

WORD OF THE MONTH

OXFORD AUSTRALIA: THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH | MARCH 2015

[Contact Us](#) | [Visit our website](#) | [ANDC](#) | [Send to friend](#)

Ned Kelly beard

- **noun**: a full beard.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

Today many fashionable young men are sporting the latest trend in facial hair—the full beard, which has not had a fashion moment since the 1970s. In Australia, the association of Ned Kelly (arguably Australia's most famous historical figure) with the style is an evocative way to describe the new look:

All right, what is it with the **Ned Kelly beards**? I don't know if you've noticed, but everywhere I look young men are striding about town with bushrangeresque-style beards on their otherwise clean-cut faces. (Brisbane *Courier-Mail*, 9 November 2014)

Ned Kelly achieved notoriety as an outlaw and bushranger after he and his gang killed three police officers in 1878. He was captured two years later after a violent confrontation with police, and was hanged on 11 November 1880. The best-known photograph of Kelly was taken at Melbourne Gaol the day before his execution. In it he has a luxuriant beard, a moustache, and short, styled hair. It is an image familiar to generations of Australians, and it provides the inspiration for the term **Ned Kelly beard**.

The term has gained currency in Australia in the last few years thanks to the adoption of the new fashion, but it is not a recent coinage. The first evidence for **Ned Kelly beard** appears in a 1932 review of the play *The Girl Who Helped Ned Kelly*, which describes the actor playing the bushranger as having the 'traditional **Ned Kelly beard**'. (Melbourne *Table Talk*, 22 September). Another early example, suggesting a shift to more general use, appears in a description of war correspondent John Brennan: 'Brennan, a tall, picturesque figure, with a '**Ned Kelly**' beard, is a popular member of the correspondents' corps.' (Brisbane *Courier-Mail*, 18 December 1944)

The evidence for the term is infrequent in the 20th century but trends strongly in the 21st century. The initial spike in the early 2000s may be a result of the 2003 film *Ned Kelly*, starring Heath Ledger resplendent with beard. More recently the **Ned Kelly beard** inspired a competition:

A bit of shampoo, conditioner and the occasional softening treatment was Greg Abel's secret weapon in the inaugural **Ned Kelly Beard** competition at Beechworth. Held as part of the Beechworth Ned Kelly Weekend, the competition attracted 19 men and one woman to see who had the longest, lushest and thickest beard. (Melbourne *Weekly Times*, 6 August 2008)

Increasing evidence in the last four years is related to the current fashion, often

associated with hipsters:

You don't have to go far in the city's hip bars to find some dude with a **Ned Kelly beard**, wearing tight jeans and a cardigan and talking about how sterile it is out in the boonies. (Melbourne *Sunday Age*, 2 October 2011)

You could go down to Surry Hills and find a young man perched on a milk crate drinking a craft beer through his **Ned Kelly Beard** and call him a hipster and he would be insulted. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 August 2014)

Ned Kelly has historically been a productive term in Australian English. **Ned Kelly beard** is yet another of the bushranger's contributions to the Australian lexicon.

Ned Kelly beard is being considered for inclusion in the second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.



You are receiving this email because you are a valued customer of Oxford University Press. If you wish to unsubscribe from future mailings, please click the unsubscribe link below.

[Unsubscribe](#)



ANU

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND