

# Estrays & Outlaws

*Estray: a record or document that has been alienated from the possession of its legitimate custodian\**

A recent case involving archival estrays related to the capture of bushranger Ned Kelly has ended happily, with the return of six valuable manuscript documents which have been missing from the official record since around 1935. The documents include telegrams, a proclamation and letters from Sir Henry Parkes, all relating to the Kelly Gang and the siege by police at Glenrowan.

By the time of the siege in 1880, the telegraph was well established as a means of communication and was particularly heavily used by government departments, who made up around 50% of telegraphic traffic in the Australian colonies. So it is not surprising to discover two telegrams between colonial offices in Victoria and New South Wales in the archives, related to someone as infamous as Ned Kelly. What is extraordinary is the vivid sense of immediacy and drama to be found in the reportage about the siege, its progress and aftermath. The telegrams read as follows:

**sent 11 am, 28 June 1880:**

Am happy to inform you that the outlaw Ned Kelly has been taken the others are surrounded in a house at Glenrowan they will, it is hoped, be captured today

**time and date unrecorded:**

Latest re Kelly Gang Ned Kelly mortally wounded, Byrne said to be lying shot dead in the hotel. Dan Kelly & Hart in possession of hotel keeping up incessant fire on the police who are returning it under cover. None of Police with exception of Supt Hare injured as yet. Dan Kelly and Hart covered with shot proof armour have thrown doors of hotel open and have let all civilians out and are now calling upon the Police to come in Bullets flying in all directions. The 2 remaining members of the gang cannot hold out much longer.

Although other bushrangers, such as Frederick Ward (aka Captain Thunderbolt), Sam Poo (a Chinese bushranger), Frank Walker, Dan Morgan, Ben Hall, Thomas Connell and Andrew Scott (aka Captain Moonlight) are also represented in the State archives collection, it is Ned Kelly who continues to capture the general public's imagination.

The quintessential Australian storyline of battler versus authority, combined with the unforgettable image of Kelly's last stand at Glenrowan – facing a fusillade of gun fire before being wounded and captured in a final futile gesture of defiance – is a recipe for continued fascination.

The original documents are on view in the Sydney Records Centre until the end of December. Digital copies of the manuscripts are also available for viewing on State Records' web site: [www.records.nsw.gov.au](http://www.records.nsw.gov.au).

Most estrays come to light when they are offered for sale or auction, often after a death in the family. The Ned Kelly records came to State Records' attention in August 2001 when a Sydney auction house advertised them for sale through auction. After negotiation with the vendor, the case ended with the return of the documents to official custody.

Other recent estrays recovered include records of the Walhallow Aboriginal Reserve, 1910-1974; the NSW Contingent to the Sudan – Regimental Brigade Orders, 1885; a Police Department Accounts Register, from 1916-17; a collection of 250 Department of Agriculture lantern slides, from the 1920s and 30s; minute books from the Agricultural Bureau of NSW, 1947-74; and a John Oxley map of early New South Wales, about 1817, reputed to have been given to French explorer Louis de Freycinet by Oxley, who Surveyor General of NSW at the time.

\* *Keeping Archives* (2nd ed), edited Judith Ellis, published by DW Thorpe in association with the Australian Society of Archivists, 1993

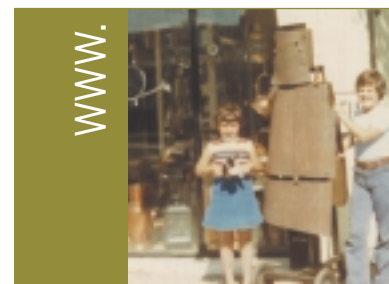
→ The gloved hands of Archivist Janette Pelosi with telegrams and letters related to the capture of Ned Kelly in 1880, recently returned to official custody in the State archives collection



PHOTO: ROBERT PEARCE/THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

REPRODUCED COURTESY OF BRAD WEBB

↓ Brad Webb of [www.ironoutlaw.com](http://www.ironoutlaw.com) and his sister standing next to 'some dodgy armour at one of the numerous Kelly museums that could be found around Benalla back in the mid 1970s'



See <http://nedonline.imagineering.net.au/main.htm> for the Public Record Office of Victoria's *Ned Online* site

And for an exhaustive, personal Ned Kelly archival project, see [www.ironoutlaw.com](http://www.ironoutlaw.com) by Melbourne graphic designer Brad Webb.