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BRAVEHEART-ED *NED KELLY*: HISTORIC FILMS AND DESTINATION IMAGE

Warwick Frost

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Abstract

In recent years there has been a great deal of interest in how feature films may create attractive destination images. Research has primarily focussed on films which promote scenery and to a lesser extent nostalgic rural cultures. In contrast there has been little attention paid to historic films, the main exception being *Braveheart*. The 2003 release of *Ned Kelly* provoked a great deal of media interest in how that film might promote tourism to north-eastern Victoria. This paper examines how the film *Ned Kelly* interacts with tourists and their expectations.

BRAVEHEART-ED *NED KELLY*: HISTORIC FILMS AND DESTINATION IMAGE

INTRODUCTION

> A Robin-Hood-like figure …good-looking, brave, a fine horseman and bushman and a crack shot, devoted to his mothers and sisters, a man who treated all women with courtesy, who stole from the rich to give to the poor, who dressed himself in his enemies' uniforms to outwit them … Such was Ned Kelly the myth (Jones, 1995: 338).

> Edward 'Ned' Kelly is the logical culmination of the Anglophone outlaw hero tradition. His legend harks back, implicitly and explicitly, to the English and Irish highwaymen. The political nature of the Kelly outbreak links the bushranger strongly with Anglo-Celtic traditions of protest and struggle, and sees probably the last use of the medieval outlawry legislation. Kelly's activities and his folklorisation resonate closely with those of American badmen …like [Jesse] James and Billy the Kid in particular, Ned Kelly's image has been taken up by the mass media and that other central aspect of twentieth century life, tourism, as an appropriate icon of romance and adventure in the pioneering past (Seal, 1996: 147).

> In Monty Python and the Holy Grail a modern-day policeman arrests Launcelot for walking around in medieval getup and carrying a sword. That cop has the right idea about history on film (Rosenstone, 1995: 241).

In recent years there has been increasing interest in how films may shape destination images and resultant tourist expectations, behaviour and numbers. Initially researchers were content to list film as one of a number of media which may have such influence (see for examples Ashworth and Voogd 1994: 49 and Urry 1990: 3). In turn, there have been a number of studies specifically focussing on film and tourism (Beeton 2001; Busby and Klug 2001; Croy and Walker 2003 and 2004; Kim and Richardson 2003; Riley *et al* 1998 and Tooke and Baker 1996). Generally the focus of this literature has been on fictional films which create destination images of either highly attractive scenery or quirky, nostalgic and idyllic rural societies.

The purpose of this paper is to extend this discussion by considering how historic films may create attractive destination images and accordingly draw tourists to destinations. Examples of historic films having an impact on tourists include: visitation to Rome, particularly the Coliseum, arising from *Gladiator*; the destination image of the Wild West generated by western films; battlefield tourism stimulated by Civil War epics such as *Gettysberg*, *Gods and Generals* and *Cold Mountain*; and visits to castles and historic landscapes encouraged by medieval epics such as *Braveheart* and *A Knight's Tale*. However, historic films have attracted little attention in the tourism literature. The main exception is *Braveheart*, which was credited with raising the destination image of Stirling in Scotland (Croy and Walker 2003: 112-3).

It is contended that by being so closely related to history, tourism generated by historic films raises two issues which do not necessarily arise from other types of films. The first is that historic films may generate a specific type of tourism - heritage tourism – based on visiting historic sites. It is important to understand that in these cases, tourists are responding to a destination image based on the historical associations of a place rather than its scenic attributes. Indeed historic films may stimulate visitations to places that have little current visual relationship to what they viewed in the film. Second, historic films present already known and established stories and tourists' knowledge and expectations may be influenced by other sources, such as history books. Generally a filmmaker may invent what they want in terms of characters and stories. However, historic films are constrained by the existing historic knowledge of the audience. As such, there may be issues of authenticity, both for the film and tourism operators in the associated destination.

This paper considers this issue by focussing on the case of a recent historic film, *Ned Kelly* (2003). This historic recreation tells the story of the famous Australian *bushranger* (outlaw), arguably

Australia's greatest cultural icon and 'the closest thing Australia has to a national hero' (Seal 1996: 145). This film is of significance because it tells an already well-known (and filmed) story and was predicted as increasing tourism to related destinations (Fawcett 2003; Morley 2003; Shrimpton 2003; Tourism Victoria 2003). It is also an appropriate subject, in that despite Ned Kelly being an established tourism attraction, there has been no previous tourism academic study undertaken (though a forthcoming work by Beeton considers rural destination images in Australia in the context of Ned Kelly films).

In analysing the role of *Ned Kelly* in contributing to the development of destination image, this paper is divided into three sections. The first discusses some of the literature on how historic films may affect interpretations and images of history. The second examines issues of authenticity. The recent film presents a particular version of the Kelly story. How does that relate to other versions and the experiences actually on offer for tourists? The third section considers how tourists might be attracted by the film. While domestic visitors may be drawn by the story of Ned Kelly, it is argued that it has a universal appeal with themes of persecution and rebellion understandable to international visitors.

DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES ON HISTORIC FILMS

Much of the literature on film and tourism has a narrow focus with the role of films in creating images of destinations which result in sales of holidays to those destinations. This approach is particularly limited by a concentration on the initial decision-to-visit stage. There is a need to extend such analyses further, such as the matching of the tourists' actual experiences of the destination with the image and expectations created by the film. This raises issues not only of basic satisfaction, but also of presentation, heritage interpretation and authenticity. For tourism researchers interested in historic film, there is value in taking a multi-disciplinary approach in considering how writers, historians, geographers and sociologists regard historic films and their impact on viewers. What follows is not intended as a fully survey of this literature, but rather as a sample of perspectives.

The novelist and film screenwriter George MacDonald Fraser in his popular *Hollywood history of the world* (1988) argued that Hollywood has surprisingly been generally accurate in its representations of history. Most importantly, he argued that film was a powerful medium for shaping tourists' views of history:

> For better of for worse, nothing has been more influential in shaping our images of the past than the commercial cinema. For example: take a walk through the huge excavation of ruined ancient Rome, and consider that a tourist of two centuries ago could envisage the reality of the city of the Caesars only dimly, by reference to written accounts and a few imaginative paintings. But today all the world knows what it looked like (Fraser 1988: xii).

In his seminal work on history and film, the historian Robert Rosenstone argued that, 'historical films trouble and disturb professional historians' (1995: 45). In particular, he discussed two major areas of concern. The first was that a film is generally limited by only being able to give one perspective on an historical story – that is, what is projected on the screen. In contrast, books – which historians are much more comfortable with – are able to include multiple perspectives or interpretations (Rosenstone 1995: 22). The second concern was the rewriting of history through invented, exaggerated or deleted characters and incidents. Because film is visual, he argued that film-makers tend to focus primarily in getting the authentic look of history right, and 'as long as you get the look right, you may freely invent characters and incidents and do whatever you want to the past to make it more interesting' (Rosenstone 1995: 60). This concern with invention was repeated by the heritage researcher David Lowenthal (1998: 164-6). However, despite these concerns, Rosenstone argued that well-made historical films can be effective 'new ways of visioning the past', increasing the viewers' understanding and appreciation of history (1995: 72 & 241).

The medievalist Haydock provocatively argued that many historic films were pastiches mixing historical background with current references and were generally tailored to the American market. He argued that since *Braveheart* (1995) there has been a 'surge of big-budget, historical epics', which 'all share an abiding concern with the construction of national identity in the face of colonialism or imperialism' and in which 'remote complicated historical processes become distant but clear approximations of American democratic freedom' (Haydock 2002: 9-10). Similarly, Turner (1994) argued that Australian films (and heritage in general) were often packaged to demonstrate resonances for the larger American market. The folklorist Graham Seal commented that there were over 30 films dealing with Robin Hood. These had created 'a tamed and domesticated image' of the outlaw, making him 'a familiar figure of adventure, [and] romance … some distance from armed defiance of the forces of law and order' (1996: 30-1). In a study of the Ghost Town of Bodie in California, DeLyser (1999) noted that through its use in a number of films, visitors had come to see it as the archetypal western town and were less interested in its real history as a mining town. Hutton (1992) found that film was a major factor in public acceptance of reinterpretations of General Custer. Up to the 1940s he was presented as a heroic figure, but films of the 1950s and 1960s created a new image of him as arrogant, reckless, self-centred and even insane.

In summary, this selection from the literature emphasises concerns with how and why the film-maker tells historical stories and whether or not what they show is true. The parallel can be drawn with tourism operators at heritage attractions. Like historical film-makers, they are trying to both inform and entertain. To achieve this they aim for interpretation which is both effectively presented and authentic. Like the film-maker, the tourism operator has to juggle the expectations and prior knowledge of the audience, the need to provide an interesting experience and the imperative of remaining faithful to an historic story.

ISSUES OF AUTHENTICITY

Authenticity is generally regarded as of the highest importance for tourists interested in heritage (Moscardo and Pearce 1986; Timothy and Boyd 2003). As historic films create interest in history amongst viewers, how they present history has implications for authenticity and ultimately the satisfaction of tourists. Authenticity in film is not just a question of portraying facts accurately or not, it also includes the filmmakers' interpretation of why certain episodes occurred, their relative importance and the motivations of characters. Such interpretations mean that the presentation of history is never absolute, whether it is in a book, at a historical tourist attraction or a historic film (Lowenthal 1998: 112 & 164-6; Timothy and Boyd 2003: 237). In creating an attractive destination image, historic films have the potential to strongly imprint a particular historical interpretation upon the minds of potential visitors. In turn, this may create tensions, if that interpretation differs markedly from those provided by the existing tourism operators. Alternatively, historic films may also promote ideas of multiple, even contested, interpretations.

The promotion of *Ned Kelly* was marked by a conflicting approach to authenticity. On the one hand, its director emphasised that, 'it was not a historical document', but had to follow certain film conventions, including inventions and changes to the historic story, in order to be successful as a commercial feature film (Jordan 2003). Particular attention was paid to explaining to viewers why the character of a young English woman was invented in order to provide romantic interest:

> Jordan is unapologetic about spicing the film up with a fictionalised romance. "Key events are being portrayed as accurately as possible" … but, in the interests of making a compelling movie, "We've taken liberties with certain elements of the story" (Boland 2003: 38-9).

On the other hand, its makers were concerned that the film was seen as primarily historically accurate. Publicly they emphasised that their film was an educational history lesson, particularly suitable for teenaged school-children (Jordan 2003; O'Donoghue 2003). Perhaps more

importantly, though not explicitly stated, the film-makers knew that details of the story of Ned Kelly were widely known amongst their potential audience. Accordingly, while they were confident that they could add a love interest without alienating their audience, they were also convinced that they had to follow the basic historical chronology of the Kelly story (see Figure 1). In this, the experience of two other recent films make interesting comparisons. The *Lord of the Rings* trilogy closely followed the books and while there were some changes, its makers were greatly mindful of not alienating its fans. In contrast, *American Outlaws*, made little effort to follow the real story of Jesse James, even culminating in a completely fictional happy ending. In this case, the film-makers gambled that the details of the James story were insufficiently known or cared about by the audience.

Figure 1: Ned Kelly Timeline

December 1854	Born at Beveridge, north of Melbourne
1871-1874	In prison for receiving a stolen horse
15 April 1878	Constable Fitzpatrick claims that he is wounded by Ned after incident at the Kelly house. Ned's mother is jailed over the incident and Ned, brother Dan and friends Joe Byrne and Steve Hart go into hiding.
25 October 1878	Stringybark Creek Massacre. In a gun battle with a police party sent to search for him, Ned kills three policmen.
10 December 1878	Kelly Gang rob the bank at Euroa. A week later the Cameron Letter is sent, outlining their grievances.
8-10 February 1879	Posing as police, the Kelly Gang take over the NSW town of Jerilderie, robbing the bank and leaving the Jerilderie Letter.
26-28 June 1880	Kelly Gang take over town of Glenrowan. Their plan is to wreck a special police train and shoot any survivors. Wear armour for protection. The plan goes wrong, Dan, Joe and Steve are killed and Ned captured.
11 November 1880	Ned hanged for the murder of the police at Stringbark Creek.

Source: Holland and Williamson 2003: 6-7; Jones 1995.

By remaining generally faithful to the key historic facts, *Ned Kelly* is unlikely to generate any confusion amongst viewers who are stimulated to visit areas and attractions related to the bushranger. However, authenticity is not just an issue of provable facts or getting the look of a particular time period right. It is also a question of the interpretation of historical events. *Ned Kelly* unambiguously presents the bushranger as a heroic, even saintly, figure (Ryan 2003). Again, it is unlikely that anyone who visits Kelly attractions as a result of the film is going to have that view challenged.

As noted by Rosenstone, film is limited in it is usually only able to present one perspective (1995: 22) and this is certainly the case with *Ned Kelly* as a film. However, as an event, the release of the film stimulated a great deal of attention in how the Ned Kelly story may be interpreted and contested. As listed in Figure 2, six events or exhibitions were held to coincide with the release of the film. These focussed on a wide range of media, including paintings, songs, books, film, television, stage plays and even a house built in the shape of an armoured Ned Kelly. As a whole, these displays emphasised the multiplicity of interpretations of the Kelly story. It is also likely, that combined with the film, they stimulated interest in Ned Kelly, which might take the form of visits to attractions and areas associated with Ned Kelly.

Figure 2: Events and Exhibitions associated with the release of *Ned Kelly*

EVENT OR EXHIBITION	ORGANISER	LOCATION
Kelly Culture: reconstructing Ned Kelly exhibition	State Library of Victoria	Central Melbourne
The Legend of Ned Kelly exhibition	Private operator	Central Melbourne
Exhibition of Ned Kelly paintings by modern artists	National Trust	Central Melbourne
Sidney Nolan retrospective, featuring his Ned Kelly series	National Gallery of Victoria	Central Melbourne
Iron helmets, smoking guns, retrospective of Australian bushranger films	Australian Centre for the Moving Image	Central Melbourne
Ned Kelly Weekend	Community group	Beechworth

Sources: Hawker 2003; Hawley 2003; Holland and Williamson 2003; Webb 2003.

The story of Ned Kelly is highly place-specific. For some small towns associated with him, such as Glenrowan and Beechworth, he is a major (if not the main) element in their destination image and tourist industry. In recent years, there has been a focus on establishing the authenticity of Ned Kelly sites. Historian Ian Jones has fixed the site of the Stringybark Creek massacre, not where a farmer had erected a signpost in order to minimise access to his land, but several hundred metres away (1995: 364). In Beechworth, the restoration of the police camp provided the opportunity to shift 'Kelly's cell' from the false (but accessible) location under the town hall to the correct, but previously inaccessible, police lock-up. In Glenrowan, authorities have established interpretative materials at the site of the siege, which was previously unmarked and unvisited because it was on the opposite side of the railway to the main road. A recent guidebook provides details, directions and photographs of 84 specific Ned Kelly sites throughout Victoria (Kelson and McQuilton 2001).

Publicity arising from the release of *Ned Kelly* reinforced the notion of visiting authentic sites. Tourism Victoria disseminated material encouraging tourists to follow a 'Ned Kelly Trail' through north-eastern Victoria (Morley 2003; Shrimpton 2003; Tourism Victoria 2003). School-children were encouraged to visit Glenrowan and, 'stand in the place where a historic siege took place and see things basically as they were back then – view the exact spots where things happened' (O'Donoghue 2003).

One strange suggestion arising from publicity for the film is that tourists will be drawn to places where *Ned Kelly* was filmed, but which have no real connection with the bushranger's story. In particular, it was suggested that the sleepy gold town of Clunes, which was used for a number of town shots, might experience a boost in tourism (Tourism Victoria 2003). Historic films are often shot in locations some distance from where the action was meant to be set: the western *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* was filmed in Spain; the Civil War drama *Cold Mountain* in Romania and for *The Last Samurai*, New Zealand substituted for Japan. However, the destination image created applies to where the film was set, not where it was filmed. Historic films do not create destination images based on the scenery shown on the screen. The attractive image they create is based on history and that can only be experienced by tourists visiting locations actually connected to that history. It is worth noting that *The Story of the Kelly Gang* was filmed at East Ivanhoe on Melbourne's suburban fringe in 1906. However, despite the popularity of that film and the Kelly story, its status as probably the world's first feature film and the connection of the location with the Heidelberg School of landscape painters, there is no resultant flow of tourists.

INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS AND NED KELLY

Ned Kelly, as an Australian story, clearly has appeal to Australian tourists. However, does it also have appeal to international visitors? One perspective is that this glorification of an outlaw (like

convicts and the sheep-stealer of *Waltzing Matilda*) is both embarrassing on the international stage and of little interest to tourists from overseas. As such, in 1956 there were plans to stage the play *Ned Kelly* as part of the cultural program of the Melbourne Olympics. Concerned that this presented an inappropriate image, the authorities banned its performance (Holland and Williamson 2003: 18). Nearly half a century later, the American travel writer Bill Bryson was highly critical of Australia's love of Ned Kelly and ridiculed the attraction Ned Kelly's Last Stand as 'so bad it was worth more than we paid' (Bryson 2000: 173).

Despite such concerns, there were expectations that the film *Ned Kelly* would attract international tourists. Lois Appleby, the Chief Executive of Tourism Victoria, argued that there was, 'a very exciting opportunity to capitalise on the potential international publicity of 'Ned Kelly'' and part of its promotional strategy was to host overseas journalists on familiarisation tours (Tourism Victoria 2003). Qantas featured *Ned Kelly* as the cover story in its in-flight magazine, noting that, 'the film looks set to propagate the Ned Kelly legend worldwide' (Boland 2003: 36). In addition, after being banned in 1956, Ned Kelly was one of the stars of the 2000 Sydney Olympics opening ceremony.

Ned Kelly's international appeal, comes not from being a uniquely Australian story, but from being a universal story. The historian Eric Hobsbawm coined the term 'social bandit' for outlaws who explicitly or implicitly represent the oppressed. Hobsbawm argued that social bandits occurred wherever rural societies were under pressure to change or produce an excessive surplus for an elite. Citing examples from the Americas, Asia and Europe, Hobsbawm also included Ned Kelly as a social bandit (Hobsbawm 2001). The folklorist Graham Seal saw outlaws as a cultural tradition in Britain, the USA, Australia and elsewhere and argued that outlaws were aware of this tradition and tried to follow its conventions (Seal 1996: 145). He particularly linked Kelly to Robin Hood, Billy the Kid and Jesse James (Seal 1996: 147). It is also important to understand that Kelly was contemporary with the great American outlaws; Kelly was executed in 1880, Billy the Kid was gunned down in 1881 and Jesse James in 1882.

In the lead up to the release of the film, Ned Kelly was compared to Robin Hood (Fawcett 2003: 21; see also Jones 1995: 338) and Jesse James (Goodman 2003; Ryan 2003). Director Gregor Jordan emphasised that this was more an Irish story than an Australian one (Jordan 2003) and revealed that the script portrayed Ned's life, 'as similar to the story of Christ – persecuted through life, martyred in death' (quoted in Boland 2003: 36).

The universal appeal of the outlaw's story may be seen by comparing *Ned Kelly* with *Braveheart*. The latter film told the little-known story of the Scottish patriot William Wallace and was highly successful internationally. Intriguingly, Seal (1996: 2) placed Wallace as an outlaw alongside Kelly. Certainly, the two films present their heroes in similar ways, as is shown in Figure 3. The characteristics in Figure 3 may also be compared with Seal's ten consistent elements in the outlaw tradition, being, 'friend of the poor, oppressed, forced into outlawry, brave, generous, courteous, does not indulge in unjustified violence, trickster [of his opponents], betrayed, lives on after death' (1996: 11). *Braveheart* has been used as an example of a historic story repackaged to fit American tastes regarding freedom fighting (Haydock 2002: 9). The recent Australian film may indeed be seen as a *Braveheart*-ed *Ned Kelly*.

Figure 3: Comparison of characteristics of films *Braveheart* and *Ned Kelly*

BRAVEHEART	***NED KELLY***
Victim of English Imperialism	Victim of English Imperialism
Symbol of Scottish resistance	Symbol of Irish resistance
Young, charismatic, handsome hero	Young, charismatic, handsome hero
Initially tries to avoid conflict	Initially tries to avoid conflict
Goaded by persecution of family – murder of wife	Goaded by persecution of family – jailing of mother
Loyal band of followers	Loyal gang
Betrayed by friend Robert the Bruce (invented for the film)	Avoids betrayal by friend Aaron Sherritt.
Executed	Executed (but not shown on screen)

CONCLUSION

In considering the role of historic films in the development of destination image, four patterns emerge. First, the interest generated is *story-based* rather than *visually-based*. While there may be attractive scenery, this is not the prime motivator for the audience to become tourists. Rather, their desire is to visit and experience places associated with the historic story they have viewed. It is even possible that a bland or unattractive destination may attract tourists because of what happened there in the past.

Second, historic films are constrained by the need to follow historic conventions, particularly accurate portrayals of clothing, buildings, customs and artefacts. If a film is set in the nineteenth century, it has to look like that period. In some cases they may follow well-known stories, *Ned Kelly* is an excellent example, and this limits opportunities for invention. In a parallel to heritage and tourism, authenticity becomes an important part of the destination image.

Third, historic films may reinforce other sources of information about the past and this in turn may further develop the destination image. *Ned Kelly* encouraged a range of exhibitions and events related to the bushranger and these excited interest in a range of perspectives and ideas which went well beyond those explored in the film. Combined they created a destination image which highlighted the ambivalence, mystery and tragedy of the story. Of course, historic films which diverged substantially from established sources might have the opposite effect.

Fourth, historic films may carry the appeal of a story and a destination well beyond local markets. It is commonly suggested that Hollywood repackages stories to make them understandable and appealing to a broad, primarily American, market (Haydock 2002; Turner 1994). As such, elements of historic stories such as heroism, battling against overwhelming odds, fighting against oppression, belief in freedom and tragic self-sacrifice are emphasised. *Braveheart* successfully took a little-known Scottish figure and turned it into a story of universal appeal. *Ned Kelly* similarly showed an Australian character in terms understandable to an international audience. In both cases these films allowed the projection of a destination image to a far larger audience.

AFTERWORD

This paper arises from a larger project considering links between history and destination image. A companion paper, focussing on the films *High Noon* and *Ned Kelly* and considering how tourism bodies capitalise on opportunities arising from these films, was presented at the CAUTHE Conference in February 2004. A further paper, examining contested heritage and the 150th Anniversary of the Eureka Stockade is planned for early 2005.

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