



# *ANZAAB Aspects of Book Collecting*

## **Collecting Australian Bushranging Books**

Time Booksellers

**Background:** The Australian Bushranging era (1790–1890s) covered approximately the first 100 years of Australian settlement. Early bushrangers were mainly ex-convict labourers from working class, Irish backgrounds who had been transported to Australia. Referred to in much of the literature as Bolters, they were rebels against authority who were attempting to survive in the bush by stealing from isolated settlers and travellers.

The discovery of gold in the 1850's and 60's saw an upsurge in bushranging activity. Gold nuggets were relatively easy to steal, transport and sell and, because of this, many Australian-born sons joined the ranks of the bushrangers.

Improvements in communication transport and the expansion of settlements finally caused the demise of bushranging in the late 1890's. It was in this later period that the Kelly Gang (led by Ned Kelly) were finally captured at Glenrowan in Victoria.

**Subject range:** Fiction and non-fiction books on this subject number in the thousands. If you add to these issues of illustrated newspapers, magazines, government papers and reports, pamphlets and broadsides that number would double. For example, Brian McDonald's *A bibliographical look at the Ned Kelly legend* (2002) alone lists nearly 800 items of Kellyana (material relating to Ned Kelly) and pre-dating Kelly's exploits there was a hundred years of popular literature relating to bushranging.

**Availability:** Most general second-hand bookshops have small sections on bushranging, while rarer titles can often be found via an internet search. Collective book sites, like [www.booksandcollectibles.com.au](http://www.booksandcollectibles.com.au), which list several million titles are an invaluable resource to the collector. Other sources not to be overlooked are bookseller's catalogues, book auctions and online auctions. Given the wide scope of the subject matter, the new collector would be wise to narrow the field and start by collecting books on one particular bushranger, or a specific geographical area or time period.

**Subject price-range:** Much of the material relating to this area of collecting can still be obtained at a modest price. Contemporary literature (published in the last 40 years) sells for under \$50, while much of the older, historical literature (ie. published in the 1800's) can be purchased for under \$500. Also, many of the rarer items—such as the *Police Commission: Minutes of evidence taken before Royal Commission on the Police Force of Victoria...*(1881)—have been reproduced in facsimile editions and these facsimiles have become collectable in their own right.

**Footnote:** As with all areas of book collecting it is usually quality not quantity that defines a good collection. While many titles are easily acquired, the extra time and the few dollars spent acquiring the best possible copy will always reward the collector in future years.