

## Ned's Hanging

We're all waiting. A crowd of thousands, waiting in dread to hear the crash of a prison door, the stomp of feet coming towards us, the hum of final prayers being said. We've been here, waiting outside the old Melbourne Gaol since nine o'clock this morning. People have kept pouring through into the gaol all morning, all supporters and sympathisers of Ned Kelly apart from the odd few who are here just to tell their grandchildren they saw Ned Kelly being hanged. There was reported to be five thousand people here to witness the hanging of Ned Kelly. Most of us here are the lower class, selectors and family men trying to support our families with the little money, food and possessions we have, here because we believe what Ned Kelly was doing is right and supporting him because he stood up for his family and people like us, the lower class. Everything that happened to Ned wasn't entirely his fault. He was a victim of the times, really. From police corruption and brutality to victimisation of the poor, Ned was a victim of it all. In the circumstances, I probably would've done the same thing.

Five days ago Ned's solicitor started a petition to save Ned's life. I am amazed at the amount of people that signed the petition. Everyone thought for sure that with sixty thousand signatures the petition would save him. I along with many other friends and family and neighbours that were proud of being supporters of Ned, signed the petition. I had convinced myself that Ned was saved from the gallows. Sadly though, he wasn't. Ned was sentenced to death by hanging and is due to be brought out any minute now. The crowds around me are growing restless. We are all just waiting for the sound of Ned being brought out. Many of us have travelled from towns as far away as Beechworth just to be here as supporters of Ned Kelly.

I can hear the people beside me muttering to themselves about how Ned deserves to be hanged in contrast to the people in front of me who whisper about the unjustness of the situation. Suddenly the crowd grows quiet, apart from a few hushed whispers. I look around, wondering what is happening when I hear it. The stomp of boots on the hard prison floor. Ned is marched out to the gallows and is accompanied by three ministers and a priest carrying a large, white cross. Ned's arms are being tightly strapped to his side with a thick, leather strap by the executioner and the priest is reading the prayers for the dead while Ned recites the responses. Finally, the governor of the gaol directed the executioner to do his duty of placing the noose around Ned's neck. The crowd, meanwhile, were staring ahead at the goings on intently, hardly blinking as if they would miss something important if they blinked. Ned himself was surprisingly calm and during the happenings, just looking at the priest with a calm expression on his face and a defiant look in his eyes, as if to tell everyone that he was not afraid of anything, not even death. The executioner was then shown how to adjust the noose, all while Ned was paying no attention to the happenings around him, to show everyone that he was not afraid and that he would die like a true Kelly. The crowd, in the meantime, were whispering to each other and growing agitated. All I could think about was how the poor bloke was trying to help his family and get his mother out of jail only to end up in the gallows for his trouble. My thoughts were interrupted when the crowd started speaking loudly with both excitement and anger. Ned Kelly spoke for the first time all

morning and said, "Such is life". The executioner put the execution hood over Ned's head, leaving his beard exposed underneath. I still could not believe that Ned, after all he had been through, was going to step off the drop any second now and be hanged by the neck.

The executioner then stepped off the drop and the signal as given. Ned then launched into eternity. He fell two and a half metres. The body then jerked upwards after he fell. Apart from a slight quiver, the body did not move. Ned Kelly was hanged at ten o'clock. The priest repeated prayers for 5 minutes. The body was left there for half an hour before it was closely inspected then cut down and placed in a roughly cut coffin. The crowd was silent. I was filled with disappointment, sadness and anger about Ned Kelly being hanged. I suppose most others feel the same way.

So now it's over. Ned Kelly, the man that would do anything for his family and stood up for the poor, is now dead. Ned, a victim of the times, dead. The crowd is dispersing so I suppose I should head home too. I suppose now our lives will go back to normal. I will forever remember Ned Kelly and I know he will never be forgotten.

Bill Peters, Ned Kelly Supporter