

Statement of cultural heritage significance

The following statements explain why the records about the Kelly gang are important to Australia's cultural heritage:

- Ned Kelly is one of the most infamous criminals in Australian history. Films, books, exhibitions, art, songs, documentaries and numerous articles have examined his life and legacy. His armour, in particular his iron helmet, has become instantly recognisable. Representations of it are used in art, advertising and film. It has become so instantly recognisable that a stylised version featured in the opening ceremony for the Sydney Olympics in 2000 in the iconic form made famous by Sir Sidney Nolan's paintings.
- In 2002 PROV, recognising the research, educational and historic importance of the numerous Kelly documents in its collection, placed digital copies and related images of most of them on the web in an exhibition entitled *Ned Online*. The digitised documents are accompanied by transcripts in order to assist people with reading the nineteenth-century handwriting they contain.
- The various aspects of the **Kelly story** – his Irish ancestry, his poor country origins, his family's struggle to survive on the land, his encounters with the law, imprisonment, the police chase and police incompetence, the final dramatic shoot out and capture of Kelly and his execution – are all now an important part of cultural tourism in Australia. Cultural institutions around Australia recognise the cultural significance of the Kelly story, display artefacts and tell various aspects of the Kelly saga.
- The four suits of **armour** briefly worn by the gang have rarely been exhibited together. They were displayed in a major exhibition in 1996 at the Old Melbourne Gaol for the first time in forty years. Since then, they have only been displayed together at another major exhibition about the multifaceted cultural phenomenon and associated myths surrounding the Kelly story, held at the State Library of Victoria in 2004. The suits of armour are on permanent display at the National Museum of Australia, the State Library of Victoria and the Victorian Police Museum.



- **Old Melbourne Gaol** is the sixth most visited place in Melbourne. Visitors from all over Australia come to see the place where Ned Kelly and his mother were imprisoned and where Ned Kelly was hanged.
- Sir Sydney Nolan painted his famous Kelly series of **paintings** in the 1950s and they now form the centrepiece of the Australian section of the National Gallery of Australia's collection.
- **Tourism** uses the Kelly story extensively. Tourism has developed around 'Kelly country'. Trails, markers and maps have been developed for visitors to see where the gang lived and operated. The town of Glenrowan where the final encounter between police and the gang occurred has been placed on the Victorian Heritage Register. The town survives on visitors to the numerous Kelly memorials and other places of interest.
- In 1906 the Tait brothers produced what was probably **the world's first full-length feature film** entitled *The Story of the Kelly Gang*. The importance of this film (of which only nine minutes of fragments remain) has been recognized by its inclusion on the Australian Memory of the World register. The film proved popular with both Australian and British audiences. The New South Wales police department, however, were displeased with the popularity of the bushranger genre and imposed a ban on the production of such films from 1912. Nevertheless, numerous **other films** have been made over the years about Kelly, such as *Ned Kelly* made in 1970, starring Mick Jagger as Kelly, the *Trial of Ned Kelly* (1977) starring John Waters and Gerard Kennedy, the 1980 mini-series *The Last Outlaw* starring John Jarratt, Steven Bisley and Sigrid Thornton, and more recently *Ned Kelly* (2003) featuring Heath Ledger in the lead role.
- **Billy Connolly** in his television series on Australia featured a segment on the Old Melbourne Gaol and Ned Kelly. It is often rerun on television in Australia and overseas and has attracted many tourists to Australia and Melbourne.
- **Folk songs** have been written about bushrangers and the Kellys.
- The story of the Kelly gang features on the national **school curriculums** as part of the topic 'Bushrangers'. *Ned Online* is promoted to schools by PROV as a resource for students to examine the original documents and form their own opinions.



- More **books** have been written about Ned Kelly than any other Australian. Many of these authors have based their research on the documents held in the archives. These novels also document the change in public attitude. For the first fifty years after his execution the literature was overwhelmingly anti-Kelly. In 1929 J.J. Kenneally published his *Complete Inner History of the Kelly Gang and their Pursuers*. The book presented Kelly in heroic terms and remained in print for over fifty years. The novelist Peter Carey won the Booker Prize for his fiction novel *The True History of the Kelly Gang*. It is based on the Kelly story.
- PROV holds a government copy of the 'Jerilderie Letter'. **Ned Kelly's own 'Jerilderie Letter'** has become an important piece of Australian literature, particularly the passage where he speaks about 'scattering pieces of me and my brother all over the bush and yet they know and acknowledge I have been wronged and my mother and four or five men lagged innocent and is my brothers and sisters and my mother not to be pitied also who has no alternative only to put up with the brutal and cowardly conduct of a parcel of big ugly fat-necked wombat headed big bellied magpie legged narrow hipped splaw-footed sons of Irish Bailiffs or english landlords which is better known as Officers of Justice or Victorian Police who some calls honest gentlemen but I would like to know what business an honest man would have in the Police as it is an old saying It takes a rogue to catch a rogue' is often used by writers, comedians and satirists.
- Throughout the 1870s while the gang operated and when he was captured and hanged in **1880** there was huge **media coverage** in Australia and overseas in London. There was fascination with this 'simple' bush boy who could outwit and outrun the whole of the Victoria Police force for years at a time. His humour, riding ability and bush skills were greatly admired.
- Controversy still exists as to whether Ned Kelly received a fair **trial** and whether he intentionally murdered the three police at Stringybark Creek. Members of the legal fraternity, such as Julian Burnside, ex-Chief Justice Phillips and others, have studied his trial in depth and postulated their hypotheses. Their research and conclusions are based on the documents held at PROV.
- Every year, 11 November is commemorated as both Remembrance Day and also as the anniversary of Ned Kelly's **death**. The anniversary is still widely reported in the media.



- Ned Kelly, because of his **Irish heritage**, has been commemorated on a stamp series in Ireland.
- Indeed Kelly has played a significant role in **Australian culture** since the late nineteenth century. Many diverse interpretations have emerged of Kelly. People remain divided in their opinions of Kelly ranging from admiration to aversion. Australians continue to attempt to discover the 'real' Ned Kelly. Meanwhile several significant artefacts and documents associated with Ned Kelly have secured a place in our national mythology.

