

Melbourne Grammar News 2018-12-14 online 14 December 2018 A shared connection

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Reunion reveals a shared connection

A school reunion is always an excellent opportunity to reconnect with former classmates and old friends, but the recent 30 year reunion for 1988 Old Melburnians included a particularly stunning example of reconnection. Two Old Melburnians, Tom Shelton (OM 1988) and Brendan Cooke (OM 1988), discovered their shared history with none other than Ned Kelly, Australia's most infamous bushranger.

Tom Shelton, now a successful property developer, says his family connection with Kelly relates to a near drowning. "The story as I understand it is that, as a seven year old boy, my great grandfather, Richard Shelton, fell into Hughes Creek near Avenel and was dragged out by Ned, who would have only been around 11 years old at the time. Richard's parents gave Ned a green sash to thank him, and that moment seems to have meant enough to him, that he kept the sash with him for the rest of his life and was wearing it at his final stand at Glenrowan," he says.

Tom became aware of the family connection shortly after leaving school, never realising that he had shared his time at Melbourne Grammar with one of Ned's descendants, Brendan Cooke, who has returned to university to study Law.

"Ned Kelly's sister, Margaret, is my great great grandmother, so Ned is my great great grand uncle," Brendan explains. "In the back of my mind when I'd read history about Ned Kelly and noticed mentions of the name Shelton, I wondered whether Tom had a connection with that family. When it all came to light at the reunion, it was a really pleasant surprise."

Renowned landscape architect Jim Fogarty (OM 1988) was sitting with Brendan at the reunion and identified the possible connection. "It was fascinating to see history come back alive in Tom and Brendan's story," Jim says. "It's easy to think of stories like that of Ned Kelly as almost a fantasy. Then it dawns on you that this is a real story about real people."

Brendan and Tom both remember being good mates at School, attending class and playing football in the First XVIII together, but being completely unaware of their historical link. "It was one of those amazing situations where, had we not come to the reunion, I am not sure the facts would have come to light," says Tom.

"Therein lies the importance of keeping in touch with fellow Old Melburnians and of scratching beyond the surface to find something in common."