

Edward 'Ned' Kelly (1855-1880), is Australia's most famous bushranger, made his last stand at Glenrowan, Victoria in iron armour he hammered from plough shares. He was hanged at the Old Melbourne Gaol on 11 November 1880 – 2005 marks the 125th anniversary of his death.

Article extract:
10 Most Important Australians
Craig McGregor, Sydney Morning Herald

Number 1. Ned Kelly

You've got to start with Ned. He is the great, iconic figure of Australia – a tragic, confused but brave-hearted man who, in many ways, sums up the history of this contradictory continent. Born in chains, violent, rebellious, with a terrible sense of what was right and wrong, fair and unfair, which ended with him picking up the gun and enacting the bloody fate of many revolutionaries in post-colonial societies. Australia, too, became post-colonial. It became independent, then affluent, then sophisticated, then globalised. You would think the image of a bearded, bank-robbing 'Bastard from the Bush' would become lost in a welter of Coke ads and 'Aussie! Aussie! Aussie!' footy chants.

But somewhere in the muddled history that all nations have, some memory of this Irish currency lad, with an iron Nolan mask welded to his face, stayed alive for generation after generation, decade after decade, war after war, disaster after disaster, boom after boom, until – as the never-ending stream of films and books and histories shows – Ned Kelly somehow came to be regarded as the classic Australian: irreverent, matey, fierce but jokey, a national hero of the sort no other country had created before. Of course, we hanged him.

Sidney Nolan's Ned Kelly Paintings

Article extract:
Man and Myth
Michael Fitzgerald, Time Pacific

While journeying back through so-called 'Kelly country' with writer Max Harris in 1945 that Nolan saw the universality of the bushranger's story. As Harris put it, 'We are all Neds in our own way, invisible, turning to run for cover and then launching an attack on authority from our own positions.' Through an outsider's point of view, and a bold black helmet, Nolan could critically frame the Australian landscape. His Kelly series of the following year would be the first of many to explore what he saw as Australia's fugitive place in the world.

