

Finally, a movie that tells the truth about Stringybark Creek

In April this year, I attended the cast and crew movie premier of an hour-long feature film simply titled Stringybark. The movie is about the Kelly Gang's ambush of four policemen at Stringybark Creek in October 1878. For the first time on the movie screen; the story is told from the police perspective. Chief Commissioner Graham Aston appeared in a video praising the sacrifice of the policemen sent out to capture Ned and his brother Dan Kelly. It shows the reckless triple murder of policemen as it truly was, unnecessary and brutal. Stringybark demolishes Ned's claim of self-defence and a fair fight as false and self-serving. There was no fair fight and self-defence was never an issue.

Not only does the movie present a truthful and historically accurate account of the Stringybark Creek encounter. It delves into the family life of search party leader Sergeant Michael Kennedy. Michael is shown in a cosy domestic scene with his wife and children, where the love between them is evident. His ugly shotgun death, after two hours of interrogation, is more poignant because of the insight into his family life. Kennedy dies bravely facing down Kelly, who is unnerved and hesitates before he pulls the trigger.

All four policemen are shown to be decent, honourable and respectable men. Lonigan and Scanlan had an ominous foreboding about the search party. Lonigan reputedly returned home twice to bid his wife and family goodbye. Scanlan told a friend if he did not return, he could have his dog. They both died never having drawn or fired their guns. The movie shows the Kelly gang in the despicable act of looting the dead policemen's bodies. Kennedy's notebook with blood on the cover and pages torn out is shown discarded on the ground. In an emotional soliloquy delivered as the movie ends. Kennedy's grieving widow's words of condemnation left the audience of 250

people in stunned silence. The credits ran for several minutes, before the audience erupted in prolonged applause.

Kelly was tried, convicted and executed for his cold-blooded murder of Constable Lonigan. He never apologised to his victims' families for depriving them of husbands and fathers. Nor did he deliver Kennedy's roughly scribbled last words to Bridget, which blighted the rest of her life. Stringybark is an innovation in Aussie film making, a movie transcending the usual 'guns, beards, armour and Ned the hero' storyline. It will undoubtedly stand the test of time in a field overburdened with an abundance of mediocre Ned Kelly movies.

Doug Morrissey.

Doug's latest book Ned Kelly: Selectors, Squatters and Stock Thieves was published by Connor Court in 2018. He is currently writing a book on the Stringybark Creek Police Murders which will be published later this year.