

## INTRODUCTION

In first deciding to write the stories of the people involved in the Glenrowan siege, I had to find out who they were and how they came to be at the Glenrowan Inn. There are some names associated with the siege that over the past 125 years who are still well known. These were the people who were either killed or injured during the shootout or those who played memorable parts in the event; like Mrs Reardon and her baby who were shot at by Sgt Steele whilst trying to escape.

The hostages have always been numbered 62, this is the amount that James Reardon counted and gave evidence to during the Royal Commission. But who were the 62? Who did James Reardon count? Was this the total amount of all of those in the Glenrowan Inn including babies and small children? Were Ned and his gang also included in this final tally?

Over the five years I have been researching, this has been the enduring question. Who exactly were those 62? No one can ever answer this question, only Reardon himself who is now long dead; but through research, and always with this query in mind I believe that the 62 prisoners are made up of 40 odd civilian men and 18 to 20 Kelly sympathisers. Most of those names still remain unknown.

I believe James Reardon counted only those at Mrs Jones Hotel earlier in the evening and that the women and children with Mrs Stanistreet were not included.

I have spent many, many hours reading documents and old newspapers hoping to find an elusive name of one of Ned Kelly's prisoners. I have been told names of those who were supposedly there; unfortunately some of these cannot be verified. There also seems to be many documents associated with the siege missing from the Public Records Office Victoria (PROV). There were instances I read about in the papers but there was

# "I WAS AT THE KELLY GANG ROUND-UP"

## David Mortimer, of Albury, Tells His Story

Many stories have been written and told of the Kelly Gang—Australia's most notorious bushrangers who towards the end of the last century amazed the world with their daring exploits in parts of North-Eastern Victoria and Riverina.

The little town—Glenrowan—nestling at the foot of a range of hills beside the main Melbourne-Albury railway line, where the outlaws made their last stand, will always be regarded as a place where history was made.

It is doubtful if there is anyone who can give a more complete story of Kelly Gang's escapades than Mr David Mortimer, now living in retirement at 549 Kiwara st, Albury. In his 83 summers, he has a memory life-edge keenness which bridges the period between youth and age with remarkable clearness.

Mortimer, as a lad of 19, was on the spot when the Kelly Gang 'shot up' by the police and black trackers in 1880—just 64 years ago. He tells the story this way:

"I was thrust from the hooves of fast-moving horses galloping through the bush. I heralded the arrival of the outlaws and their henchmen early on a morning in the year 1880, at Glenrowan. The horses, a finer bunch I could not wish to see, were lathered in sweat. Their dripping coats bore strong evidence that they had ridden fast from afar.

"Across hilly country the bushrangers had travelled throughout the district from The Woolshed, near Beechworth, where one of the band, Joe Burns, under cover of darkness, had committed his last crime. At point-blank range he had shot Aaron Sheers, a schoolmate of the Kelly brothers, because of the belief that Sheers was hiding at his home a posse of men awaiting the opportunity to attack the gang.

"While three others covered the settlement with their rifles, Joe Burns went to the back door and knocked. It answered the summons, dressed in his night attire, and when he had entered into view a shot rang out and he fell dead. With a triumphant shout the gang invited police—said to be hiding under their beds—to come and make combat. The summons unanswered, the Kellys made for their new lair."

**WS BY "BUSH TELEPHONE"**  
 "As the Kellys got wind that black trackers and a large number of police were on their way from Melbourne to the end of their escapades puzzled to know how to look out in the final fray, by some unknown means they were informed and with daring and courage met with speed on to fight it out

horseback at their side. As they approached the railway line near the now famous hotel owned by Mrs Jones, one of the outlaws, whom they later knew to be Joe Burns, hailed them from his prancing chestnut and relieved them of their firearms. The party was directed to the hotel and as others passed by they also were confined in the building and advised to remain there until they were freed.

Some hours earlier, after holding up Mrs Jones at her hotel and demanding that she carry out their instructions, the Kellys "collected" the local stationmaster and locked him up. They then rounded up members of a repair gang and made them bring their tools to a bend in the railway track and set to work on lifting out a length of rail.

"It was the bushrangers' intention to wreck the train bringing their would-be captors from Melbourne. Reluctantly the railwaymen did their enforced task and when they had finished they, too, were herded into the hotel to await the doom of passengers in the north-bound mail.

"No attempt was made to molest people herded at the hotel. On the contrary, the bushrangers treated us quite well. Joe Burns gave me a nip of Scotch and when the day began to drag Ned Kelly organised a hop, step and jump competition," said Mr Mortimer.

"As day passed into night and Mrs Jones fed her uninvited guests, Joe Burns, apparently in the killing mood, laid plans for the death of Constable Bracken, who lived further up the road towards Benalla. Bracken had caused the Kellys a good deal of inconvenience and he would be better out of the way, the outlaws thought. Besides, he was a policeman—vested with the authority to maintain law and order—and that was foreign to men who knew no laws but those of their own making.

"David Mortimer knew Bracken well and was ordered to lead the gang to his home. "As we approached the house I was covered by a rifle and sent to knock on Bracken's door. As I rapped out the summons I prayed



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taken back to hospital. Police black trackers went to ground. A silence was broken by an order 'surrender in the name of the Queen.' 'Surrender, be —! Fire a 'Charcoal,' Joe Burns shouted, reference was to the black tracker.

"Police answered the challenge with bullets. Pandemonium broke within the hotel. Women screamed, bullets bit deep into the wooden ceiling of the walls.

"As Michael Reardon stood in doorway with his two little daughters clutching his hands, police called him to throw up his hands. Before he could free himself he was shot through a shoulder. Reardon died in hospital a few months later."

### NED IS ROUNDED UP

"It was in the early hours of a morning that Ned Kelly made his bid for freedom. While rounding rear of the hotel a chance shot hit him on the foot. It was quite a hit and he made for cover in thick brush. Trackers followed the splashes of blood which at intervals plotted his steps doubled back to rejoin his mates, it was his fate to be met by a posse of policemen. They fired several shots at him, but none of these penetrated his armor.

"One aimed at his legs caused no stagger and he dragged himself a log behind which he lay undisturbed upon. He was taken to station and locked up.

"Joe Burns, arrogant until the day he was struck by a bullet from a rifle and dropped dead on the floor. Crouching people rushed to the door as it was flung open and into the open. They ignored orders to drop to the ground to be being struck by bullets and were hit to escape injury.

"Monday wore on. There were more bushrangers—Steve Hart and Dan King—still sniping from the hotel. They were great marksmen and had secured

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nothing to substantiate where the information had come from - so again the information cannot be included.

I have to the very best of my ability come up with the names of those people imprisoned in the Glenrowan Hotel on the 27th June 1880 by Ned Kelly. Other than just names, I have tried to tell who they were, why they were at the hotel and what happened to them after the event. Through statements, trial evidence, newspaper articles and with the help of some of the relatives and descendants of those who were there I have tried to piece together their lives. Some are no more than a couple of sentences while others have wonderful stories to tell.

Although my main focus is the hostages, I have included some people who were not, but were at the siege. It seemed important to give them a voice for one reason or another. As in every dramatic situation there are those who rose to the occasion and others who showed the worst side of their characters.

The research is my own, any mistakes are mine. I have endeavoured to provide a historically accurate and verifiable account of the days during and the years after the Glenrowan Siege.

JUDITH DOUTHIE

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Hugh Bracken. *Permission State Library of Victoria.*

## HUGH BRACKEN

Hugh Bracken was born on the 12<sup>th</sup> July 1840 at Drumgague, County Fermanagh, Ireland. He arrived in Australia on the ship '*Champion of the Seas*' on the 17<sup>th</sup> July 1861 and joined the Victorian police force as a mounted constable a few months later.<sup>1</sup>

Hugh Bracken's first appointment with the police force was at Beechworth, he was later transferred to Buckland and then to Bright. During this time he bought two blocks of land in the Porepunkah district. Bracken resigned from the police force for the first time in 1866. He had hopes of becoming a settler but things did not work out the way he had hoped.<sup>2</sup>

Bracken rejoined the police force in 1867, shortly afterwards he married Amelia Fanny Ryder at Geelong. His first post was Ballarat, followed by Lake Learmonth, Ararat and then Oxley. It was there he first came in contact with the Kelly gang; He would again resign from the police force in 1873.

In November 1878 Hugh Bracken joined the police force for the third time. Previous to this he had been working as an attendant at the Beechworth Lunatic Asylum.<sup>3</sup> Rejoining the Police Force was a direct reaction to the deaths of his police colleagues, Scanlon, Lonigan and Kennedy who were shot by the Kelly's at Stringybark Creek Bracken was sent firstly to Wodonga, Alexandra then Glenrowan where he was the lone officer.

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Bracken was a very conscientious policeman, in the weeks before the siege he had often visited those around Glenrowan who he thought might be able to give any information on the comings and goings of the outlaws. Bracken had been a visitor at both Paddy McDonnell and Mrs Jones hotel, making sure there were no breaches of licences. At both Hotels Bracken made it his business to speak to those who might be of assistance to him in his police duties; on a number of occasions he visited Mrs Jones premises 'shouting' a sherry for her or one of her patrons, in the hope that it might loosen their tongue.

In the weeks before the siege Mrs Jones had Ettie Hart come to visit her and stay for a few days. Ettie worked for a bank teller in Wangaratta. The Hart family lived at South Wangaratta where Mrs Jones and her husband had had their refreshment rooms before moving to Glenrowan, it can be supposed that the Harts and the Joneses knew each other well.

During Mrs Jones claim for compensation, Mrs Jones was cross examined by Mr Chomley, he asked;

*Do you recollect Bracken saying anything about you getting the reward of £8000 if you gave information?*

*(Mrs Jones) He did not; He never said anything to me on the subject of the reward.*

*(Chomley) When he referred to the £8000 reward you said in reply you would not have blood money and that poor Mrs Hart knew you too well to mistrust you - did you say that?*

*(Mrs Jones) No, Bracken never said anything of the sort. Ward said something.*

*(Chomley) Do you recollect the occasion that Bracken was at your hotel when Julia hart was there two days at the time? Bracken came down. She is a sister of Steve Hart?*

*(Mrs Jones) Yes*

*(Chomley) Do you recollect in the course of conversation his saying that was a bad job the busbrangers had shot the police and were it not for their so doing they would have the good wishes of people?*

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*(Mrs Jones) No, not any of it.*

*(Chomley) reading from a brief "that if they were after shooting her own son she could not but like them, remarking that poor Steve was such a nice fellow and that Joseph Byrne was the nicest man she had ever seen" Is that untrue?*

*(Mrs Jones) That is untrue*

*(Chomley) Bracken never put those questions to you?*

*(Mrs Jones) Most of the time he was at Glenrowan I was ill. I was bed ridden. He was in my bedroom one day to see that I was in a very low state with neuralgia in my head.<sup>4</sup>*

Bracken spent the week before the siege keeping watch on Maggie Skillion's property at Eleven Mile Creek and as a result of being out night after night in the cold he came down with a case of gastric flu, which laid him up in bed.

On the night of the 27<sup>th</sup> of June when Ned Kelly arrived at the constable's door and ordered him to 'bail up', Bracken's wife and small son were in bed. Ned ordered Mrs Bracken to remain where she was, because if she did, then, nothing would happen to her husband. Bracken dressed and saddled his horse, Ned had admired Bracken's horse and he intended to take it with him when he left Glenrowan. Bracken was mounted on the horse and Byrne took the reins. Ned rode behind making sure there was no attempt to escape.

Bracken was taken back to Mrs Jones hotel where Dan Kelly thought Bracken should be shot, or at the very least handcuffed, but Ned insisted 'he be left as he is'. When the police train was heard to arrive; the Kelly gang quickly dressed in their armour. At this time Bracken, who had watched where Mrs Jones had put the key to the front door grabbed it, unlocked the door and escaped. After he told inspector Hare that the Kelly gang were at Mrs. Jones hotel Bracken jumped on his horse and rode the eight miles to Wangaratta for reinforcements.

Hugh Bracken returned to Glenrowan with the Wangaratta policemen, so he was also there at the time of Ned Kelly's capture. As Sergeant Steele and Jesse Dowsett wrestled the pistol from Ned's hand. Steele threatened

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to shoot Ned; Bracken pushed Steele aside and said *"If you shoot Kelly I'll shoot you"*

When interviewed by *The Argus* newspaper after the Siege, Hugh Bracken made the following statement;

*"I am stationed at Greta, five miles from Glenrowan. At 11 o'clock on Sunday night I was called by Edward Reynolds. I was then at the police station, which is one mile from the railway station. I had been suffering from a bilious attack, and was very weak. At first I did not reply, but another voice called me and then I opened the door. Just as I did so, Ned Kelly presented a revolver at my head. He was masked with an iron helmet and I didn't at first know it was Ned Kelly. The mask was like a nail can. He told me to 'bail up', and throw my hands up. I said "You are not Ned Kelly; you are only one of the police trying my mettle." He continued "Throw up your arms, or you are a dead man." I put one hand up and he said "Put the other up; we want no nonsense." I complied. He then took my gun and revolver, and asked me for cartridges. I told him I only had those the gun and revolver were loaded with.*

*Then he said "I believe you have a very fast horse." He referred to a horse called 'Sir Solomon' which I possess 'Sir Solomon is crippled but I had a good horse in the stable. He ordered me to lead him to the stable, and I did so. We saddled the horse, bridled it and then he told me to mount. Ned Kelly was accompanied by Byrne. Both were mounted and a man named Reynolds was with them on foot. Byrne took hold of my horses bridle and Ned Kelly followed up behind with Reynolds on foot.*

*We proceeded to Jones's Hotel. Robert Gibbons another prisoner also accompanied us. When we arrived at the hotel we found a lot of people stuck up there. We were put in one of the rooms of the hotel. The gang were all armed with revolvers and rifles.*

*There were only three of them there, Hart, I believe, being at the postmaster's house at the time. Byrne locked the front door and I watched where he put the key. He laid it carelessly near the chimney. Believing a special train would be coming up with police I secured the key when Byrne's back was turned and put it in my pocket. I heard the special train arrive. Thereupon the gang went into a back room, this was my opportunity and I quietly went to the front door, unlocked it and rushed out. I ran to the railway station, found the train had arrived and the police on the platform; told them where the Kelly's were, and asked them to surround the place immediately.*

*After a few minutes, Superintendent Hare returned with his arm wounded. I then secured a horse and rode to Wangaratta about 12 miles distant. Told the police there what had happened and sent telegrams all over the district and the police of Wangaratta immediately started for the scene, I returned with them.<sup>5</sup>*

Hugh Bracken received part of the reward money for his actions at Glenrowan. Just days after Ned's capture Bracken asked to be removed from Glenrowan, as with other residents he felt it was in his and his family's best interests to be away from the town. He was posted to Richmond where many of the police officers there treated him with resentment. These men believed Bracken should have allowed Steele to shoot Kelly, just as Kelly had done to the three policemen at Stringybark. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of September Bracken was posted to Wallan. The Kelly and Quinn families had lived at Wallan in earlier days and there were still many in the district who knew the families well; many of them were also Irish men. However, the residents treated Bracken with high regard; according to them he had done the right thing in not allowing Sgt Steele to shoot one of their own. The events that had taken place did not sit well with Bracken, he had so much wanted the respect and esteem of his colleagues and it appeared but they thought little of him.

In 1883 Bracken suffered a nervous breakdown; he was transferred to Melbourne where he was found to be unfit for further duty and discharged.

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Hugh made his home at Wallan amongst his friends, however, in 1884 his wife Fanny died, leaving Hugh to raise his six year old son Richard on his own. A few months later in the same year Hugh married Emily Morrow of Richmond, they had one son, James before Emily died just 10 yrs later in 1894. Hugh then had his two sons Richard now 16 and James aged 9 to raise alone.

Hugh Bracken died on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1900 at Wallan from a self inflicted gunshot wound. It seems the death of two wives and his own dark demons bought about his death. He was buried three days later in the Wallan Cemetery.

Hugh Bracken's elder son Richard married and went to live in Geelong. His younger son James died in action at Le Verguder, France on the 19<sup>th</sup> September 1918.

- 1 Bill Coffey *The Brackens*, Glen Waverley 1990 p.18.
- 2 Letter by Wm McLean Kelly papers VPRO.
- 3 Letter from Hugh Bracken, Kelly Papers VPRS 4965/P0000/3.
- 4 Mrs. Jones compensation case VPRS 4967/unit 3 file 83/27754.
- 5 *Argus* newspaper, 29 June 1880.