

KENNEDY for schools

The Men of Stringybark Creek

Sergeant Michael Kennedy, Constable Thomas Lonigan, Constable Michael Scanlan and Constable Thomas McIntyre

A companion deck to the school resource. 26 October 1878 to October 2028.

Prepared to accompany KENNEDY, a Lonely Hill Films production. In cinemas October 2028.

Version 1.0, September 2026



Detail from Arthur Burman's photograph of the police camp site at Stringybark Creek, November 1878.

The other half of the Kelly story

Students meet Ned Kelly in picture books, in Sidney Nolan's paintings and in films. They rarely meet the four policemen who rode into the Wombat Ranges on 25 October 1878 under orders to arrest two wanted men.

Three of them were killed. The fourth survived to tell what happened, and was doubted for the rest of his life. This deck restores the four men and the families they left behind. It also shows the record they made, from the first telegrams and Constable McIntyre's report of 27 October 1878 to the inquests, the 1881 Royal Commission and the memorials raised by the people of Victoria. October 2028 marks 150 years since Stringybark Creek.

4

rode out of Mansfield at dawn, 25 October 1878

3

were murdered at Stringybark Creek the next afternoon

1

survived and gave the evidence that convicted Kelly



Part One

Victoria in 1878

Arthur Burman, the search party in the Wombat Ranges, November 1878.

A district too big for the force that policed it



Captain Frederick Standish, Chief Commissioner of Police 1858 to 1880.

Standish told the Royal Commission that for years a mounted constable's regulation weapon had been a revolver only. Repeating rifles reached the district only after the murders.

The ranges between Mansfield, Benalla and Beechworth were thinly settled and hard to police. Stock theft was common, and constables were posted one or two to a town. This was the strength of the whole North Eastern District in September 1878, a month before the murders.

3

officers in the whole North Eastern District,
September 1878

9

sergeants and senior constables

43

mounted constables to cover the district

24

foot police (nine sub officers and fifteen
constables)

How four men came to be in the Wombat Ranges

1

15 April 1878

The Fitzpatrick incident

Constable Fitzpatrick goes to the Kelly home at Eleven Mile Creek to arrest Dan Kelly on a horse stealing warrant. He is wounded in the wrist and reports that Ned Kelly shot him. Ned and Dan go into the ranges.

2

October 1878

Convictions at Beechworth

Ellen Kelly, William Skillion and William Williamson are convicted of aiding the attempted murder of a police officer. A reward of one hundred pounds stands for Ned's arrest.

3

25 October 1878

Two parties ride out

Police receive private word that the Kellys are at the head of the King River. One party approaches from the Greta side; Sergeant Kennedy's party rides from Mansfield in plain clothes.

What Kennedy's party carried

Their service revolvers, one Spencer repeating rifle carried by Scanlan, a double barrelled shotgun borrowed from a Mansfield resident, and a fortnight's provisions. They expected to be in the bush for some time and did not know that the gang was living in a hut less than a mile from where they camped.



Ned Kelly



Dan Kelly

the search for the Kellys



Sergeant Michael Kennedy

Kennedy's team



Constable Michael Scanlon



Constable James McIntyre



Constable Thomas Lonigan



Part Two

The four men

By August 1878, the police realised their search for the Kelly brothers was becoming more desperate. In addition to the stealing charges, a £100 reward and a warrant for their arrest, the brothers had been charged with the murder of Constable Scanlon. Attempts to find the brothers had not succeeded. They had been laying low in their hut on Bullock Creek near here.

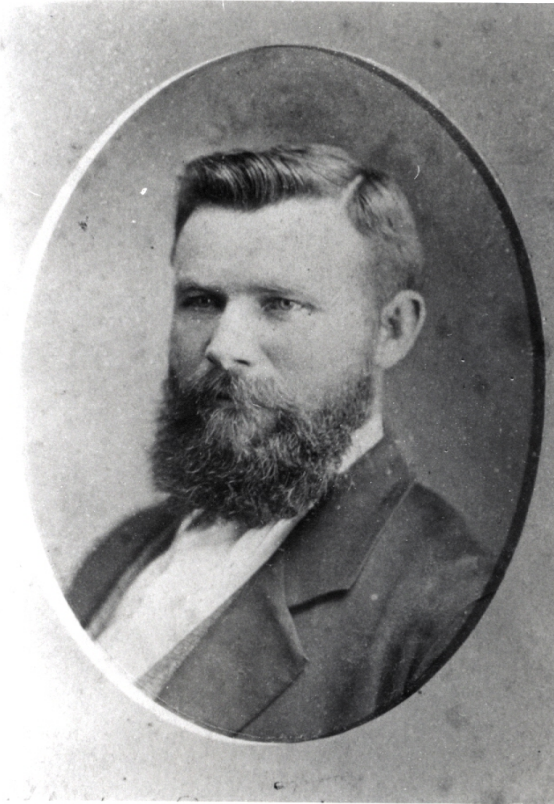
In a bid to finally resolve the outstanding warrants and capture the Kellys, a plan was developed for a police party to ride out from Mansfield and to set up a base camp at Stringybark Creek. Here they would scout the surrounding area before joining up with a second police group heading south from the Hedi Police Station. Together the two groups would then form a single party to advance into the prime search area at the head of the King River.

The Mansfield police team comprised Sergeant Kennedy and his colleague Constable McIntyre. They were assisted by two additional police constables brought in specially for the operation. Constable Scanlon also knew the area well and Constable Lonigan from Violet Town knew Kelly. On Friday 25th October the party set off, never dreaming they would be camping that very night within just two miles of the fugitives they were seeking.

Interpretive panel at Stringybark Creek on the search for the Kellys and Kennedy's team.

Sergeant Michael Kennedy

Victoria Police number 2009. Officer in charge of the Mansfield party.



Michael Kennedy. Benalla, 1877.

Michael Kennedy was born on 20 October 1842 in County Westmeath, Ireland, to Hugh and Rose Anna Kennedy. He joined Victoria Police on 19 August 1864 and married Bridget Tobin in 1868. By October 1878 they had five children and a sixth on the way; an infant son, John Thomas, had died in 1877. When the family left Doon for Mansfield in 1877, the townspeople raised a testimonial of more than fifty six pounds and wrote to thank him for his service.

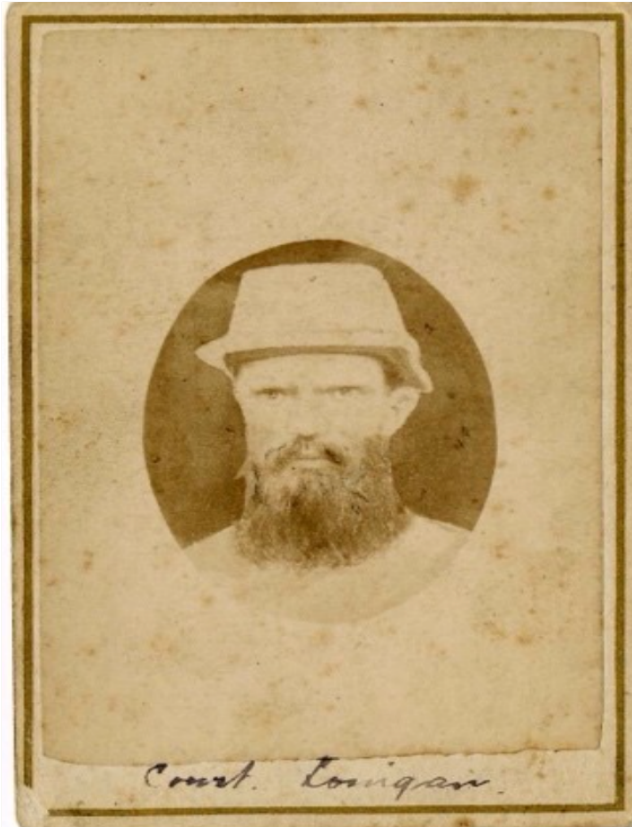
He rode the route to Stringybark Creek himself the week before, found the best crossing of Holland Creek and told no one his plan. He was the last of the party to fall. Alone against four armed men, he fought from tree to tree along the track McIntyre had taken until he was wounded and shot at close range. His body lay in the bush for five days. His watch, chain, ring and notebook were taken. He was 36, six days past his birthday.

“ *A vigilant officer and generally well liked.*

The Argus, Melbourne, 1 November 1878

Constable Thomas Lonigan

Mounted Constable, number 2423. Stationed at Violet Town.



Thomas Lonigan. Carte de visite inscribed Const. Lonigan, undated.

Ages differ on the record: 34 on the Mansfield monument, 35 on his headstone. Colonial ages were often given from memory.

- Born in County Sligo, Ireland, in the early 1840s, to William and Mary Ann Lonigan, and raised a Catholic. He changed faith to marry Maria Siggins, an Anglican, known to the family as Charlotte.
- Arrived in Melbourne in January 1870 on the Caduceus with Charlotte and their daughter Emily. Served at Kilmore, Beechworth, Benalla and the Ovens before Violet Town.
- By October 1878 the couple had four children and a fifth on the way. He was brought into Kennedy's party because Mansfield could not supply four men.
- In September 1877 he had helped restrain Ned Kelly after an arrest at Benalla. Kelly is reported to have said that if he ever shot a man, Lonigan would be the first.
- The first man shot at Stringybark Creek. He had moved two paces towards a tree with his hand on his revolver when Ned Kelly shot him in the head. Ned Kelly was tried, convicted and hanged for his murder. Charlotte died in Carlton in 1891, aged 45.

Constable Michael Scanlan

Mounted Constable, number 2118. Stationed at Mooroopna. Often spelled Scanlon.



Michael Scanlan. Undated portrait.

Michael Scanlan was born in County Kerry, Ireland, in the 1840s. A teacher by training, he joined Victoria Police in 1865 and served in Melbourne as an aide to the Chief Commissioner. He was Kennedy's close friend and patrol partner and, as a tracker who knew the Wombat country, the sergeant's first choice for the search. A single man with no family in the colony, he asked friends before he left Mooroopna to keep his retriever if he did not come back. He carried the party's only rifle, a Spencer repeater, slung on his back, spent 26 October patrolling with Kennedy and rode back into camp in the late afternoon. When the gang called on the two men to put up their hands he jumped down and tried to reach a tree. He was shot before he could bring the rifle to bear and, in McIntyre's words, never spoke. Sorrow at his death was reported as universal throughout the district. His age is given as 25 on the Mansfield monument, 35 on his headstone and 36 on his death registration.

“ *A brave, cool, amiable, and excellent man.*

Reported from Mansfield, 29 October 1878

Constable Thomas McIntyre

Mounted Constable, number 2384. Stationed at Mansfield. The survivor.



Thomas Newman McIntyre.

What he did

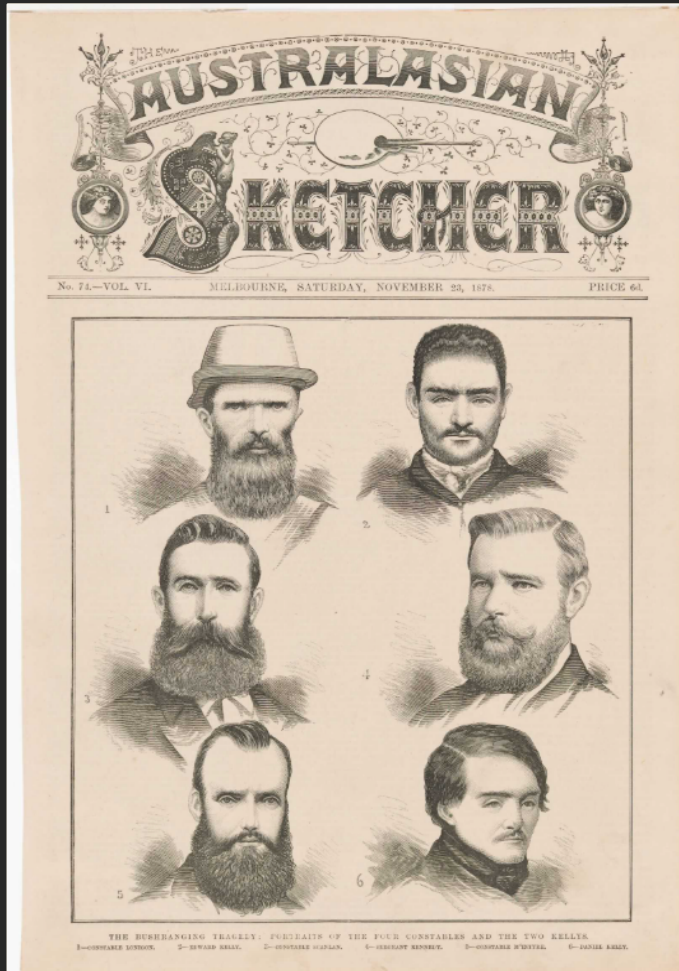
- Born in Belfast on 24 May 1846. Trained with the Irish Constabulary but had never fired a gun in earnest. In Victoria he taught school, helped build the Mansfield school, then returned to policing.
- Known as Mac to the two Michaels. Described in 1878 as a steady, smart, intelligent officer. He took on the extra duty of camp cook.
- Unarmed when the gang appeared, his revolver at the tent door. Held at gunpoint, he refused to trick his comrades into a trap and told Kelly one of them was the father of a large family.
- Warned Kennedy in the open, escaped on the sergeant's horse only when the gang began shooting to kill, hid in a wombat hole until dark and walked 20 miles to Mansfield.

What it cost him

- Principal witness at Ned Kelly's trial in October 1880. Branded a coward and a liar by Kelly's supporters for the rest of his life.
- Retired at 35 in ill health. Married Eliza Fowler in 1879; eight children. Died at Ballarat in 1918, aged 72.
- He spent the rest of his life defending what he saw, and wrote *Reminiscences of a Victorian Mounted Constable*.

His manuscript, the first history of the Kelly Gang, is held by the Victoria Police Museum and can be read online.

As the press saw them



The Australasian Sketcher, Melbourne, 23 November 1878.

Four weeks after the killings the Australasian Sketcher put the story on its cover: “The Bushranging Tragedy: portraits of the four constables and the two Kellys.”

- The portraits were numbered: 1 Constable Lonigan, 2 Edward Kelly, 3 Constable Scanlan, 4 Sergeant Kennedy, 5 Constable McIntyre, 6 Daniel Kelly.
- The engravings of Lonigan, Scanlan, Kennedy and McIntyre were copied from the photographs on the previous slides.
- Victims and killers share one page, drawn in the same style, at the same size. Sixty years later the Kellys would have the page to themselves.

What does it tell you about 1878 that a newspaper gave equal space to the four police and the two men who killed them? What would a cover look like today?

Part Three

26 October 1878

Engraving of the attack on the police camp at Stringybark Creek, 1878.





The ambush

About 5 pm

Four armed men come out of the long grass shouting at Lonigan and McIntyre to bail up. Three carry guns; Ned Kelly has two.

Seconds later

McIntyre, unarmed, raises his hands. Lonigan moves for a tree with his hand on his revolver and is shot in the head.

The wait

McIntyre is held for an hour or more. Kelly promises no one who puts up his hands will be shot, and hides his men behind logs and in the tent.

The return

Kennedy and Scanlan ride in. McIntyre warns them to surrender. Kelly shouts. Kennedy thinks it a joke, then dismounts under fire. Scanlan is shot before he can use his rifle.

The escape

McIntyre leaps onto Kennedy's horse and gallops down the creek. Kennedy, alone, fights from tree to tree for half a mile before he is wounded and killed at close range.

Before dark

The gang burns the tent, takes the horses, guns and belongings, and rides back into the ranges.

Source: Constable McIntyre's report, Mansfield, 27 October 1878 (PROV VPRS 4966); his account in *The Maitland Mercury*, 31 October 1878.

How McIntyre got the news out

Bruised from a fall, his clothes torn and the gang somewhere behind him, the one man who could tell the colony what had happened had twenty miles of bush between him and the nearest help.

2 miles

on Kennedy’s horse, from the camp to the wombat hole

20 miles

on foot, from the wombat hole to McColl’s farm





The search party returns to the creek

- Sub Inspector Pewtress, McIntyre and the Mansfield volunteers reached the camp at 2.30 am on Monday 28 October and found the bodies of Lonigan and Scanlan.
- The tent had been burnt and everything taken or destroyed. The bodies were carried to Mansfield on horseback.
- Searches for Kennedy continued all week while the district waited in fear.
- In early November the Melbourne photographer Arthur Burman travelled to the creek with members of the search party, who posed to recreate what they had found. His photographs are the only images of the site from 1878.

The exact position of the tent and the trees has been argued over ever since.

Arthur Burman's photograph of the police camp site, November 1878. A member of the search party sits on the log where McIntyre was made to sit; the posts of the burnt hut stand at the centre.



Arthur Burman's reconstruction of the discovery of Sergeant Kennedy's body, posed by members of the search party, November 1878.

Finding Sergeant Kennedy

- A party of ten volunteers and five constables under Pewtress and Mr Tomkins, the shire president, reached the creek at 7.30 am on Thursday 31 October.
- Henry Sparrow, an overseer from Mount Battery Station, found the body within half a mile of the camp, along the track McIntyre had taken.
- Kennedy lay on his back with a cloak over his face. Bullet marks on the trees showed the line of his last fight. His jacket was singed by a shot fired at very close range.
- His watch, chain, ring and notebook were gone. Ned Kelly later showed off the watch.
- The three men were buried at Mansfield. Because two were Catholic and one was Protestant, the custom of the day placed them in different sections of the same cemetery.

“ *Lying on his back, a cloak over his face, pierced with three balls.*

Telegram from Mansfield, 31 October 1878

Part Four

What came after

The police memorial at Mansfield, unveiled 22 April 1880.



Two widows were left to raise nine children

Bridget Kennedy

- Left with five children under ten and expecting a sixth. There was no pension for a police widow in 1878.
- Came close to bankruptcy and feared losing the family home at Mansfield, which she and Michael had named Westmeath. Neighbours kept the family afloat.
- The children did their homework each afternoon at the Mansfield police station while she cooked. She later ran a business and raised all five.
- Protested for the rest of her life against books and films that romanticised the gang. In 1922 the Chief Secretary banned a Kelly film for holding the police up to ridicule. She died in 1924.

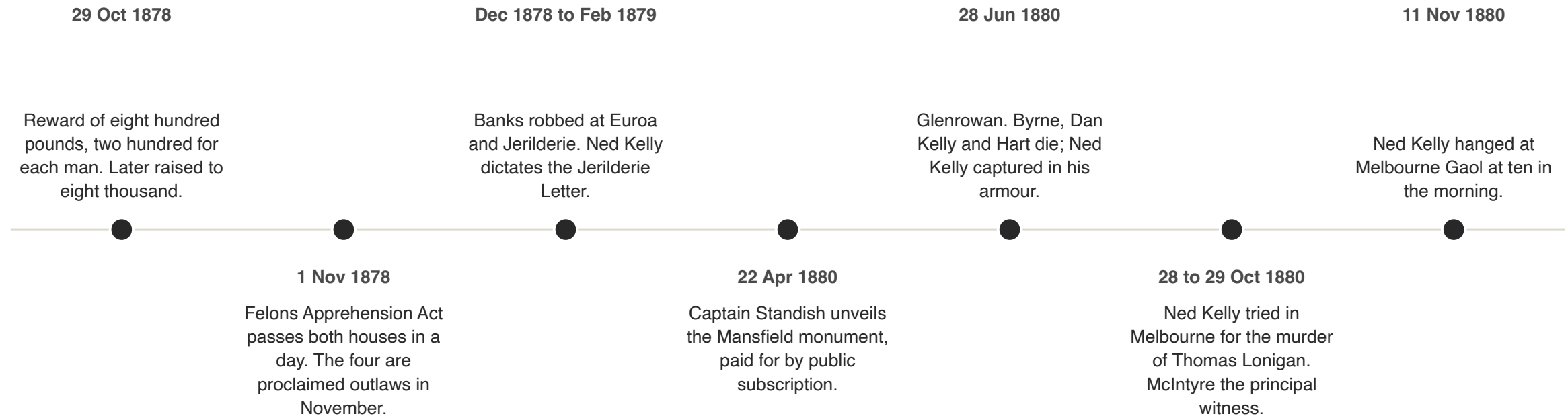
Maria Lonigan, known as Charlotte

- Left with four children, the eldest ten, and expecting a fifth. A newspaper in the week of the murders described the family as badly off.
- Moved to Carlton in Melbourne to start again and relied on family and charity.
- The government at first paid attention only to the Kennedy case; the Lonigan family was added after parliament pressed the Chief Secretary.
- She died in Carlton in 1891, aged 45. Her descendants attended the restoration of Thomas Lonigan's grave in 2013.

1879 to 1880: the fight for a pension

In 1879 the Mansfield Shire Council laid a petition before parliament arguing that the annual allowance the Police Board had offered Mrs Kennedy was not enough, and that she should be left no worse off than in her husband's lifetime. Members pressed the Chief Secretary, Graham Berry, to pay her Michael's full salary. Berry agreed and extended the arrangement to Charlotte Lonigan. By July 1880, twenty one months after the murders, each widow had a pension based on her husband's pay at his death, and each child a trust of one hundred pounds to be paid at 21. Soldiers' widows had been provided for all along.

What the colony did in the two years that followed



Kelly was tried for one murder only, that of Constable Lonigan, because it was the death McIntyre had seen with his own eyes. Bridget Kennedy remained aggrieved that no one was ever tried for the deaths of her husband and Michael Scanlan.

What the Royal Commission said about the four men

- Appointed by the Victorian Parliament in March 1881 to inquire into the police force and its pursuit of the Kellys. It sat from 23 March to 20 September.
- Chaired by Francis Longmore, a long standing critic of the Chief Commissioner. One member, George Wilson Hall, owned the Mansfield and Benalla newspapers and had published a book about the gang in 1879.
- Concerned with senior officers and the management of the search. It censured several of them and its findings reshaped the force.
- It did not criticise the men of Kennedy's party. Its most senior witness praised the constables in the district for their willingness to go out after the gang at any hour.
- Its evidence also documented the conditions the constables worked under: a district too big for its force and a public too frightened to help. Its mounted police were armed with a revolver.

66

witnesses examined

18,000

questions asked, over six months

The Commission made no finding against Kennedy, Lonigan, Scanlan or McIntyre. Asked whether he had ever seen the men reluctant to go out, Captain Standish answered: "No, on the contrary, a laudable anxiety."

How the story was retold

1879

A ballad, Stringybark Creek, thought to be by Joe Byrne, is printed at Mansfield in G. W. Hall's book. It mocks the police.

1906

The Story of the Kelly Gang premieres in Melbourne and presents Ned Kelly as a folk hero. Bridget Kennedy was alive when it was released.

1930s

A tree at the site is carved with the names of the three police. A replica Kelly helmet is later fixed to it and it becomes the Kelly Tree.

2001

A memorial stone to the three men is placed at Stringybark Creek.

2013

The three graves at Mansfield, damaged by vandals in the 1960s, are restored and rededicated before more than a hundred police and descendants.

2014

Kennedy, Lonigan and Scanlan are posthumously awarded the Victoria Police Star.

2018

A new memorial opens at Stringybark Creek Reserve for the 140th anniversary. Victoria Police releases the podcast A Shout from the Long Grass.

2028

150 years. KENNEDY, the story of Bridget Kennedy, reaches cinemas in October.

In the classroom

Activity	Years	Curriculum link (Victorian Curriculum F to 10 History)	Time
1 Four men, four lives. Profile tables from Part C, then introduce one man without naming Ned Kelly.	5 to 8	Historical sources as evidence and the significance of individuals, Levels 5 to 8	50 minutes
2 Source detective. McIntyre (1878) against Kelly (1879): origin, time, purpose, audience, corroboration.	9 to 10	VCHHC123 Analyse and corroborate sources and evaluate their accuracy, usefulness and reliability	50 to 100 minutes
3 The telegram. Write Pewtress's 35 word telegram to Melbourne, then compare it with the real one.	5 to 8	Chronology and historical sources as evidence, Levels 5 to 8	25 minutes
4 The map and the walk. Mark the stations and the creek; measure McIntyre's route.	5 to 8, with Geography	Chronology, Levels 5 to 8, and Geography, place and space	50 minutes
5 Whose story gets told? Timeline of memory from the 1879 ballad to the 2018 memorial.	9 to 10	VCHHC125 Evaluate different historical interpretations and contested debates; VCHHC128 Evaluate historical significance	50 to 100 minutes
6 What does a country owe? Bridget Kennedy's campaign; how police families are supported today.	9 to 10, with Civics and Citizenship	VCHHC124 Analyse the different perspectives of people in the past; Civics and Citizenship, Levels 9 and 10	50 minutes, plus research
7 Testing a claim. Kelly's self defence claim against the inquest evidence.	9 to 10, with Ethical Capability	VCHHC123 Analyse and corroborate sources; Ethical Capability, Levels 9 and 10	50 minutes
8 A memorial for four men. Design a memorial that includes McIntyre; write a 40 word inscription.	All years	VCHHC128 Evaluate the historical significance of an event, idea, individual or place; younger levels	50 minutes

VCHHC codes are Victorian Curriculum F to 10 History content descriptions (Version 1.0); teachers working from Version 2.0 can map to the equivalent descriptions. Full instructions, the nine source primary source pack, discussion questions, glossary and assessment prompts are in the school resource The Men of Stringybark Creek.

October 2028. Remember their names.

150 years since Stringybark Creek



Sergeant Michael Kennedy

1842 to 1878. The headstone at Mansfield Cemetery also names Bridget Mary Kennedy and their son John Thomas.



Constable Thomas Lonigan

About 1841 to 1878. Mansfield Cemetery; the grave was restored and rededicated in 2013.



Constable Michael Scanlan

1840s to 1878. Mansfield Cemetery; the headstone was erected by the Parliament of Victoria.

Kennedy, Lonigan and Scanlan lie at Mansfield. Constable Thomas McIntyre, 1846 to 1918, the survivor, is buried at Ballarat.

KENNEDY, a Lonely Hill Films production. In cinemas October 2028. kennedythefilm.com

Sources: Royal Commission on the Police Force of Victoria, 1881; Report of Constable McIntyre, 27 October 1878 (PROV); The Maitland Mercury and The Argus, October and November 1878; Leo Kennedy with Mic Looby, Black Snake, 2018; Victoria Police Museum; Monument Australia.