

the
years
NED KELLY
went
straight



- Kelly Chronology**
- 1854 Ned Kelly born at Wallan, Vic.
 - 1865 Ned Kelly's father dies. Family moves to Glenrowan.
 - 1871 Kelly sentenced to three years for horse stealing.
 - 1874 Kelly released.
 - 1878 Battle of Stringybark Creek — three police killed. Ned Kelly, Dan Kelly, Joe Byrne, Steve Hart proclaimed outlaws. Euroa Bank robbery.
 - 1879 Jerilderie Bank robbery.
 - 1880 Kelly Gang destroyed at Glenrowan Inn. Ned Kelly captured, tried, executed, Melbourne, November 11.

NEARLY 84 years ago, Ned Kelly burst into outlawry in a short but vicious gunfight at Stringybark Creek. Three police troopers died.

Two bank robberies and nearly two years later, the bushranging career of Ned Kelly and his gang ended at Glenrowan in a legendary holocaust. Exactly two years after the initial gun battle, Ned Kelly, sole survivor of the Kelly Gang, was on trial for the murder of Constable Lonigan, the first trooper to die at Stringybark.

He was found guilty and hanged. At the trial, the chief police witness, Constable McIntyre, perjured himself on a small but vital point. He said that Lonigan, challenged by Ned Kelly, was shot as he ran towards cover.

Ned Kelly always claimed that Lonigan reached cover and received his death wound as he came up from behind a log

to open fire on the Kellys. The variation is a subtle one, but its implications weren't lost on McIntyre. The official first account of the shooting given by him tallied with Ned Kelly's. In all subsequent versions, including that given at the trial, this part of the story was amended to make the shooting appear more cold-blooded.

The fact of murder remains, and Kelly the criminal is no less guilty. But Kelly the man is shown in a different light. Two police witnesses at the trial said that in Kelly's account of the shootings, he seemed anxious to protect his brother and mates at his own expense. It is also a point that Ned Kelly made his famous last stand at Glenrowan, not to protect himself, but in an attempt to get back to his men surrounded by police in the Glenrowan Inn.

A common explanation of such ges-

tures is that Kelly was a ruthless, habitual criminal with a few good streaks. This is glib and feasible, but it doesn't fit the facts, certainly not the fact that Ned Kelly made a remarkable three-year effort to lead an honest life. The story of those three years gives the best possible insight into the character of the man who has sunk into near-anonymity beneath the plough-steel helmet that has become his symbol.

Ned Kelly's juvenile delinquency after the death of his father, John ("Red") Kelly, has been often described and reasons for it discussed. The fact remains that, by his seventeenth year, Ned Kelly had been acquitted of assaulting a Chinese, had narrowly escaped conviction as an accomplice of bushranger Harry Power, and had served six months for obscene language and assault. Then, in 1871, when he was sixteen, he was

sentenced to three years for receiving a stolen horse.

There is overwhelming evidence that young Ned didn't know that the horse was stolen. He had borrowed it from a man named Wild Wright, and didn't know what was afoot when a trooper went to arrest him, without explanation. He violently resisted and was badly knocked about. He was tried and sentenced to three years for receiving. Wild Wright, convicted of stealing the horse, received only eighteen months.

Battered and bitter, the sixteen-year-old Kelly seemed an unlikely subject for reform. Yet this prison sentence provided the most powerful single influence for good in his life. The first half was served at Beechworth, the second at Pentridge gaol, near Melbourne, where, behind its hostile, bluestone walls, Ned Kelly found one of the few people who ever tried to understand and help him. It was the gaol's Roman Catholic chaplain, Father O'Hea, a priest who had known Ned Kelly's father and had been friend and counsellor to the Kelly family

during their years at Wallan and Beveridge. Father O'Hea had baptized Ned's brother Jim and his sister Margaret, and may have baptized Ned himself.

There can be no doubt that Father O'Hea was basically responsible for the remarkable transformation which took place in Ned during those years in prison. The Ned Kelly who emerged from Pentridge was the Ned Kelly who has been almost forgotten: Kelly the honest man, Kelly the timber worker, Kelly the boxer, Kelly the overseer, Kelly the shearer.

Soon after leaving prison, Ned Kelly went to work as a faller for a timber mill owned by Heath and Dockendorf.

That year, 1874, perhaps at one of the mills, Ned ran into Wild Wright, the man whose horse-stealing escapade had sent him to prison. Perhaps to settle the score, perhaps just to see who was the better man, they staged a boxing match.

Wild Wright was a noted district fighter who, in later years, became a professional boxer. He stood six-foot-one,

and topped thirteen stone. An old district identity described him to me as "a man with a great bony frame and a great bony face; a black moustache, and the fiercest pair of eyes you'd ever seen." Ned Kelly was more than an inch shorter and a stone lighter, but three years hard labour and several months in the timber country had taught him to take care of himself.

The fight took place in Beechworth, probably in the yard of the Imperial Hotel. It was apparently a well-staged affair. Ned fought in a pair of all-trunks worn over long underpants and undershirt. No detailed account of the battle has yet been discovered. We know only that Ned Kelly won and became, in his twentieth year, a sort of unofficial heavy-weight boxing champion of Victoria's north-eastern district.

Some months after his victory over Wild Wright, Ned returned to his mother's home at Eleven Mile Creek near Glenrowan—a man of some stature now, who had been earning good money for nearly a year. Now he tried another job, and again his prison experience came to his aid. The Beechworth gaol had its own quarry where Ned had learned how to work local granite. Apparently, he had also done some building work with a convict gang. At any rate, in the year after his release, 1875, Ned Kelly contracted to build a granite house for a settler near Glenrowan. The granite was quarried in nearby hills and carted to the building site. Some of the blocks were six feet long. Fourteen-year-old Dan Kelly possibly helped, but sixteen-year-old Jim was serving a prison term.

That granite homestead still stands near Glenrowan, as solid as on the day the amateur mason chipped "1875" in one of its stones.

Not far from the Kelly home, outside Greta, was Burke's Hole Farm, owned by James Dixon, a former mayor of Wangaratta. The property included a timber mill. That year, Dixon went bankrupt and the mill was taken over by Ned Kelly's old employer, Saunders and Rule. They appointed Ned overseer of the mill, with its two-storey building, 33 hp. steam engine and travelling rack benches.

Kelly was now becoming a well-known figure in the district. A photograph of him taken at about this time shows a sober, bearded young man, dressed in a suit, with waistcoat and tie. In those days there was little entertainment offering in hamlets like Greta and Glenrowan. Impromptu sports meetings were often staged by the young men of the district. The Glenrowan sports were usually held

Kelly on trial in Melbourne. Trooper Steele (left) brought Kelly down with two charges of duck-shot to end the Glenrowan gun battle. Drawing by Melbourne artist Julius Ashton.



Probably the only photograph taken of members of the Kelly Gang during their outlawry. It shows (l. to r.) Wild Wright, Ned Kelly, Steve Hart. The picture comes from the collection of the trooper placed in charge of Greta after the gang was broken up.



in a paddock near Harvey's orchard. Ned Kelly had been something of an athlete ever since his school days at Wallan and Beveridge. One of his Beveridge school-mates, Fred Hopkins, remembered him as a "tall and active youngster who excelled all other boys at school games".

As old Glenrowan identity, the late Joseph Ashmead, could remember how Ned Kelly entertained the crowd at one of these meetings by bending from the saddle at full gallop to snatch a handkerchief from the ground. Other tricks in the Kelly trick-riding repertoire included standing and lying on the saddle at full gallop, and jumping fences while kneeling on his horse's back.

When 1875 gave way to 1876, Ned Kelly had been out of prison for two years. Brother Dan was riding around the district with a pack of young blades who dubbed themselves the "Greta Mob" and affected a sort of uniform. They wore their hat straps under their noses, and brightly-coloured sashes round their waists. Ned, though a hero of the "Greta Mob", did not join them. He often wore a handsome green sash which had been given to him as a bid for saving a neighbour's son from drowning. But he did not affect the mob's badge of hat strap under nose. Both he and his best friend, Joe Byrne, continued to wear their tweed suits and waistcoats. Even in the days of horse stealing which lay ahead, Superintendent Hare would concede that they were "good-looking, well-dressed men" who easily passed as well-to-do young squatters.

Ned's third year of honest work was laid over. Mainstay of his mill was a contract to supply timber for the railway being built between Wangaratta and Beechworth. In July 1878, the line was completed and there were leaner times ahead. But Saunders and Hule gained another railway contract, with the main Gippsland line.

One of Ned's mill workers was a Glenrowan lad, Jack McMonigle, who had earned his friendship and respect. Ned sent McMonigle ahead to Gippsland with half the plant, and arranged that he would follow with the rest. But the plant arrived without Ned Kelly. From scraps of evidence, we can reconstruct what happened.

On Bullock Creek in the Wombat Ranges, Ned and Dan had found some old alluvial workings which still showed good prospects. Nearby was a log hut in a fairly bad state of repair. To give Dan a good start, Ned took a few of his men up to the ranges to begin repairing the hut and clearing some of the timber round it. The job well under way, Ned left to return to Glenrowan. But he made

a detour to visit his mother's family on the Devil's River.

In one of those absurd incidents that can shape destinies, Ned ran in a wild ball and gave it to a farmer. Again, we are on familiar ground. Ned Kelly described the incident fully in his letters; how the farmer sold the bull to a butcher, who killed it; how a local squatter spread the story that Ned had stolen the bull from him; how Ned confronted the squatter and made him withdraw the accusation.

The incident was a flimsy enough excuse to abandon the timber mill and take up horse and cattle stealing; but Ned Kelly had dropped into the middle of a squatter-selector land war which was being aggravated by bad seasons and economic depression. The man who inevitably became a leader as well as a figurehead, Ned Kelly, was committed, and probably doomed.

On and on during the next year, 1877, Ned Kelly, his American step-father George King, Joe Byrne, Dan Kelly and others raided squatters' paddocks throughout the North-Eastern district. Horses and cattle were sold as far north as Jerrilderie and as far south as Melbourne. But times were bad, and stock was going for a song. Ned and Dan probably sheared during the next season. Perhaps while Ned was knocking down an early sheep, he struck up an unlikely friendship.

A new police trooper had just arrived at Benalla, a wild young fellow called Alex Fitzpatrick. Ned himself has left us this portrait of the man who would shape his life: "A young strapping (fellow) rather genteel, more fit to be a steward to a landless than a policeman." In later years, Ned could remember "deceit and cowardice . . . in his puny cabbage-bearded looking face". But for a time, Fitzpatrick was his friend.

As a policeman, Fitzpatrick wasn't shaping too well. He made unfortunate friends and drank too much. Perhaps it was suggested that, unless he did something fairly spectacular, his future in the force was doubtful.

On a visit to Benalla, Ned Kelly became drunk, and rode his horse across a footpath. He was arrested and spent the night in the lock-up. Next morning, on the way to court, Constable Fitzpatrick did a significant thing. He tried to handcuff his mate.

Ned Kelly already believed that his



This previously unpublished picture of Ned Kelly was taken to commemorate his victory over Wild Wright in 1874. It was recently discovered by the author at Cape-land Antiques, St. Kilda. Smoko pots (below) from the Glenrowan Inn, at the site of the Kelly ends. A plate clothes policeman, with drawn revolver, can be seen in the foreground. (Bottom) Stray bullets from the siege did not deter police and civilians from paying for this group at the Glenrowan railway station. Behind them, Ned Kelly lies wounded in the railway waiting room. These old pictures make up for photographic lack of quality by their historical importance.



Sergeant Kennedy's body lies under a blanket at the scene of the Stringybark Creek shooting affair.

bootmaker is a well-known incident. Ned beat Fitzpatrick unconscious, threw off his would-be captors, then let himself be led quietly away by an aged and respected J.P. to stand trial.

Fined a few pounds for his drunkenness and for damage to police uniforms, Ned Kelly left court with much on his mind. In submitting to arrest by the J.P., he had spectacularly demonstrated his attitude to the law. But there was Alex Fitzpatrick. If Ned was to trust the law, was he also to trust Fitzpatrick? Nearly a month after the chase, Ned met Fitzpatrick riding along the Benalla road. The weeks had cooled him down, and besides, there was a serious matter to discuss. Warraxis were out for Dan Kelly and two of his consorts, on a charge of breaking into a store and assaulting the stockkeeper and his wife. But the three youths had taken to the bush. Ned had already refused a request by In-

spector Brooke Smith to bring the fugitives in. But now, Fitzpatrick succeeded in convincing him that the charges were not serious, and that it would be best if the three boys gave themselves up.

It was no easy decision, this. But, next morning Ned Kelly galloped into Benalla leading the three fugitives. They surrendered to Fitzpatrick and let themselves be locked up to await trial. Ned Kelly still had faith in the law and one of its officers—despite past experience.

Then, on October 19, 1877, came the trial. A horrified Ned Kelly saw the boys found guilty of wilful damaging on what was subsequently proved to be perjured evidence. Each received three months.

This was the end of the honest road for Ned Kelly. With his step-father, George King, he returned to horse stealing. Ned claimed justification, and provocation which may have existed. The fact remained that he was bitter and dis-

illusioned. His three honest years had gone for nothing. The dog had a bad name; there was no equal justice; the dice were loaded against the Kellys.

Within six months, another and more famous Fitzpatrick incident had taken place. Trying to arrest Dan Kelly on a horse-stealing charge of which the lad was later proved innocent, Fitzpatrick got into a scuffle at the Kelly homestead, possibly over an advance he made to Kate Kelly. Fitzpatrick, who had been drinking, returned to Benalla with a slight wrist injury, and swore that Ned Kelly had shot him. The events of the next two and a half years are history.

But one more incident should be recalled. Ned and Dan were fugitives with a price on their heads, in the hut on Bellock Creek. Their mother, brother-in-law, and a friend were awaiting trial for complicity in the alleged wounding of Fitzpatrick. Through his old boxing opponent, Wild Wright, and one of his mother's people, Ned Kelly sent a remarkable offer to Alfred Wyatt, a straight-dealing police magistrate who was relieving at Beechworth. If Mrs Kelly and the two men were released, Ned and Dan would surrender themselves for trial. The offer was not accepted. Mrs Kelly was tried, and sentenced to three years. The two men each received six years.

On October 28 of that year, 1878, Ned Kelly, shaming gold at the Bullock Creek hut, learnt that four well-armed plain-clothes police were camped less than a mile away at Stringybark Creek. With Dan and Joe Byrne and Steve Hart, he went to bail them up, and take their guns and horses.

But before he left the hut, he did two significant things. He pulled his hat strap under his nose and borrowed a red sash to bind around his waist. It was his gesture of final rebellion. Ned Kelly had become one of the "Greta Mob".

The wounded Kelly is brought to Melbourne to stand trial for murder.



An artist's impression of Ned Kelly's final moments on the gallows at Pentridge Gaol.



Walkabout

AUSTRALIA'S WAY OF LIFE MAGAZINE

