

## **Your Shortcut to ... Ned Kelly**

He robbed banks ... saved and took lives... and threw parties for his hostages. This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to Ned Kelly—the podcast where we dive into the who, what, when, where, why and how of the big news stories. I'm Amanda Bower.

And I'm Bryce Corbett.

Bryce, we've been talking a lot at Squiz Kids lately about media literacy - about how to stop, think, and check if something you see or hear or read is true. And one of the things that Squiz-E the Newshound has learned is that two people who were in the exact same place, at the exact same time, can have a VERY different version of what happened. The story of Ned Kelly is a great example of that. Some people see him as a hero—a kind of Australian Robin Hood ... and others see him as a murderous criminal. He's inspired some of our country's most famous art, and was the subject of the world's first feature length film —have a look at the links in your episode notes.

Today, we'll take you through HOW Ned Kelly became Australia's most wanted bushranger; WHY so many people thought of him as a hero; and WHAT his metal armour was all about.

Listen carefully - there's a Squiz at the end!

WHO

Ned Kelly was born in Beveridge, Victoria in either 1854 or 1855 - his precise date of birth isn't known. His Dad, John Kelly, was sent from Ireland to Australia as a convict, for stealing pigs. Once John had served his time, he decided to stay.

And what kind of kid was Ned?

When he was just ten years old, Ned saved another boy from drowning. The kid's family awarded Ned with a green silk sash for his bravery. He was still wearing that sash when he was finally captured... so I think it's fair to say that he was very proud of having saved that life.

So at 10, Ned saved a life, and yet a few years later, he was involved in police killings. What changed?

When Ned was only 12, his father died. He began to spend more time with his uncles, who weren't exactly law-abiding citizens. And when he was 14, Ned came under the influence of a bushranger called Harry Powers.

What exactly is a bushranger?

Back then, it meant a convict who had escaped, and was hiding in the bush. These bushrangers survived by stealing and robbing... and the Kelly family supported Harry Powers.

Why would they do that?

Well, convicts were often treated terribly, so some people didn't blame them for escaping. Ned's family was known to support and protect people who were on the run... and Ned basically became Harry's apprentice. He started helping Harry steal horses and commit robberies.

But he was only 14!

14-year-olds definitely had more responsibilities back then than most kids do today, and maybe Ned was more mature than your average year 9 - but the situation raises some important questions. Was Ned too young to think for himself about joining Harry Powers? If most of the adults you know are breaking the law, how hard is it to say no and do the right thing? Whatever your opinion, there's no doubt that from the age of 14, Ned was on the Victorian police's "wanted" list.

How old was Ned when he was first arrested?

Just 15. By the time he was 17, he'd already been to prison twice. But the point of no return came when Ned was 23, in what is called "The Fitzpatrick Incident" - and it's the perfect example of how two completely different stories can be told about the same events.

Ohh - I remember this! A police officer called Alexander Fitzpatrick came to the Kellys' house, and wound up injured... but those are just about the only details that Fitzpatrick and the Kellys agreed on.

Exactly right. The police officer's version of the story is that he'd come to arrest Dan Kelly, Ned's brother, and wound up shot by Ned, and knocked unconscious by Ned's mother, Ellen. The Kellys' version is that Fitzpatrick had arrived drunk, had no paperwork to arrest Dan, and had been inappropriate towards Ned and Dan's sister, Kate. That's what caused them to fight with him, and the injury occurred when they were defending their sister.

And the judge agreed with the police officer's version of events?

Yup. Even though the head of the police had actually described Alexander Fitzpatrick as "generally bad and a discredit to the force."

And what happened next?

Ned and Dan went on the run, but Ellen, their mother, was sentenced to six months of hard labour for knocking Fitzpatrick unconscious. Now, members of the public were

outraged that an elderly woman would be sentenced to hard physical work... and there was a lot of sympathy for the Kelly brothers, who were now officially bushrangers. The Kelly gang started stealing—but they said it was to pay a lawyer to appeal their mum's sentence.

I'm guessing that's one reason WHY many people thought of Ned Kelly as a hero.

WHY?

There's no doubt, Bryce, that Ned Kelly was a criminal. He killed three police officers... he robbed two banks... and some people were very afraid of him. But he also had his sympathisers. In fact, the police got so frustrated that people were helping the Kelly Gang avoid capture, that they started putting people in prison for months, without charge, if the police suspected they were aiding the Kellys. In what became a famous letter, Ned talked about police harassment of people like him, and of bad treatment of the Irish in Australia.

Ah... is that the 56-page letter left behind when the Kellys robbed a bank in Jerilderie?

That's it! Imagine writing a 56-page letter... In the letter, Ned said he acted in self defense when he killed those officers—once again, it's a case of there being different versions of the same event. He also wrote passionately about how badly he thought poor people were being treated in colonial Australia. In fact, when Ned robbed the bank, he also burned all the bank's paperwork on who owed them money... so that those people wouldn't have to pay the bank back.

Which is why some people think of Ned as an Australian Robin Hood - stealing from the rich, and helping the poor. You said earlier that Ned even threw a party for his hostages. Is that really true?

When the Kelly gang robbed their first bank, they didn't hurt anyone - all the locals were put into a storeroom, and there are stories that the Kellys put on a horse trick riding show for them, and even had a drink with the bank manager, before they rode away with all the bank's money. And in a place called Glenrowan, the Kellys took the entire town hostage at the local inn, and there were drinks and dancing!

Glenrowan? Isn't that where Ned Kelly was finally captured?

That is exactly right. Maybe they were having too much fun at the inn, because Ned allowed one local to leave, and he was able to alert police. The police surrounded the Glenrowan Inn... and were terrified when Ned came out, because he looked more like a machine than a man.

Ah yes! Ned Kelly's famous metal armour. WHAT was that all about?

WHAT

All four members of the Kelly Gang had made themselves bullet proof armour out of pieces of metal ploughs used on farms - I'll put a great video in your episode notes showing how the armour looked and worked. It was like nothing anyone had seen before, and when Ned came out of the Glenrowan Inn, a journalist wrote about it this way:

"There was no head visible and in the dim light of morning, with the steam rising from the ground, it looked for all the world like the ghost of Hamlet's father with no head, only a very thick neck.... The figure continued gradually to advance, stopping every now and then and moving what looked like its headless neck mechanically round, and then raising one foot onto a log, and aiming and firing a revolver. Shot after shot was fired at it, but without effect"

Bullets bounced off Ned's armour multiple times, but he had two big problems: the armour was extremely heavy, so he couldn't get away ... and it didn't cover the bottom half of his body. The police finally hit him in the legs, and captured him. The rest of the gang was killed. Ned was taken to prison, and sentenced to hang to death.

Ah yes, and just before he died, didn't Ned famously say "Such is life."

Well, that's what SOME newspapers reported at the time. But actually, Ned decided not to make a speech before he died, and most witnesses said that his final words were mumbled, and something like "Ah well, I suppose" —he was likely just answering a question that someone had asked him. We'll never know exactly what Ned said; we will never know the truth of many of the things he did; but we do know that at the age of 25 or 26, Ned Kelly died for his crimes.

Perhaps because so many questions are still unanswered, Ned Kelly remains one of the most fascinating people in Australian history.

## THE S'QUIZ

"This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening...

1. What did the Kelly gang use to make their armour? (Metal parts of a plough)"
2. Ned Kelly was wearing something on the day he was captured that he got when he was 10. What was it? (A green silk sash)
3. What do you think - was Ned Kelly a goodie, a baddie, or something more complicated? (Of course there's no right answer to that, but it's sure to start some good conversations!)

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for joining us as we explored the who, what, how, where, when, and why of Ned Kelly

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day!

Over and out.