

= Old Melbourne Gaol =

The Old Melbourne Gaol is a museum on Russell Street , in Melbourne , Victoria , Australia . It consists of a bluestone building and courtyard , and is located next to the old City Police Watch House and City Courts buildings . It was first constructed starting in 1839 , and during its operation as a prison between 1842 and 1929 , it held and executed some of Australia 's most notorious criminals , including bushranger Ned Kelly and serial killer Frederick Bailey Deeming . In total , 133 people were executed by hanging . Though it was used briefly during World War II , it formally ceased operating as a prison in 1924 ; with parts of the gaol being incorporated into the RMIT University , and the rest becoming a museum .

The three @-@ storey museum displays information and memorabilia of the prisoners and staff , including death masks of the executed criminals . At one time the museum displayed Ned Kelly 's skull , before it was stolen in 1978 ; as well as the pencil used by wrongly convicted Colin Campbell Ross to protest his innocence in writing , before being executed . Paranormal enthusiasts claim the museum is haunted , with claims of ghostly apparitions and unexplained voices near cells .

= = History = =

An allotment of scrubland to the north @-@ east of Melbourne was selected as Port Phillips first permanent gaol . On 1 January 1838 , George Wintle was appointed to be gaoler at the prison at £ 100 a year ; with the site becoming colloquially known as Wintle 's Hotel . Construction of the gaol started in 1839 ? 1840 on Collins Street West , but it was considered too small at the time . A second gaol was then built between 1841 and 1844 at the corner of Russell and La Trobe Streets , adjoining the then Supreme court . The first cell block was opened for prisoners in 1845 , but the facilities were considered inadequate ; escapes occurring frequently . The gaol was already crowded by 1850 .

With the discovery of gold in 1851 ( when the Port Phillip District became the new Colony of Victoria ) , and the resulting influx of population , law and order became more difficult to maintain . Subsequently , a new wing , with its own perimeter wall , was constructed between 1852 and 1854 ; the building using bluestone instead of sandstone . The design was based on that of British prison engineer Joshua Jebb , and especially the designs for the Pentonville Model Prison in London ( which suited the current prison reform theories at the time ) . The new wing was extended in between 1857 and 1859 , with the boundary wall also being extended during this time . In 1860 , a new north wing was built ; which included entrance buildings , a central hall and chapel . Between 1862 and 1864 , a cell block was built for female prisoners on the western side ? it was basically a replica of the present east block ( until this time , female convicts were not kept apart from the male prisoners ) . In 1864 , the perimeter wall , and the gaol overall , was completed ; making it a dominant feature of authority on the Melbourne skyline .

At its completion , the prison occupied an entire city block , and included exercise yards , a hospital in one of the yards , a chapel , a bath house and staff accommodation . A house for the chief warders was built on the corner of Franklin and Russell streets , and 17 homes were built for gaolers on Swanston street in 1860 . Artefacts recovered from the area indicate that even the gaolers and their families lived within the gaol walls in the 1850s and 1860s .

= = = Operation = = =

Much of daily life inside the gaol could be gleaned from sources such as diaries written by John Castieau , governor of the gaol between 1869 and 1884 . During its operation , the gaol was used to house short @-@ term prisoners , lunatics and some of the colony 's most notorious and hardened criminals . It also housed up to twenty children at a time ? including those imprisoned for petty theft or vagrancy , or simply those staying with a convicted parent . Babies under twelve months old were allowed to be with their mothers . The youngest prisoner was recorded as three @-@ year @-@ old Michael Crimmins , who spent 6 months in the prison in 1857 for being idle and disorderly . In 1851 ,

the 13- and 14 @-@ year @-@ old O 'Dowd sisters were imprisoned because they had nowhere else to go .

Prisoners convicted of serious crime , such as murder , arson , burglary , rape and shooting , would begin their time on the ground floor with a time of solitary confinement . They were also forbidden from communicating with other prisoners , which was strictly enforced by the usage of a silence mask , or calico hood , when outside their cells . They would only be given a single hour of solitary exercise a day , with the remaining 23 hours spent in their cells . Inside the cells , prisoners would be able to lie on a thin mattress over the slate floors . They could only bathe and change clothes once a week , and attend the chapel on Sundays ( with a Bible provided to promote good behaviour ) . Prisoners might only have been allowed to finally socialise with other prisoners towards the end of their sentences .

The routine for prisoners was regulated by a system of bells , and enforced by punishments ; prisoners who obeyed the rules would be promoted to the second floor ? whereby they would be allowed to work in the yards everyday . Male prisoners would perform hard labour ? including breaking rocks , and other duties in the stone quarries , while women would sew , clean and cook . Women would also make shirts and waistcoats for male prisoners , as well as act as domestic servants for the governor and his family . Prisoners who had become trusted , those nearing the completion of their sentence , and debtors , were housed on the third floor communal cells . These top level cells were large , and held up to six prisoners at time ; and were mostly reserved to prisoners convicted of minor crimes such as drunkenness , vagrancy , prostitution or petty theft .

= = = Executions = = =

During its operation , the gaol was the setting for 133 hangings . The most infamous was that of bushranger Ned Kelly at the age of 25 , on 11 November 1880 . After a two @-@ day trial , Kelly was convicted of killing a police officer . As stated by law at the time , executed prisoners were buried ( without head ) in unmarked graves in the gaol burial yard . The head was normally removed from the body as part of the phrenological study of hanged felons . Historian and associate professor of Wollongong University John McQuilton states that the lack of monitoring for burial processes was odd , given Victorian society 's normally brilliant attention to detail .

The first hanging of a woman in Victoria , Elizabeth Scott , was performed in the prison on 11 November 1863 ? along with her co @-@ accused , Julian Cross and David Gedge . The last person to be executed was Angus Murray in 1924 , the same year the gaol was closed .

= = = Ned Kelly = = =

Edward " Ned " Kelly , born sometime between June 1854 and June 1855 , was an Irish @-@ Australian bushranger , and was seen by some as merely a cold @-@ blooded killer , while to others he was a folk hero for his defiance of the colonial authorities . As a youth he clashed with the Victoria Police , and after an incident at his home in 1878 , police parties searched for him in the bush . He killed three policemen , and subsequently the colony proclaimed Kelly and his gang wanted outlaws . A final violent confrontation with police took place at Glenrowan on 28 June 1880 . Kelly , dressed in a home @-@ made plate metal armour and helmet , was captured and sent to gaol . He was hanged for murder at the Old Melbourne Gaol in November 1880 . His notoriety affirmed him as a polarising iconic figure in Australian history , folk lore , literature , art and film . He was in cell number 113 at the Old Melbourne Gaol

= = = Colin Campbell Ross = = =

Colin Campbell Ross , an Australian wine @-@ bar owner , was wrongly convicted of the rape and murder of 12 @-@ year @-@ old Alma Tirtschke in December 1921 . The case , dubbed the Gun Alley Murder , was heavily influenced by public hysteria at the time , which ultimately served to condemn him . Despite his pleas of innocence ( including an attempt whereby a letter was thrown

over the gaol walls ) , he was executed by hanging in the gaol in April 1922 ( only 115 days after the body was found ) . A new four @-@ strand rope was used for the first time at the execution , and proved to be a failure ; Ross slowly strangled for more than forty minutes before his death . A prison report later ruled that such a rope must never be used again . He was posthumously pardoned on 27 May 2008 .

= = = Frederick Bailey Deeming = = =

Frederick Bailey Deeming was born on 30 July 1853 . At 16 years of age he ran away to sea , and thereafter , he began a long career of crime , largely thieving and obtaining money under false pretences . He was responsible for the murder of his first wife Marie , and his four children , at Rainhill , England , on or about 26 July 1891 , and a second wife , Emily , at Windsor , Melbourne , on 24 December 1891 . Less than three months elapsed between the discovery of Emily Mather ? s body in Windsor , Melbourne , in March 1892 , and Deeming ? s execution at the Old Melbourne Gaol for her murder in May 1892 ; a remarkably short time by comparison to modern western legal standards . After his execution , it was reported that over 12 @,@ 000 people cheered on the streets outside , and there was public speculation that Deeming was in fact Jack the Ripper .

= = = Closure and re @-@ opening = = =

In 1870 , a review of the penal system was conducted , with the recommendation being made to close the gaol and relocate prisoners to more suitable locations . The gaol gradually slowed its operations , and demolished portions of the original site between 1880 and 1924 . In 1924 , the gaol was finally closed . However , in March 1927 , the Old Melbourne Gaol was integrated into part of the new Emily McPherson College , and was used for educational purposes . This necessitated changes to the prison ; in 1929 , despite poor record keeping of prisoner burials , historical evidence suggested the remains of approximately 32 executed prisoners , including Ned Kelly , were exhumed from the Old Melbourne Gaol and buried at mass graves in a quarry at Pentridge . In 1930 , the women 's cell block , walls and several other buildings were demolished , and a further four coffins were believed to have been moved to Pentridge in 1937 .

As the Gaol was progressively decommissioned , the building ? s fabric , including bluestone grave markers of executed prisoners , was incorporated into a sea wall at Brighton in Victoria in the 1930s . The grave marker for Martha Needle , executed in 1894 , has recently been rediscovered after being buried by metres of sand .

During World War II , the gaol was used as a military prison for soldiers found to be absent without leave . A new wall was built in the eastern courtyard during this time , so that cell block inmates were separated from the college girls . After the end of the war , the section used for holding prisoners was then used only as a storage facility for the Victoria Police Force , whose headquarters were nearby in Russell Street .

In May 1974 , the sections used by the school were remodelled by architects Eggleston , McDonald and Secomb , to act as the schools food and fashion departments . The Emily McPherson College was merged into RMIT University in 1979 , bringing the gaol entrance gates , and other facilities alongside it . In 1990 , RMIT performed work to restore the enclosed balcony to its former 1927 design . In 1994 , RMIT performed further work to landscape the inner courtyard , and in 1995 , removed the temporary war @-@ time pavilion classrooms . As of 2010 , the sections that RMIT owns are collectively known as the " RMIT Building 11 . Architect : Colonial Government Architect " , and include the entrance block and chapel ; with the bath house and chapel serving as art studios .

= = Museum = =

In 1957 , the National Trust of Australia listed the Old Melbourne Gaol on its heritage register , and a year later marked it as a site that needed to be preserved at all costs . Furthermore , in 1965 , the Melbourne Junior Chamber of Commerce floated the idea of converting it into a museum , for the

purposes of tourism . In 1972 , the gaol was reopened as a public museum , under the management of the National Trust of Australia ( Victoria ) .

As of 2010 , the gaol is recognised as Victoria 's oldest surviving penal establishment , and attracts approximately 140 @, @ 000 visitors per year . The cells have been filled with information about individual prisoners , which also serve to illustrate the history of Melbourne itself .

In addition to historical information , it also includes various memorabilia ; including death masks , an iron mask , and a pair of leather gloves designed to prevent inmates from practising self @-@ abuse . Notably , it still includes Ned Kelly 's death mask , pistol and replica of his suit of armour , as well as the pencil used by Colin Ross to write a letter protesting his innocence , which he threw over the prison walls .

Operators also run several features , including the candlelit Hangman 's Night Tour ( with actors portraying prolific and brutal hangman Michael Gateley ) , and the daily Watch House Experience ; an interactive performance in which visitors are treated as the prisoners would have been during its operation . In 2010 , the Old Melbourne Gaol Crime and Justice Experience won the heritage and cultural tourism category at the Qantas Australian Tourism Awards in Hobart .

= = = Ned Kelly 's skull = = =

A skull , believed to be Ned Kelly 's , was on display in the museum until it was stolen from a glass cabinet in 1978 . Efforts have been taken by scientists and the government to determine the location of the skull , and whether it was authentic to begin with ; it was reported that members of the public may have the remains of bones and teeth taken as souvenirs when graves were exhumed in 1929 . Special interest was directed to finding a photograph of former South Melbourne councillor Alex Talbot holding Ned Kelly 's skull , and information on grave exhume contractor Lee of Lee and Dunn , or his family , who was tasked with delivering Kelly 's skull to the governor .

In 2009 , West Australian farmer Tom Baxter handed a skull to authorities , arguing that it was the one stolen from the gaol ? while refusing to explain how he obtained it . Former Pentridge prison chaplain Father Peter Norden has stated that he believed the skull handed in could not belong to Kelly , and that it probably belonged to a woman . In 2010 , there was further speculation that the skull actually belonged to Frederick Bailey Deeming , with the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine claiming that the skull is similar to both Kelly 's and Deeming 's death masks .

= = = Haunting = = =

The museum is considered haunted by paranormal enthusiasts , including British parapsychologist Darren Done . Done spent a night at the gaol in 2003 , and claimed that he heard unexplained voices , and detected evidence of an electrical interference to suggest paranormal activity . He has since undertaken more research at the gaol , and in 2005 , he claimed to have recorded a ghostly figure with a grotesque visage standing in a doorway at the gaol . Theories suggest that the voice of a woman , claimed to have been heard , might belong to Elizabeth Scott ( the first woman hung at the gaol ) . Notably , none of the reported hauntings are related to that of Ned Kelly . Local enthusiast group GhostSeekers Australia conducts monthly tours to gather data and statistics for paranormal activity ; making use of various monitoring equipment . However , Joe Nickell , a writer for the Skeptical Inquirer , argues that evidence of ghostly phenomena at the site is scant .