

Premieres Thursday 9 July at 8:30pm on ABC1

NED KELLY UNCOVERED

Join Tony Robinson on an archaeological dig unearthing details of Ned Kelly's infamous last gun battle in 1880.

www.screenaustralia.gov.au/showcases/nedkelly

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For images go to www.abc.net.au/tvpublicity.

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SCREEN
AUSTRALIA

RENEGADE
factual



FILM
VICTORIA

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Key Creatives

Presenter – TONY ROBINSON

Writer / Director – ALEX WEST

Producers – ALEX WEST and LUCY MACLAREN

Director of Photography – REECE RAYNER

Camera & Sound Recordist – NEAL KELLY

Editor – NEAL KELLY

Composer – AJ BRADLEY

Executive Producers – ALEX WEST, JOE CONNOR, KEN CONNOR

ABC Commissioning Editor – ALAN ERSON

Featuring – ALEX MCDERMOTT, IAN JONES and ADAM FORD

Duration – 55 minutes

Website - www.screenaustralia.gov.au/showcases/nedkelly

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Synopses

One line

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One paragraph

Join Tony Robinson on an archaeological dig unearthing details of Ned Kelly's infamous last gun battle in 1880. *Ned Kelly Uncovered* follows the first ever excavation of the Glenrowan Inn site where the iconic Australian bushranger and his gang holed up for a showdown with police. The dramatic siege – which lasted over 24 hours – ended with Ned Kelly's capture and the death of gang members Joe Byrne, Dan Kelly and Steve Hart. Nearly 130 years later, can a team of archaeologists and historians reveal new insights into Ned Kelly's final moments of freedom?

One page

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More than a century after the Kelly Gang rode the ranges of Victoria and NSW, holding up towns and stealing thousands of pounds, opinion remains passionately divided between those who love Kelly as a persecuted champion of the poor and those who dismiss him as a cold-blooded killer and thief.

Will the dig site shed new light on the motivations of a man cast into legend by history? Or have souvenir hunters destroyed any chance historians have of uncovering the truth?

With expert commentary from Kelly experts Ian Jones and Alex McDermott, this one-hour documentary follows a seven-week dig led by archaeologist Adam Ford.

As the archaeologists unearth a host of artefacts including cartridges and bullets, the team conducts tests with fascinating results. Meanwhile, the historians strip back the myth, piecing together the clues to give a detailed new look at an iconic Australian, literally from the ground up.

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Production Story

For program maker Alex West, *Ned Kelly Uncovered* is the end result of a determination to bring the story of the dig at Glenrowan to the screen.

A trained archaeologist, West first heard about plans to excavate the Kelly siege site at Glenrowan from archaeologist Adam Ford, and went to investigate. On site he met a film crew – Reece Rayner, Paul Terry and Neal Kelly – who had committed their own time and resources to filming the dig from the start. They joined forces and West, the head of factual programming at Renegade Films, set about getting an international television documentary commissioned.

“The archaeology of Glenrowan gives the opportunity to reveal new things to the audience that we all think we’re familiar with,” West says of the subject’s appeal.

“I don’t think anyone would have been interested in doing yet another film on Ned Kelly, but I was interested in what the archaeology could tell us about this story that was new, while presenting archaeology in a new way especially for Australian television audiences.”

The British-born producer had previously worked with actor and writer Tony Robinson, host of archaeology series *Time Team*, and developed the documentary knowing Robinson’s involvement would be an important element.

“What we set out to do was to make a television program that was engaging and that’s all about Tony’s unique style,” he says. “He’s the world leader of this kind of thing and has a huge following internationally.”

While production took place over 11 months, Robinson was available for two weeks during the November excavation, which unexpectedly was hit by inclement weather.

“Rain was a fairly significant problem for the archaeologists,” West says. “Conditions at the dig are very difficult when the ground is wet ... We had no room to stop so it meant the whole thing was incredibly tight.”

The tight timeframe and inability to predict exactly what might be found also kept the program makers on their toes.

“At the beginning of the shoot, I wrote a road map outlining roughly what I thought might happen but there was a sense of uncertainty. No one knew whether the site had been completely looted and picked over by the souvenir hunters.

“We were working 17-hour days writing, directing and producing. Tony and I had to sit down every few hours and re-delineate the script as events unfolded. When Tony does a piece-to-camera in the film, what you see was rewritten and learnt by him in the half hour before we filmed it.”

As well as the archaeologists and Ned Kelly experts, historians Ian Jones and Alex McDermott, the filmmakers were assisted by historical re-enactors and antique weapons collectors including Rupert Hammond, who owned a gun thought to have belonged to Kelly himself.

“The amount of bullet evidence that we found of the actual gun fight was amazing and far beyond my expectations. And by doing some interesting tests on some of those remains, we were able to link beyond reasonable doubt significant findings with things that must have been owned and handled by Ned Kelly himself.”

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West hopes the program will show viewers the power of archaeology to engage them, while revealing new information about a story they thought they already knew.

“I’ve heard about Ned Kelly until I’m sick of hearing about Ned Kelly but this is really interesting and new. It’s why we called it *Ned Kelly Uncovered*. If you watch this program you’re going to learn things that you never imagined.”

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Interview with the historians

From the age of 10, Ian Jones has had a passionate interest in the subject of iconic Australian bushranger Ned Kelly.

“I read a book about Ned Kelly when I was 10 and it was very, very pro Kelly. It portrayed Ned as a hero and the police as the villains. Then I read another book the same year and this was the absolute opposite – Ned was the villain and the police were the heroes,” Jones says. “At the age of 10 I just realised I’d have to sort it all out for myself and I’ve really been doing it ever since.”

Now the leading expert on the subject of the Kelly Gang, the acclaimed author, historian and television producer was an obvious choice when the filmmakers were hiring on-screen expertise for *Ned Kelly Uncovered*.

“If people don’t understand why Ned Kelly is such a potent figure in Australian history I honestly don’t think they’ll ever understand Australia or Australians,” Jones says.

“Every country has a rebel bandit folk hero figure in the Robin Hood mould. When you look at Ned Kelly, he fits that mould almost perfectly. He was a man of striking looks, he was big, he was strong, he was chivalrous to women and he treated his enemies with dignity when he had the chance to. He was amazingly brave, he was an astonishingly good shot, he was a crack horseman... you assemble this amazing rebel figure and you dress him in armour made of plough steel and then you cap the whole thing off with this last amazing battle. It’s almost too much!”

Arguing against the myth of Kelly as a working-class hero is historian Alex McDermott, whose “revisionist” theories challenge Jones’ perception of the Kelly family as poor Irish farmers driven to crime by persecution by corrupt police.

“We locked horns on national television way back in 2001 and have quite different interpretations of what made Ned Kelly tick,” McDermott says.

“My interest is in what drove Kelly to become an outlaw. Was it simply unjustified persecution by police and victimisation of the Kelly family because they were poor Irish farmers or was it something that arose out of Kelly’s involvement in organised large-scale stock theft, transportation and reselling? Kelly and his mates were deeply implicated in organised stock theft for over 20 years; they were heavily involved in large-scale criminal activity.”

With both historians devoting their working lives to discovering the truth behind the legend, each was excited to be part of an archaeological excavation at the Glenrowan site where Kelly was captured in June 1880.

The dig was led by experienced archaeologist Adam Ford, of DIG International, who had previously worked in the siege precinct and spent months researching the site.

“There had been two buildings built on the site after the fire and we weren’t sure whether those buildings had completely wiped out any of the previous occupation,” Ford says. “We thought we’d find foundations of the original inn, evidence of the fire, burnt glass and maybe evidence of the battle if we were really lucky. In the end, we found so much more than we expected. We found evidence of the inn, we found evidence of the gun battle, we found evidence of movement during the actual gun battle. We could actually plot where the Kelly boys and the gang members were during the battle.”

The dig itself took place in two stages, first in May 2008, and again in November. Ford says his team was honoured to take part in such an important historical event.

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“People either love Kelly or they hate Kelly: there’s a lot of myth and legend. We weren’t there to dispel the legend – rather to add to it – and the opportunity to actually add to a legend doesn’t come around very often.”

There were several humbling moments.

“Finding the cartridges in the rear room of the inn and knowing then that we’d actually identified a safe refuge where the gang went back into the rear rooms to reload, was extraordinary. To find that in its location and to know that the last people who held it were members of the gang in their final moments... the hair on the back of your neck stands up.

“And the humble scale of the inn brought the whole thing back to reality...the legend makes everything a hell of a lot bigger than reality, but this brought it back to human scale.”

McDermott and Jones – who has “officially retired” from his life as a Kelly expert – felt similarly moved.

“When we started on the dig, I expected to learn more about Glenrowan and we certainly did. Constantly I was amazed at the intimacy that we achieved,” Jones says.

“Alex McDermott and I have crossed swords in the past on Ned Kelly, and part of our job description was to disagree, but we got on extremely well. We disagreed on a bit, but if you pinned it down on essentials I think we agreed pretty well, particularly if you got to the description of Ned as a rebel. But he was a rebel.”

McDermott concurs. “I like that the Kelly conversation is one of the liveliest debates in Australian history,” he says. “Practically everyone has an opinion and how many figures of Australian history can you say that about? Kelly is guaranteed to produce strong opinion.”

McDermott says that for him, the excavation shed new light on the nuts and bolts of colonial life and the way people had lived in the Kellys’ world.

“Everyone assumes that Ann Jones’ hotel in Glenrowan was this really poor little colonial pub, but when you actually start digging down it starts to confirm a lot of what Ann herself had said at the time,” he says. “It’s a classy joint; it’s got all the modern accoutrements that you’d expect from a reasonably affluent and established hotel. Nice china, all the grog, nice furniture. It was a time of struggle but also a time to make it rich and achieve prosperity.”

Treading and retreading in the footsteps of the gang also deepened his understanding of what Kelly had gone through.

“During something like Adam Ford’s excavation, which is bringing up the shrapnel and bullets, you start to get a material sense of the reality of the siege,” he says.

“It goes on for hours, Kelly was wounded early in the battle and goes on to stagger around losing goodness knows how many litres of blood. Then there is the reality of the fire and all the rest of it.

“I think he is one of the most extraordinary individuals we’ve had throughout the entirety of Australian history. For a native-born Aussie growing up in the backblocks of colonial Victoria to come up with a document that was as powerful and viscerally affecting as the Jerilderie Letter – it could only have been produced by a truly extraordinary individual – and then he backs it up with his exploits as a bushranger. He really was extraordinary.”

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Interview with *Ned Kelly Uncovered* presenter Tony Robinson

Q: What do you think is appealing to audiences about archaeology?

A: I think most people have the notion that if they dug deep enough in their back garden they'd find something pretty exciting. It's a great fantasy and often not an unjustified one.

Q: Similarly, what appeals to you about archaeology?

A: For me archaeology brings history to life. It's the mark of ordinary people in the landscape.

*Q: How did you come to be involved in *Ned Kelly Uncovered*?*

A: I've wanted to dig in Australia for some time. In fact *Time Team* came up with a couple of really interesting projects but for one reason or another they never got off the ground. The director of *Ned Kelly Uncovered*, Alex West, is an old friend. Both he and his wife used to work in British television. He asked me to host the program and I agreed like a shot.

Q: How much did you know about Ned Kelly before you began working on the film?

A: Like everybody in the Western world I knew a bit about him or at least I thought I did. The image of a bandit with guns blazing, dressed in that extraordinary armour, is hard to forget! Outlaws have a romantic quality about them don't they, because they give themselves permission to do things the rest of us are forbidden from doing. It's only when you examine them a bit more closely that the complexities of their lives begin to be revealed - and that story is usually far more interesting.

Q: Did you have any preconceptions about what you might find?

A: To be honest, I was a bit worried that we'd find nothing. Urban sites tend to get cleared, rebuilt and cleared again remarkably quickly. It wouldn't have surprised me if all we'd found under the ground was a smashed up TV and a hubcap off a Holden Commodore.

Q: Were there any breakthrough moments during the dig?

A: There were certainly dramatic moments. Finding charred bones of two of the gang members made the whole exercise seem intensely real; and there was a brilliant bit of forensics which led to us matching some of the bullets we dug up with Ned's original gun.

Q: Did the findings of the dig change the way you perceived Ned Kelly?

A: You don't often get the chance to dig at the location of such a legendary story. To see the streets and railway track where the drama was played out made it seem less like fiction, and more like a human event. But what really changed my perceptions was the historical investigation that went alongside the dig. For instance I had no idea that Victoria's Premier at the time was far more radical than Kelly!

Q: Were there any particular challenges in making the documentary?

A: It felt a bit presumptuous for me as an Englishman to be uncovering the archetypal Australian narrative. It was important to me that the audience should understand that I wasn't trying to "colonise" the story; I was just using my experience to offer an Australian audience a bit more insight into an iconic part of their own heritage. I hate those TV programs where some big "I am" tells you what to think and feel.

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Q: What did you enjoy most about working on the film?

A: I've been nuts about Australia ever since I first visited over 30 years ago when we toured the big cities with Keith Michell's company. I love it... everything about it; the people, the landscapes, the weather, the "can-do" attitude. The dig was one of the most enjoyable times in my life. And the big bonus was people's reaction to *Time Team*. I'd no idea how big it is in Australia – that was a real buzz!

Q: Is there any chance you will return to Australia to work on other films here?

A. Yes indeedee! We're already talking to ABC about another show in 2010. Mind you, that will depend on the viewing figures for the "Ned" program – so please watch it in your millions.

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About Tony Robinson and the historians

Tony Robinson — presenter

British actor, author and television presenter Tony Robinson is well known for work across several media, including as host of Channel Four's archaeology series *Time Team*.

Tony has performed regularly since his first professional appearance in a stage production of *Oliver* at 13. He played Baldrick in *Blackadder*; devised and wrote four series of the BBC's *Maid Marian and Her Merry Men* in which he played the Sheriff of Nottingham; made two series of *The Worst Jobs In History*; a documentary about the elderly entitled *Me and My Mum*, and a four-part series on British law called *Tony Robinson's Crime and Punishment*. He has had lead roles in numerous TV series including the cult sketch show *Who Dares Wins* and sitcom *My Wonderful Life*.

Tony has made TV documentaries on subjects including the Da Vinci Code, the Peasants' Revolt, the Roman Emperors, *Macbeth*, Robin Hood and right wing Christian fundamentalism. He recently completed work on a new series on the creation of the world entitled *Apocalypse Earth* and a four-part series on the impact of climate change on ancient civilisations.

As a writer of children's television programs he has won two Royal Television Society awards, a BAFTA and the International Prix Jeunesse. His children's work includes 30 episodes of *Fat Tulip's Garden*, a 13-part BBC series based on Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* called *Odysseus – the Greatest Hero of Them All*, and 26 episodes of his Old Testament series *Blood and Honey*.

His three most recent books for adults are *The Worst Jobs in History*, *Archaeology is Rubbish – A Beginner's Guide*, co-written with Professor Mick Aston, and *In Search of British Heroes*. He has also written 18 children's books.

Adam Ford — archaeologist

A professional archaeologist for almost 20 years, Adam Ford has excavated and directed digs around the world from the UK and Caribbean to the Middle East and, for the last 14 years, Australia. His work has taken him to a range of sites including prehistoric desert camps, Cold War rocket bases, mediaeval castles and desert island shipwrecks. Previously employed by the British Ministry of Defence and the City of Sydney, Adam now runs DIG International based in Victoria. He recently directed expeditions in Western Australia, the Victorian Goldfields and excavations at Melbourne's Pentridge Prison. Adam was the director of excavations at the famous Glenrowan Inn siege site in May and November 2008. Adam is passionate about getting the public interested in their heritage and promoting archaeology is a great way to go about it.

Ian Jones — author and Kelly expert

Ian Jones is Australia's leading scholar on the subject of Ned Kelly and has spent decades researching Kelly and his story. After starting his career as a journalist, Jones moved into television production and worked as a writer, producer and director with the Seven Network. His credits include the iconic drama series *Homicide*, *The Judy Jack Show* and *Meet the Press*. He spent 13 years as a director of Crawford Productions, serving as executive producer on hit series such as *The Sullivans*, *Bluey* and *Matlock Police*. While he has numerous film and television credits, including the feature film *The*

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Lighthorsemen and 13-part miniseries *Against the Wind*, Ned Kelly remained a favourite subject. He wrote the script for the 1970 feature film *Ned Kelly* starring Mick Jagger, and produced an eight-hour miniseries, *The Last Outlaw*, about Kelly for Channel Seven. Jones also has written two definitive books about the Kelly gang, *The Fatal Friendship* about Joe Byrne and Aaron Sherritt and *Ned Kelly: A Short Life*. He has several children's books underway and plans to write a major memoir about his lifetime quest to find the truth about Ned Kelly. In 2006, he was awarded the Australian Film Institute's Longford Lifetime Achievement Award and a lifetime achievement award by the Australian Writers Guild.

Alex McDermott — La Trobe University scholar

Alex McDermott is an Australian historian whose research expertise covers Ned Kelly's outlaw letters and the Kelly legend, Australia's historical myths and counter-myths, Australian political leaders and the phenomenon of 19th century colonial Australia. Alex has written and spoken frequently about Ned Kelly. He produced an honours thesis on Kelly's two outlaw letters, edited and introduced *The Jerilderie Letter*, published by Text Media in 2001 and worked as project historian for the archaeological dig of the Ned Kelly siege site in Glenrowan. Since 2005, Alex has worked as history researcher for Artemis Productions' Australian series *Who Do You Think You Are?* and as a history researcher for Film Australia's (now Screen Australia) Making History Initiative in conjunction with ABC Television. He has been involved in the three-part *Constructing Australia* series, the two-part *Rogue Nation* about Australia's convict origins, and a suite of works about leading Australians: *Menzies and Churchill at War*, *Monash – The Forgotten Anzac*, *Infamous Victory – Ben Chifley's Battle For Coal* and *The Prime Minister is Missing*.

He is conducting postgraduate research on 19th century Melbourne and colonial Victoria and working as a history researcher for the Immigration Series developed by Screen Australia and SBS.

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About the Program Makers

Alex West — writer/director/producer

During his long career as a writer, director and producer, Alex West has worked for the British Broadcasting Corporation and a variety of independent producers and television networks.

While working for the leading UK independent producer Wall To Wall, he helped to develop the company into an internationally renowned producer of high quality and innovative factual programs. He co-executive produced the original UK series of *Who Do You Think You Are?*. His many factual and documentary credits include *The Mafia* for ABC TV and National Geographic Channel.

In Australia, Alex worked as an executive producer at Film Australia from 2005 to 2007, responsible for the Making History Initiative. His credits include the three-part ABC documentary series *Constructing Australia*, *Mawson – Life and Death in Antarctica*, and the recent ABC history documentaries *Rogue Nation*, *Menzies and Churchill at War*, and *Monash – The Forgotten Anzac*. *Constructing Australia: The Bridge* won a Logie Award for the Most Outstanding Documentary in 2007.

Alex is the head of factual programming at Renegade Films in Melbourne, and is producing a slate of programming including the recently broadcast *The Man Inside Dame Edna* for ABC1. In April 2009, Renegade Factual was commissioned by ABC Television to produce the definitive two-hour documentary on the 2009 Victorian bushfires.

Alex is a Fulbright Scholar and his programs have been nominated for British Academy Awards.

Lucy Maclaren — producer

A graduate of Swinburne Film and Television school, Lucy Maclaren began her career as a casting consultant, assistant director and production manager as well as producing several short dramas and documentaries. She has also been Investment and Project Manager at the Australian Film Commission and Film Victoria. In 1999 she produced her first feature film *Strange Fits of Passion*, written and directed by Elise McCredie, which was accepted into Critics' Week at Cannes. She has since produced the acclaimed dramatised documentary *Love Letters from a War* and a 50-minute drama, *Cable*. Lucy has also worked as a line producer on many feature films.

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