



School of Historical and European Studies



History

Alex McDermott

Bachelor of Arts (Hons) 1999; PhD candidate

I arrived at La Trobe as a 'refugee' from another university's honours program — and have never since had reason to regret my decision to study at La Trobe.

For my honours thesis I studied and wrote about Ned Kelly's two public letters, the Cameron and Jerilderie letters. When Peter Carey's novel about Kelly came out, I reviewed it (unsympathetically) in *Eureka Street*.

This caught the attention of Michael Heyward of Text Media Publications who had been looking for someone to edit and introduce the Jerilderie letter in book form. I was happy to accept his invitation and my book, *The Jerilderie Letter*, was published in 2001. I was also invited to appear on the ABC's 'Lateline' program to debate my interpretation of Ned Kelly with Ian Jones, the established authority on the outlaw.

I want to write history that ordinary people will find interesting. For my PhD thesis I am writing on the origins of Melbourne's founding myths under the title, 'Batman, Fawcner and the Afterlife'. Throughout my postgraduate candidature, I have gained work with Film Australia as history researcher and consultant for their 'History Initiative Series', a set of history documentaries which try to cover the most important and pivotal events in Australia's history. I have also recently supported the La Trobe Archaeology Program's dig for the Rural City of Wangaratta and Heritage Victoria as the project historian at the site of Ned Kelly's last stand in Glenrowan in north-eastern Victoria. It is hoped that the artefacts uncovered by this dig will help give Australians a better understanding of themselves, through differentiating truth from legend in the critical events of history.

I receive great support from the History Program at La Trobe; the mix of congeniality, encouragement and robust debate in the postgraduate program is unique.

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