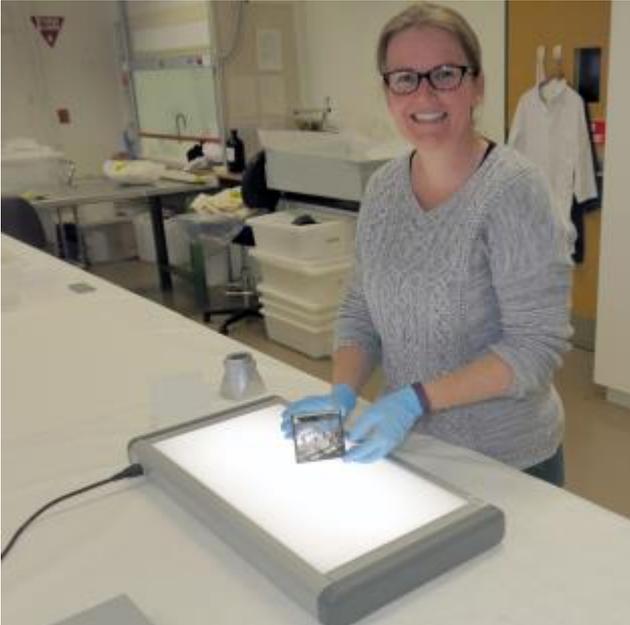


Ned Kelly, lantern slides and the genesis of “right-click” image-sharing culture



Registration Officer Sarah Streatfeild with a slide from the National Museum of Australia’s Ned Kelly set

Enter the words ‘Ned Kelly’ into Google image search and you’ll be met with an array of images: nineteenth century photographs of the bearded man himself, woodcut illustrations from 1880 newspapers of Ned in his armour, images of Mick Jagger and Heath Ledger acting in their respective Kelly films, and kitsch souvenirs. If you visit the National Museum of Australia’s excellent online catalogue and search for a set of 77 Ned Kelly magic lantern slides, which were purchased as part of group of 146 slides in the early 2000s, you will return a not dissimilar grid of images. You won’t find Mick or Heath, but you will find film stills from Australia’s first Ned Kelly film, *The Story of the Kelly Gang* from 1906, as well as images copied from popular twentieth century books about Kelly. Elisa deCourcy and Martyn Jolly visited the Head, Australian Society and History, Suzanne Bravery and Registration Officer Sarah Streatfeild to find out more

about this set.

The images in the slides themselves aren’t rare, most of them have been frequently reproduced as the Kelly myth has grown and grown. But what is of interest is the unknown person who assembled them in the 1940s, along with another set about other Australian bushrangers called *Robbery Under Arms*. Whoever they were, they were obviously a bushranger buff preparing a show, perhaps for a public lecture at an historical society, or perhaps just for their family of friends. They have made the lantern-slides from the huge array of bushranger imagery already circulating through a wide variety of pop cultural sources — contemporary books, old newspapers, and so on. Each slide has been extensively labeled and relabeled, and each has been placed into its own sleeve improvised out of old bank envelopes. In the spidery handwriting of an aged person captions and prompting words for a live commentary have been added to the envelopes, such as RED BLAZE FLAMES, for a slide of Glenrowan pub on fire. This slide has also been hand coloured, so the burning of the Glenrowan pub, tinted red in the 1906 fiction film, is tinted red again in this lantern slide. Other images come straight from the siege. For instance the set contains the famous image by J W Lindt of the body of Joe Byrne strung up on a door. However, this image was copied out of a book, perhaps Julian Ashton’s autobiography published in the 1941. The set is accompanied by the lantern which would have originally projected them, a model dating from the 1940s.



Glenrowan Hotel on Fire I. Magic lantern slide, made c1940s. Collection: National Museum of Australia



Hotel on Fire II. Magic lantern slide, made c1940s. Collection: National Museum of Australia

We celebrate magic lanterns today because they predicted much of our contemporary relationship to new media, its special effects and illusionism for instance. But this collection also prefigures in fascinating ways today's casual 'right click culture'. Magic lantern slides were a way of 'saving as' existing images, duplicating them, reformatting them, shifting them and recontextualising them. The museum has preserved here not just a comprehensive databank of bushranger iconography, but a complete individual practice, a new way that has been emerging for decades for everyday people to use popular images to say new things about their history.

Joe Byrne at Gaol, Seymour, 1880. Magic lantern slide, made c1940s. Collection: National Museum of Australia

