

# Bushranging

## in the National Historical Collection

I don't think you can have an interest in Australian history without an interest in bushrangers.

Jack Thompson, patron of the Friends of the National Museum of Australia, *The Canberra Times*, 26 September 2003

The recently opened *Outlawed!* exhibition examines the lives of some well-known outlaws from around the world and across time. It includes almost 500 artefacts, about 200 representing the lives and times of some of Australia's better-known bushrangers.

The term 'bushranger' has come to mean any person who attacked or robbed travellers and others in rural Australia. One commentator estimates that about 2000 bushrangers have been recorded in written accounts. Many more, however, remain invisible to history. Only a very few are represented in museum collections.

The National Historical Collection has a small but diverse range of bushranging-related artefacts.

### Silver tea urn



Silver tea urn rewarded to the farmers who killed Gilbert and Hall member John O'Meally. Photo: George Serras

At about 8.45pm on the evening of Thursday 19 November 1863, bushrangers John Gilbert, Ben Hall and John O'Meally attacked the Goimbla homestead of David and Amelia Campbell, outside Eugowra in the Lachlan Valley. In the ensuing two-hour gun battle David's brother William was wounded, property was destroyed and O'Meally was killed by a shotgun blast. Hall and Gilbert fled the scene after removing all the valuables from O'Meally's body.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* praised the Campbells' courage, describing the death of the 'remorseless and bloodthirsty ruffian' O'Meally as a

source of 'public relief'. O'Meally's serious bushranging career had lasted only 20 months but allegedly included armed robberies and the killing of at least two people. At the time of his death the New South Wales Government was offering a £1000 reward for his capture.

The Campbells were well rewarded. They received the reward money, a sterling silver epergne, a silver tea urn, a gold watch and a shotgun. They were also presented with two public testimonials and a public subscription of about £1000 to compensate for their property losses. In the mid-1870s, David was awarded a gold 'bushranger medal' from the government.

In 1986, Veda Hope, a granddaughter of the Campbells, donated the silver tea urn and the testimonials to the National Historical Collection. The urn had been presented to Amelia by the 'ladies

of upper and middle Adelong (as) an appreciation of her heroic conduct displayed during the attack at Goimbla'. The first testimonial, addressed to Amelia, is a small rectangle of silk onto which a message of admiration has been stitched by Mrs Thomas Calloway and her two married daughters Mrs W Beaver and Mrs J A Carter, also from the Adelong district. The second is a large handwritten petition signed by 92 Forbes district residents, addressed to both Campbells, which expresses 'unmixed admiration' of their 'heroic courage' in confronting the ruthless bushrangers.

### The 'Jerilderie Letter'

Self-confessed police-killer and stock-thief Ned Kelly is arguably Australia's best-known historical character. He is also the author of one of the most extraordinary documents in Australian history. Kelly's 56-page confession and manifesto, now known as the 'Jerilderie Letter', provides a direct insight into the state of his mind in February 1879, 16 months before police destroyed the Kelly Gang at Glenrowan.

It begins simply enough – 'I wish to acquaint you with some of the occurrences of the present past and future' – but builds quickly through increasingly violent language to an explosive ending – 'I am a widow's son outlawed and my orders must be obeyed'. The author believes he has been deeply wronged. He admits to crimes but claims he was forced into them



The John Hanlon transcript of the Jerilderie letter, NMA Collection

by a corrupt police force. He demands that squatters share their property with the poor. He makes violent threats against those who have wronged him in the past and who might oppose him in the future.

The outlawed Kelly Gang rode into Jerilderie late on the night of Saturday 8 February 1879. They left the following Monday, having removed about £2000 from the bank and believing the document they had left with bank clerk Edwin Living would soon be published. Living, however, had other ideas. As soon as the gang had departed he rode straight to Deniliquin, stopping only to refresh himself at John Hanlon's Eight Mile hotel, and caught the train to Melbourne where he handed the letter to police. A copy was made and 'placed on file' where it remained, largely ignored, until the 1930s.

The original 'Jerilderie Letter' is now in the collection of the State Library of Victoria but a copy made by John Hanlon was purchased at auction in July 2001, for inclusion in the National Historical Collection.

## US Revolver Company revolvers

In 2002, the Scully family donated two US Revolver Company revolvers and a kerosene table lamp to the National Historical Collection. These had been passed down through successive generations as mementos of the family's experience during the 1900 Governor brothers outbreak.



Revolver, model 1900, US Revolver Company, Scully Collection, NMA  
Photo: George Serras

In July 1900 a group that included Jimmy and Joe Governor and Jimmy Underwood killed five women and children on the Mawbey family property at Breealong, outside Gilgandra. In the following weeks four others were killed, people were assaulted and armed robberies carried out. North-central New South Wales was in a state of panic.

The Scully family — Edward, Angelina and three young children — lived on Bobadeen station in isolated country between Ulan and Cassilis. During the Governor outbreak it was common for families to gather at certain homesteads, including Bobadeen, every night. It is easy to imagine the family and neighbours sitting around a table in a room lit only by a kerosene lamp — possibly with the donated revolvers in front of them — wondering where the Governors would strike next.

## Popular culture collection

Bushranging is represented in several collections in the National Historical Collection, most notably the Christies Auctions collection, the Wetzel collection and the Royal Australian Historical Society collection.



Horse-drawn passenger coach  
Photo:

A Johnson Magic Lantern with 164 slides was purchased at a Christies' auction in July 2001. The slides are divided into three themes — 'Australian Landscapes', 'Robbery under Arms' and 'Ned Kelly'. Unfortunately, it is not known who compiled or used the slides. Magic lantern slide shows were a popular form of entertainment in the days before 'moving pictures'. In some parts of Australia they continued in use until the 1950s.

In the mid-1980s the Wetzel Movie Museum was acquired for the Collection. The museum's collection, established at Buderim in May 1970, included projectors, movie cameras, magic lanterns, autographed photographs and other film memorabilia. Among the movie props is one of five aluminium and fibreglass replica suits of armour made for the 1970 film *Ned Kelly*, which starred Mick Jagger.

The Interim Council of the Museum acquired a horse-drawn passenger coach and a horse-drawn landau from the Royal Australian Historical Society for inclusion in the National Historical Collection in 1980. It is believed that the coach was one used by the Nowland family on the mail and passenger service they ran between Gunnedah and Coonabarabran from the 1880s until about 1919.

Carroll-Baker Australian Productions apparently acquired the coach for use in the making of *The Man from Kangaroo*, filmed at Gunnedah and Kangaroo Valley in 1920. This film starred the champion athlete 'Snowy' Baker as a 'boxing parson' who saves both his ministry and his sweetheart from bushrangers.

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Facsimile of the armour used by Mick Jagger in the 1970 *Ned Kelly* film.  
Photo: Dragi Markovic

All of these artefacts, together with others from the National Historical Collection, are currently on display in the *Outlawed!* exhibition.