



One of the units in *Australian HISTORY MYSTERIES* is about Ned Kelly. Was he a hero or a villain? The unit below provides a way of leading students into a consideration of Kelly as a person, by looking at what we can find out about him from different types of evidence. Having done this, you can put Ned on trial for the killings at Stringybark Creek – which is the emphasis in the *Australian HISTORY MYSTERIES* unit.

In class:

- 1 Brainstorm your knowledge and ideas about Ned Kelly.
- 2 Read the background briefing about Kelly, then look at the various representations of him that follow.
- 3 Prepare a short museum display using images and captions that show the Ned Kelly you have discovered from this evidence.

In search of

Ned Kelly

Kelly and Horse
Sidney Nolan (1946)
Nolan Gallery, Lanyon, Canberra



Click on images
to view in
large format

Background Briefing

Ned Kelly was born in Victoria in 1854 or 1855, to a family of poor Irish immigrants – John 'Red' Kelly and Ellen (nee Quinn).

'Red' Kelly died when Ned was about 12, leaving him the oldest male 'breadwinner' in the family.

The Kelly and Quinn families, as well as that of his uncles, the Lloyds, were regularly in trouble with the police. Ned's first criminal charge, for assault, was in 1869 (when he was about 15), and his first conviction and jailing was in 1870.

In 1878 Constable Fitzpatrick visited the Kelly home to arrest Ned's brother, Dan, on a charge of horse stealing. Fitzpatrick, a notable liar, claimed that Ned had shot him in the wrist during a scuffle after a drink-affected Fitzpatrick had molested Ned's 14 year old sister, Kate. An arrest warrant was issued for Ned, and he fled to the bush with Dan, Steve Hart and Joe Byrne. Ned blamed all that followed on Fitzpatrick.

Later that year a party of police searching for Ned was ambushed by the Kelly gang at Stringybark Creek, and three of the four police were killed during a shoot-out. Ned later claimed that he had called on them to surrender, but, aware that the police had boasted that they would not bring him back alive, he shot them in self-defence.

During the next two years the gang robbed the banks at Jerilderie and Euroa, and tried to wreck a police train at Glenrowan. A local schoolteacher warned the train driver of the danger, and the police surrounded the hotel where the gang was waiting. Eventually, three of the gang members were killed (two of them apparently killed each other), and Ned was seriously wounded and captured.

He was tried for the murder of one of the policemen at Stringybark Creek, found guilty, and hanged on 11 November 1880.

Based on Graeme Davison et. al. (eds) 2001, *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, Revised Edition, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 365-6.

This brief outline does not tell us what sort of man Ned was, nor why he has been remembered to this day. To try and find out more about Ned Kelly, let's look at the sort of information and evidence that might be held in museums and libraries today.

