely hidden in the bush near Greta, a few miles north of Benalla. The police sergeant at Benalla was determined to catch the gang. He believed that one of Ned's close friends, Aaron Sherritt, could be persuaded to help the police and soon put their plan into operation. Sherritt had told the police that Joe Byrne often visited his mother so a trap was set at Mrs Byrne's house. But Mrs Byrne was suspicious and crept up on the police where they were hiding before heading off to warn Joe Byrne of the trap. However the police were now more determined than ever and arranged for a party of Aboriginal blacktrackers to be brought from Queensland to help in the search. It didn't take long for the blacktrackers to locate the gang in the bush but the police were afraid of meeting the Kelly Gang in the bush and returned to the police station. Over the next few months the police kept a watchful eye over the occupants of Greta, looking for a sign that might tell them of the Kelly's movements. They began to receive reports about an odd type of theft - the steel mould-boards of ploughs were disappearing on a regular basis. When Joe Byrne received the message from his mother about Aaron Sherritt's treachery, he resolved to kill him. Ned worked out a plan linking the killing of Sherritt with his wish to destroy the police and decided to have a shoot-out with the police on the railway line at Glenrowan. One night, when Sherritt opened the door of his hut, he was confronted by Joe Byrne and Dan Kelly and was promptly gunned down with two blasts of a shotgun. At the time, there were four police officers inside Sherritt's hut waiting to ambush Byrne.

Ned realised that once news of Sherritt's murder reached Melbourne, a special detachment of police would be sent to Glenrowan by train to capture him. He planned to derail the train and kill the survivors to rid the north east of the police he hated so much. Arriving at the railway line, Ned and Steve Hart found they couldn't lift the rails on their own so they summoned the help of several of the local railway workers before taking them as prisoners to Ann Jones Hotel at Glenrowan while they waited for the police train to arrive. As the night wore on, the beer flowed and the crowd inside the hotel became restless. The local schoolmaster, Mr Curnow, quietly slipped out of the hotel under cover of darkness to warn the train driver of what lay ahead.

When Ned heard that the train had arrived and their plan wasn't working, the gang rushed to put on their armour - the mould-boards stolen earlier and fashioned into headgear and body armour by Dan Kelly over a freshly-felled hardwood log. Warning the people inside the hotel to lay on the floor, the gang stood on the hotel verandah and fired at the police who returned the volley in a fusillade of bullets. Both Ned and Superintendent Hare (who was in charge of the police) were shot in the first volley, and Ned staggered away unseen into the bush. Hare, who was bleeding profusely, returned to Benalla, leaving the police without a leader until Superintendent Sadlier arrived some hours later. Inside the hotel there was sheer terror as the occupants ducked the police bullets that splintered the flimsy wooden walls. Outside, Ned Kelly suddenly loomed up beside the police, walking from tree to tree and firing at them. He wore an iron mask and a long grey overcoat and in the early morning light looked about nine feet tall. The police bullets seemed to bounce off him but a Sergeant Steel soon brought him down by firing at his legs whereupon the police pounced and carried him off to the railway station where a doctor dressed his wounds. Dan Kelly remained inside the inn. While drinking at the bar, a stray bullet hit and killed Joe Byrne. The police stopped firing and begged the rest of the gang to allow the innocent hostages inside to leave. As the hostages were leaving, Maggie Skillian, Ned's sister arrived and called on the police to let her bargain with the bushrangers inside and convince them to surrender. While the argument with the police continued the Glenrowan Inn burst into flames and before long it was reduced to ashes. After the fire was over a Catholic priest found the bodies of Dan Kelly and Steve Hart lying dead beside each other, Joe Byrne's body having been dragged out earlier.

Ned was transported off to Melbourne to be sentenced and although 80,000 people signed a petition to have the sentence commuted to life imprisonment, Ned Kelly was hung in October 1880 at Melbourne Gaol at just 26 years of age. The end had come for the famous Kelly Gang, one of the most famous bushranger gangs in Australia's history.