



Notes and the laptop used by Peter Carey to write his Man Booker Prize-winning novel, *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2001). Peter Carey Papers, Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS 13420/13/PH01

## Peter Carey Papers, 1991–2001

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Australian Manuscripts Collection MS 13420

Acquired 2001

The papers and drafts relating to Peter Carey's novel *True History of the Kelly Gang* are arguably the most important single collection of Australian literary manuscripts held by State Library Victoria. Its acquisition was also a landmark in the history of the Library because it was the first 'born digital' collection to be added to the Australian Manuscripts Collection.

In 2001, Laurie Muller, from the University of Queensland Press, advised the Library that Carey wanted to sell the manuscript of *True History* together with the papers associated with some of his other recent books. This approach to the Library occurred immediately after the donation of the original manuscript of Ned Kelly's Jerilderie letter in December 2000.

Up until then, the bulk of Carey's literary papers had been donated to the Fryer Library at the University of Queensland. With a rising international profile, New York-based Carey decided that he would now sell his papers. The Fryer Library was unable to fund the purchase, and thus the *True History* archive was being offered on the open market.

To properly assess the collection's significance, the Library arranged for it to be couriered from New York to Melbourne. On unpacking it from its four black overnight bags, the librarians immediately gained deep insights into Carey's approach to creative writing. There were some 12 drafts of the novel together with a group of notebooks that pre-dated the first draft. Examination of the drafts inevitably raised the question of the future of Carey's laptop computer on which much of the material had been compiled, and which also contained his email correspondence with his editor. After discussion with Carey, it was agreed that it would be included in the sale, with the Library covering the cost of a new laptop.

Peter Carey is one of very few Victorian-born writers with a truly international reputation: at that time, he had already won the Booker Prize for Literature with *Oscar and Lucinda*. A few weeks after the Library's purchase of the collection, *True History of the Kelly Gang* won the 2001 Booker Prize, further enhancing his international standing.

A footnote to this acquisition was the purchase, in 2004, of a further draft, with accompanying research material for the novel (MS 13475). It was offered for sale by Beechworth bookseller Stephen Tapsell, who had acquired this bound draft directly from Carey after he had made a research visit to north-east Victoria.