

Historical importance of the PROV Kelly documents

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

Ned Online provides an opportunity for students to read original documents and form their own ideas about the Kelly gang's activities.

- The infamous Victorian bushranger Ned Kelly has had more written about him than any other Australian. Kelly's **influence on Australian history** radiates far beyond the events that made him the highest profile Australian bushranger. Through his crimes, the Victorian government's response to them and the various positive and negative views held about him by Australians at large, Ned Kelly has had an immensely significant impact on the course of Australian history.
- The Kelly papers held by Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) are the **primary documentary evidence**, and provide detailed factual information for anyone interested in researching Ned Kelly, his gang members, family and supporters. The hundreds of official Kelly papers at PROV are the largest and most intact collection of historical documents related to the subject. They are an irreplaceable documentary heritage.
- Among the contents of this unique documentary collection are **the earliest reports that exist about various events in the Kelly saga**. For instance, Constable Thomas McIntyre's report of the shoot-out at Stringybark Creek, and the telegrams describing the Kelly gang's appearance in armour at Glenrowan. The documents are authenticated through their status as official records, and many are formally sworn statements to magistrates. These documents are therefore essential to disentangling myth from reality, and to understanding other collections of 'Kellyana' based on later material.
- These documents were used as evidence in **the 1881 Royal Commission on the Police Force of Victoria** which reviewed the operations of the Victorian police at the time of the Kelly outbreak. The Royal Commission's Report was presented to both houses of Parliament. The Royal Commission exposed police incompetence and corruption and helped change the way the Victorian police force was administered and operated. It instilled in the Victorian force a tradition



of public accountability and self-examination which exists to this day. It helped create one of Australia's finest police forces.

- The documents offer a great deal of **detail of the life of the bushranger gang**, what they did and how they avoided the police. They also provide details of the relationship between **the Kelly gang and the police**. The deeds as recorded of the Kelly gang are still considered a major event in the history of Victorian policing. The official police documents provide the most intact record of the police train trip to Glenrowan, the siege and their alarmed reaction to the gang dressed in their suits of armour. The gang's shooting of three policemen remains the highest number of Victorian police killed at one time. After 125 years, the shootings continue to be a touch stone for the force.
- Much debate still surrounds **the treatment Ned Kelly received at his trial** and whether he should have even been tried for murder. The police statement taken from Constable McIntyre, amongst the many documents held in the Kelly records held at PROV, is a primary resource for investigating this allegation. The Kelly court records are important in the reassessment of the justice or otherwise that Kelly received at his trial.
- The **Petitions for Reprieve** document provides evidence that even in 1880 Kelly was very popular and had a great deal of support.
- The collection of documents includes originals or contemporary copies of every public **letter that Kelly is known to have written**, including the only document we know to be in his own handwriting, a note penned to Sergeant James Babington by a fifteen-year-old Kelly who was in trouble with his relatives.
- **Original photographs of Ned Kelly and his family** and others associated with the story are rare. A number of remaining original photographs of Ned Kelly are in the Victorian archives police records, together with photographs of some of his relatives who were also incarcerated.

