

# KELLY GANG'S LAST FIGHT

## Last Living Survivor of Drama at Glenrowan Tells Story

Exciting events connected with the final exploits of the Kelly Gang and their last stand at Glenrowan, Victoria, are recalled by the death last week of Mr. John Charles Lowe, of Yarrawonga, at the age of 88 years.

**MR. LOWE**—father of Mr. William Lowe, of Docker Street, Wagga, was present during the attempted derailment of a train-load of troopers; in fact, he was one of the men who were forced by the Kellys to pull up the railway line. He was also inside the Glenrowan Hotel with the gang when the building was besieged by the police.

Eleven years before his death Mr. Lowe gave a graphic account of his experiences. His story is reproduced below.

I have been asked on many occasions and by many people to write my version of the capture of the Kelly Gang, but have up to the present, declined.

What I have recorded in these memoirs are facts, and not in the slightest degree exaggerated, as I was present from start to finish and for some time after.

As I am now 77 years of age, and it is nearly 60 years since the events recorded took place, there are quite a lot of things I have forgotten, but some I never shall.

I was not twenty years of age at the time, and lived with my parents at Benalla. Having a horse and dray of my own, I was engaged to a contractor named Piazza to go to Glenrowan and cart road metal to the railway trucks at the station for transport to Benalla for the construction of the main street.

All told, there were seven of us, and we pitched camp about three chains from Mrs. Jones' hotel, and about three chains in a direct line from the railway

station.

We had been there about a month when one Saturday night we were having a bit of a jollification and it was about midnight before we went to bed. My tent was on the railway fence and the others at the back of it.

Between 1 and 2 o'clock I was awakened by a man at the entrance to my tent. He ordered me to get up and, thinking it was one of my mates continuing his joking, I told him to go to —.

A voice from the back of my tent then said, "Put a bullet through him if he resists. We are police, and you had better get up." I did so, and when I got outside I recognised both of the men as Steve Hart and Ned Kelly, whom I knew before they went out.

Kelly asked me if I knew them and answered in the affirmative as I had often seen them in Benalla. He told me they had shot Sheritt near Beechworth and that there would be a train load of police along, at any moment. He wanted men to help pull up the railway line, so as to wreck the train.

He cautioned me very severely, and assured me he would do me no harm as long as I obeyed him. He asked he how many men were in the other tents and, on my informing him, told me to get them out. This I proceeded to do, Kelly being with me at each tent entrance.

At the last tent the occupants refused to move and there was some argument. One of the occupants was the boss, Piazza, and, lifting his gun, which he kept beside his bed, he sat up, threatening to shoot us. Kelly, ripping open the tent door, said, "You

open the tent door, said, "You —. You lift a gun to me," and fired his rifle at Piazza.

As he did so Piazza knocked the gun from his arm, the charge going through his bunk into the ground.

A woman, who was also occupying the tent, gave a terrific scream, whereupon Kelly turned on me for not telling him in the first place there was a woman, but I explained that she was not always there.

Having turned out all hands, Kelly then repeated what he had previously told me, re the police and the train, and also the help he required to pull up the line. He further cautioned us, and promised not to harm us if we did what he wanted.

He thought we were line-repairers and knew how to go about the job. We told him we were not, nor had we tools which would do the job. We directed him to where the repairers lived, about a quarter of a mile along the line.

Leaving us in charge of Hart, Kelly went and brought two or three of the line-repairers and the families and the whole of us, women and all, proceeded along the line and took up a length of rails and sleepers, sliding these down a steep bank into a creek. We were then compelled to go into the bush and get saplings and branches with which to conceal the break in the line.

At this stage we had a great chance to get away, as I was fully 100 yards from the railway fence, while I heard others breaking limbs and talking further away still.

The job done, we returned to the railway station. It was then nearly clear day, and being a Sunday morning, no one was about. We were all expecting the

Sunday morning, no one was about. We were all expecting the train, and lolled about for some time.

As near as I can remember, we went over to the hotel. By this time, Dan Kelly and Joe Byrne had arrived (from where we did not know), but all thought from Beechworth, where Sheritt was shot.

We stone-carters, were allowed to go to our tents to get breakfast. What the rest did I do not know, but I think Mrs. Jones, the proprietress of the hotel, was the Good Samaritan, as they were not allowed to leave the hotel.

As the morning went on we wandered about like lost sheep, expecting the train to come, while the gang was busy attending to their horses and accoutrements, armor, etc., which they had brought from across the line and put in a back room of the hotel, leaving the horses in the back yard and paying full attention to stragglers who came along, making them prisoners.

We were given a fair amount of liberty and allowed to roam about freely, up and down to the railway gates, looking for the train and putting our ear to the rails to try and hear it.

On one occasion we were nearly

all down at the gates, when three or four lads, walking from Greta, about four miles distant came along. They came, as they had done once or twice before, intending to go into the hills to hunt kangaroos and wallabies, of which there was a considerable number at the time. I had two very good dogs that rarely missed their quarry, but there was no hunting that day. One or two of the lads was named Delaney. Their father was a blacksmith at Greta, and formerly lived in Benalla, where the lads and I went to school together.

When Ned Kelly asked these lads their name there was a sensation in the crowd, as it was known that some time previously the elder Delaney and his sister were driving in a spring cart to Wangaratta when they overtook a mounted trooper, whose horse had sometime earlier fallen with him and injured his leg. Delaney offered him a ride in the cart with his sister. The trooper accepted and Delaney rode the horse.

Kelly knew all about this, and took Delaney to task about it. He gave him a great scolding, abused the police, and finished up by threatening to shoot Delaney there and then. Kelly gave him a revolver and ordered him to stand against a gatepost. Say-

ing he had never done a cowardly thing in his life Kelly then walked across to the other side of the line and said Delaney was to have first shot.

At that time Kelly had on his body armor and we were all convinced that he intended to carry out his threat.

Delaney was crying, and I am fairly certain he was not the only one. We, especially the women, pleaded hard and Kelly gave in, taking his revolver back and cautioning him, and the rest of us, never to do anything for a policeman.

It was now about dinner time and we went to our tents, the remainder to the hotel, still wondering what had happened to the train.

Shortly after dinner there came Mr. Curnow, the school teacher, who, with his wife and two small children, was out for a drive in his buggy. Against their will, they were gathered in with the rest of us. Some put in the afternoon playing cards, others at jumping and various games of skill, revolvers being used for weights to jump with. On the whole, the time passed well.

During the day, Ned Kelly and one of his mates went to the police station, which was about a mile away on the Benalla side of the township, and brought back the man in charge whose name, I think was Bracken.

Night was drawing near and we were all anxious to see the end of it. There was no train and no police, and we were curious to know what was going to happen. Various ones asked to be allowed to get away but there was no hope.

The only exception was the school teacher, who pleaded hard with Kelly, saying that his wife and children had not been well, and begged to let them home.

In the end he succeeded, but was cautioned not to leave his house or communicate with anybody, as one of the gang would go to watch and if he moved he would be shot.

His school was about a mile away, on the Benalla side of Glenrowan and opposite to the police station.

Kelly made a mistake in letting him go, as it upset his plans, which, as far as I know, were not divulged to anyone. During the time we were in the gang's company, they spoke freely of the past—how they lived, evaded the police, at times very close to them but not seen. They said

to them but not seen. They said they were getting good gold and were well satisfied, but that the police would not let them alone.

We were all wanting sleep and the hours seemed very long. It was about 2 a.m. when we heard the train a considerable distance away. This caused some uneasiness amongst us as we were all expecting it to crash.

We did not, for a moment, think it would stop but expected to go on to where the line was torn up, making an awful smash and probably killing

every person on board, as it was the most dangerous part of the line.

The track came through a small cutting and downhill round a sharp curve. There was a drop of 15 to 20 feet from the embankment into the dry creek where we had previously thrown the rails.

Having heard the train whistle then stop for a short time and start again, coming along slowly, we could not account for it and were at a loss to know what would happen next. We were all on the move, the Kellys busy getting their armor on, and we thought they were going to where the break in the line had been made.

We found out later why the train had stopped. The school teacher whom the Kellys had allowed to go home earlier in the evening was a brave man and risked his life to save those on the train. Not many would have done as he did, especially after the cautioning and threats he received when he left us. I understand that he left his wife and children alone in the house and, taking an ordinary lantern and a piece of red cloth, was able to stop the train.

To our surprise, the train came to a standstill at the platform, and we heard the dropping of truck doors, the unloading of horses, and the talking of men. Things were all of a bustle for a short time and as it was a fairly clear night, though without a moon, we could see objects moving.

Some of us went out the back door of the hotel and were watching the movements at the station. We saw a number of police coming towards us as though they were making for the hotel.

They had come only a few yards when the Kellys, who were standing near the farther end of the house, opened fire on them.

The police returned the fire and made for whatever cover they could. Nearby were a few

they could. Nearby were a few washaways with culverts over them, and the police rushed for these places of shelter. We prisoners who were looking on from the back of the house got very abrupt orders to go inside if we did not want to be shot.

After that we saw very little, but heard a great amount of shooting. I think it was Supt. Hare, who was shot in the wrist in the first volley that was fired from the east end of the house and not from the front verandah, which the newspaper pictures showed at the time. There were only three of the gang present—where the fourth was I don't know.

For a short time there was a bit of a lull, with no shooting, and I understand the police were surrounding the house. It was then about three o'clock on Monday morning, and from then on there was plenty of shooting.

More police arrived and I was told afterwards that they numbered 60.

From the inside the shooting seemed to be at intervals of from ten to fifteen minutes and there was a good volley each time. We could hear the bullets hitting the house, those through the walls making quite a different sound from those through the roof.

At times we roamed from room to room, but our main room was on the southeast corner of the building close to the bar. Kelly's room was at the back of us, but none of us entered it after the shooting started. We did so beforehand and they showed us their armor, which was kept in there.

At each volley we all lay flat on the floor, remaining there until it was over. There were about forty of us but I would say that about half got away during the early period of shooting, three or four of them being wounded, one fatally.

Some who rushed out came in again, being afraid of being shot by the police.

One of the gang, Joe Byrne, was shot early in the attack. It has been said that he was getting a drink at the bar and that the whole of the gang were drinking, thus contributing to their own downfall.

That is not correct, for there was little or no drinking by either the gang or the prisoners. It was true that he fell at the bar counter-end in the passage,

and as no one took the trouble to move him, we had to step over him when going from room to room.

Daylight came and, through

the windows which by then were completely shattered, we could see the police moving about some distance away. One of my work-mates and I opened a door and held out a white cloth, but as a bullet came through the door panel beside us, we got back very quickly.

We called out to the police to cease firing, as there was no one in the place but innocent civilians, women and children.

But the firing continued though perhaps not so frequently until, I think, nearly nine o'clock when, from outside, we heard a voice ordering all inside to come out within five minutes. We all made a rush and were scattering when we were commanded by the police, who were at our tents, to go over there.

This we proceeded to do, but when about 20 yards from them we were ordered to kneel down and then to lie down.

A big, burly policeman cried out, "We will shoot this lot first as they are all sympathisers."

When a dozen or more policemen levelled their rifles at us I thought the end had come.

After lying there for a while we were called up, one at a time for examination. Some were held for a time, but I passed very easily and was told by one who knew me that my horse was full of bullets as he had been galloping about in the line of fire all night. I later found him to be all right, though four horses were shot dead in the encounter, and from the police I received 7/6 a head for burning the carcasses.

We were now free and learned that Ned Kelly had been taken earlier in the morning. He must have been well outside the police cordon, as he was taken some four or five chains from the house as, it is supposed, he was making back to his mates.

Byrne, we knew, was left dead in the hotel, and, I am sure, that Dan Kelly and Steve Hart were also dead for, as I mentioned before, they were in the room adjoining ours.

In the early part of the night we could distinctly hear them shooting at intervals, until about daylight. But after that their shooting ceased and it is my opinion (and also that of some of my mates) that long before we left the building they had shot themselves.

In the early part we could hear them talking and moving about, but later we heard no sound and as we had not the liberty of entering their room we were afraid to do so.

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When we got clear of the police we were told to go over to the train and get something to eat. Most of us did so, and did justice to the food which had been brought out by the police.

For the next hour or so we watched the police still firing on the house, which was now a wreck, being well riddled with bullets. It was said by many that it was a great pity the house was not left standing as the owner, Mrs. Jones, would have made a lot of money from those who came later to view it.

About this time a priest came along in a train and was making straight for the house, with the full intention, I believe, of entering it. When he got fairly near, he was ordered back and returned. Kate Kelly also attempted to reach it but was stopped.

Then came the setting on fire of the house. Under cover of heavy firing by his mates, a policeman rushed to one end of the house with a bundle of straw and set it alight. Before it got a fair hold the crowd, which, by this time, comprised a good number who had been coming from all directions during the morning, made for the house, led by the priest, who was the first man in.

They carried Byrne out, making through the kitchen, which was detached. There, in an end room, was found lying on a bed, an old line-repairer whose name, I think, was Sherry. He was seriously wounded and was carried out the back, but died in a very short time.

By this time the building was well alight and burning fast. After it had burnt and had cooled down a bit all were busy looking around.

In the room where we had left Dan Kelly and Steve Hart, two bodies so badly burnt as to be beyond recognition were seen lying side by side, one with the head towards the

north and the other towards the south.

I have often since heard it said, and also read in different newspapers, that Dan Kelly was still alive at the time, but I say without the slightest doubt that those reports were wrong. I and over 40-odd prisoners in the place knew every one of the gang, and we were also well known to each other, and it is hardly likely that we would not have known if two were missing and announced the fact. I am quite sure that the two bodies were those of Kelly and Hart.

At about four o'clock that



At about four o'clock that evening I returned to my home in Benalla by train and intended to hunt up some of my pals and tell them all about it. But was pretty well worn out and ready for bed when neighbors from all around gathered at our place.

There had never been such a number of visitors at one time before. They asked me all kinds of questions till I fell asleep in the chair and my mother had to ask them to go home and made me go to bed as I had had just about enough.

The next day I went back to Glenrowan to my job, took some five or six weeks more to finish. While there the number of people who came to see the place was enormous. Every train brought a lot, as many as fifty alighting at one time, beside others who came by road. This continued for about three weeks, when excitement began to wane somewhat.

Up to the time we left there were still a few who came along, and it is surprising to see the variety of things they took away as souvenirs—bits of iron, pots, saucepans, dishes, pieces of half-burnt furniture, etc.

The most-sought-after souvenirs were bullets that were cut out of trees. There was a great number of these, as every tree had some embedded therein.

Some being well up in the limbs, a good climb was necessary and I got up to two shillings each for those I retrieved, while others, I believe, got more. The railway station was a great place to sell them to passengers travelling through. But the time came when these souvenirs became scarce.

However, there was a line repairer who had a single barrelled gun. He made bullets with a hammer and, putting them into his gun, he fired them into a tree. He told me he got 1/6 for the bullets without any trouble.

For two or three weeks after-

more, asking all kinds of questions, many of which we could not answer.

After the affair was over the detectives paid us much attention and were very inquisitive. I don't know what their object was, other than to get a case against the hotelkeeper (Mrs. Jones) for harboring the Kellys, which they later did.

One day two of the detectives rode with me in the dray up the hill. They thought, from what I was saying, that my remarks were much against them and their mates. They advised me to be more careful in what I said, as it might cause me trouble. I might here say that I had no time for them after their night's shooting at me, and perhaps I might have spoken too plainly.

Some time later Mrs. Jones appeared at the Wangaratta Court. With some 25 others I was summoned as a witness. As far as I can remember, we were mostly in her favor.

The first few witnesses called asked for their expenses, which were refused as they were told that they had not travelled over 25 miles to give evidence for the Crown. They were all from Glenrowan, which was about 12 miles from Wangaratta.

When my turn came I also asked for expenses and I was more fortunate than the others, for by that time I had moved to another job about four miles south of Benalla. My expenses were allowed and I think I was the only witness who was paid.

I am now to the end of my story. What I have written is still fresh in my memory, but a lot more which would have made interesting reading I have partly forgotten. Fifty-nine years is a long time to think back, and I should have written my story years ago.

(Cont. on Page 5)

## Last Fight Kelly Gang's

(Cont. from Page 4)

wards we were pestered with visitors who were not content to walk round and see things for themselves, but came to our camp, especially at meal times. Often there were a dozen or more, asking all kinds of questions, many of which we could