

Kelly Gang

memorabilia

The image of Ned Kelly and his gang wearing their ploughshare armour at Glenrowan still captures the imagination, and Kelly memorabilia is still coming out of the woodwork

TOM THOMPSON



1 Scrimshaw cattle horn showing one of the Greta Mob bushrangers shooting at police troopers

2 This double mounted scrimshaw from 1880 shows Ned Kelly beneath his favourite horse, Daylight



The Kelly saga has been most adequately exposed, thanks to the efforts of historian Ian Jones over the last thirty years. But a few mysteries have surfaced to allow a bit of wonder and speculation – the fate of Ned’s stepfather, the American George King, who disappeared in April 1878; the Kelly Gang scrimshaw given to sympathisers 1878–81; and the mysterious disappearing act of Ned’s sister, Kate Kelly, from 1881 to 1898.

Ned and Dan Kelly were outlawed following the visit of Constable Alexander Fitzpatrick – alone, drunk and without a warrant – to the Kelly homestead on 15 April 1878, ostensibly to pick up Dan Kelly. Fitzpatrick claimed Ned shot him and that he lost his revolver in the fracas, which certainly followed his inept wooing of young Kate Kelly.

In the aftermath, George King, who had fathered three children with Ned’s mother Ellen, cleared out, never to be seen again and Ellen herself was imprisoned. Kate and her elder sister Maggie reared the younger children while their brothers and their mates created havoc on both sides of the NSW and Victorian border.

A few years ago, Noble Numismatics sold a Kelly scrimshaw for over \$160,000, and three great examples will go to auction in



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3 Kate Kelly's revolver. A .32 calibre revolver by Henckell & Co, Solingen, inscribed with the initials KK on the wooden stock. The revolver bears the insignia of the Royal Constabulary, associated with the police force who hunted the Kelly Gang in 1878–1880. Such relics were on show as early as 1880 at a display known in the popular newspapers as the Kate Kelly Exhibition

4 Carte-de-visite of Kate Kelly, signed to reverse, a previously unknown variant of the Waxworks series

Melbourne in October. A pair of cattle horns that have been shown at Glenrowan feature mounted troopers chasing bushrangers – one of them wearing a spotted shirt and with his chinstrap worn under the nose in the larrikin Greta Mob fashion – plus an extraordinary Australian 'coat-of-arms' with an emu and kangaroo, a furnace and ploughshares. The other horn shows a finely cut young woman pointing at a scroll clearly incised 'AM Fitzpatrick', sailing ships, an American eagle and flag. Certainly someone here knew the Kelly story, but like most scrimshaw, the artist is anonymous, though probably American.

Another example of scrimshaw c. 1880 is a double mounted horn inscribed with portraits of the Kelly

Gang and George King, with an elaborate Glenrowan briar rose decorating both sides. It is attributed to George King, who could have travelled by ship on the Melbourne to New Zealand run for several years, passing these memory sticks on to sympathiser's families.

Historians are particularly lucky that one James Bray, a photographer of Beechworth, engaged with the emerging Greta Mob of Irish larrikins from 1877, taking portraits of Dan Kelly, Joe Byrne and Aaron Sherritt, their friends and sympathisers, and the final endgame at Glenrowan in 1880. These small *carte-de-visites* photographs (CDVs) became the first series of Kelly collectables,

when Melbourne photographer Burman reprinted Bray's work by popular demand, even recreating scenes of the shoot-out at Glenrowan, where 286 revolvers were issued to police.

A post-Glenrowan scrimshaw attributed to George King has also surfaced, again in the USA. It was found in an attic in Mansfield over 60 years ago. This single cow horn has been incised with a portrait of Ned Kelly (modelled on a woodcut in the *Illustrated Sydney News* of July 1880) above his horse Daylight, gang members, Sub-Inspector Stanhope O'Connor (who led the blacktrackers at Glenrowan) and many articulated Glenrowan briar roses to both sides.

