

## **This photograph of Ned Kelly cost \$19,000. There's one problem . . .**

By Andrew Rule May 18 2002

This story will spoil someone's day. Several people's, in fact, starting with the collector who paid \$19,080 for the most prized photograph in a collection of Ned Kelly memorabilia that Christie's auctioned seven weeks ago.

### **[= Gentleman Ned photo]**

The photograph said to be of Ned Kelly and auctioned by Christie's.

Christie's judged the photograph so precious it reproduced it on the cover of its glossy catalogue for the March 26 sale. Inside was a long description in praise of Lot 167, including the statement: "THIS IS A UNIQUE PRINT OF AN IMPORTANT KELLY PORTRAIT - the only known image from his honest, hard-working years."

Whereas many other photographs of Kelly family members and sympathisers were passed in, bidding was brisk for the portrait, although it did not break the record \$19,800 paid in 1987 for a picture of Kelly in a boxing pose.

This would appear to make the picture a good buy . . . except for one small problem: the man in the photograph is not Ned Kelly.

Computer analysis by experts shows that the photograph, although undoubtedly old, is no more valuable than a picture of any anonymous ancestor washed up in a trash and treasure stall. This might shock the collector who bought the picture by telephone, easily topping the sale of 78 lots of Kellyana that Christie's offered in March. It might also shock the photograph's former owners, descendants of Ned Kelly's cousin, Tom Lloyd.

Christie's executive Michael Ludgrove was a little bemused yesterday to hear that three independent experts had checked the photograph and found it lacked one essential ingredient . . . Edward Kelly, bushranger.

On Monday, April 29, Mr Ludgrove took a call from a retired dental surgeon and keen amateur historian, John Chapman, who warned him that the photograph was not Ned Kelly.

Dr Chapman, 73, who has collected Australiana most of his life, had missed the sale. But, when shown the catalogue later, he declared the photograph wrong. Dr Chapman knows about the anatomy of the human head - but, as he told Christie's, it hardly takes an expert to pick differences between the man in the photograph and the real Ned Kelly, as shown in authentic police photographs.

Merely by running a ruler from the top of the unknown man's ear to the tip of his nose, then doing the same on a picture of Kelly, Dr Chapman demonstrates that the faces did not match. The shape of the ears, as well as their relative position on the skull, is noticeably different. The unknown man's ear is low-set, below the level of his eyes, and turns out and down. Kelly's ear is neat and close to the skull and much higher in relation to his eyes. The unknown man's fair eyebrows are arched. Kelly's dark eyebrows are heavy and straight.

The unknown man's hands are spidery and thin and look to belong to someone much older than 21. Kelly's fists, as shown in the boxing photograph, are as strong and square as you might expect from the heavyweight champion of north-eastern Victoria.

One man looks like a bushranger; the other more like a schoolteacher. However, it seems likely that the man is a long-forgotten relation of Kelly relatives or "sympathisers" - the photograph was taken at the Beechworth studios of James Bray, where (Kelly gang member) Joe Byrne and his boyhood friend Aaron Sherritt had their photographs taken in the 1870s.

Dr Chapman says Mr Ludgrove at first suggested a "meeting" between Dr Chapman, himself and Ian Jones, the well-known and respected Kelly historian who authenticated the photographs for the sale. But when Dr Chapman called back some days later to confirm the meeting, he says Mr

Ludgrove had changed his mind - stating that Christie's had decided to stand by the authentication and would not discuss the matter further.

Dr Chapman was disappointed, but not deterred. "I gave Christie's the courtesy of being able to set it right themselves, and save face, but they choked me off a bit," he said. He asked for Mr Jones' telephone number, and was refused it. He asked if Christie's would get Mr Jones to call him. That request was also refused. He was told to put his thoughts in writing.

The auctioneers had not always been so unfriendly. Dr Chapman is a well-known collector, and has written catalogue notes about historical items going under the hammer. He presented the original Eureka petition to the State Library in 1988, and is regarded as an authority on some colonial documents and items. He taught anatomy of the head and neck at the Dental Therapy School before retiring in 1989, and has been called as an expert witness in court cases.

Satisfied that he had given Christie's every chance to review the photograph, consult independent experts and contact the buyer, Dr Chapman contacted *The Age* through former senior journalist John Lahey, whom he had previously helped with stories of an historical theme.

The differences between the men in the photographs seem clear enough to a neutral observer. But, to prove it, *The Age* went to the forensic dental experts who help police identify bodies.

John Clement is a forensic orthodontist with Melbourne University School of Dental Science. He and his staff helped identify Adele Bailey, the transsexual whose remains were found in a mineshaft at Bonnie Doon in 1995.

Ronn Taylor, a dental prosthetist who works with Dr Clement, is an old hand at identifying skulls. A plaster copy of Ned Kelly's death mask sits on his desk. He said Kelly's ears, forehead, eyebrow ridges and nose differed from those in the Christie's photograph.

"There's no way I can get a match," he said. "I don't reckon it's the same person. If I am wrong I will eat my hat."

A senior lecturer in geomatics at the university, Cliff Ogleby, is an expert in measurement. Last year he worked with the State Library to preserve for posterity three-dimensional computer images of Ned Kelly's death mask and armour, perfect to the last millimetre.

When Mr Ogleby saw a copy of the Christie's photograph in newspapers before the March sale, he thought it looked wrong.

This week he tested the photograph against the computer image of the death mask of Kelly's shaved head, which was cast in plaster an hour after the hanging in 1880. The mask is so detailed it shows the rope mark on his neck - and the precise shape and size of his ears, nose and eyebrows.

When the death mask image is placed over two authentic Kelly photographs, the ears, nose and eyes match perfectly. But when placed over the Christie's picture, it does not match - with the ears standing out as different.

In fact, said Mr Ogleby, a photograph of Heath Ledger, the actor cast to play Ned Kelly in a forthcoming film, matched Kelly's face much better than the man in the Christie's photograph.

"There's no way it's the same person, and I have got about 40 students here who have looked at it and agree with me," he said.

Richard Neave is one of the world's leading forensic experts on the shape of ears. Recently retired from Manchester University in Britain, Mr Neave is often asked by British police to identify suspects from photographs.

Mr Neave told *The Age*: "The supposed photograph of Mr Ned Kelly is not of him but of some other person."

\* Mr Ludgrove said last night his firm relied on Ian Jones' opinion in authenticating the photograph. He said that if Christie's was satisfied there had been a mistake, Christie's would consider reimbursing the buyer.