

The Great Australian Legend

A Panorama of Bush Balladry and Song arranged by A.L. Lloyd

Sung by: **A.L. Lloyd, Trevor Lucas
Martyn Wyndham-Reade**

- 1 **Waltzing Matilda** *A.L. Lloyd and Chorus*
- 2 **Jim Jones at Botany Bay** *A.L. Lloyd*
- 3 **The Wild Colonial Boy** *A.L. Lloyd*
- 4 **The Streets of Forbes** *Trevor Lucas*
- 5 **The Hold-up at Eugowra Rocks** *A.L. Lloyd and Chorus*
- 6 **The Flash Stockman** *Martyn Wyndham-Reade*
- 7 **Five Miles from Gundagai** *Trevor Lucas*
- 8 **The Lime-Juice Tub** *A.L. Lloyd, Martyn Wyndham-Reade and Chorus*
- 9 **Euabalong Ball** *A.L. Lloyd*
- 10 **The Banks of the Condamine** *Trevor Lucas*
- 11 **Click Go the Shears** *Martyn Wyndham-Reade*
- 12 **Flash Jack from Gundagai** *A.L. Lloyd*
- 13 **The Road to Gundagai** *Martyn Wyndham-Reade*
- 14 **Hard Tack** *Martyn Wyndham-Reade*
- 15 **On the Road with Liddy** *A.L. Lloyd*

Accompaniments:
Alf Edwards *concertina*
Al Jeffery *4-string banjo*
Dave Pegg *string bass*
Andy Seagroatt *mandolin*
Dave Swarbrick *fiddle*

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Notes by A.L. Lloyd
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This record offers a selection of traditional Australian songs – familiar old bush favourites, ballads whose prestige has increased during the recent ‘folk-song revival’, and one or two pieces hitherto little known – chosen to illustrate something of the march of history and the formation of human character during the last hundred and fifty years, from the old convict days of Botany Bay up to recent times when the drovers of the remote North-west, having delivered their cattle after the long drive, could look forward to nothing more thrilling than a brief spin in a friend’s car and a ‘show on the screen for an hour or two’, before drifting off again into the vast emptiness of the Outback. Typically, the songs face the facts of life with more irony than tenderness, and the most characteristic pieces present a surface that’s uneventful enough; but within them all there’s more than meets the ear.

Waltzing Matilda

Australia’s ‘unofficial national anthem’. Who made it? Banjo Paterson claims the words, written at Dagworth Station, near Winton, Queensland, in 1895. The most-used tune is variously credited to Mrs Marie Cowan, Miss Christina McPherson (sister of Robert McPherson, the Dagworth manager), and to Josephine Péné (some say a barmaid, some say a piano teacher; not that the one rules out the other), also of Winton, who seems to have the strongest claim of all. The version here, in words and tune, runs a bit differently from the usual; it has been popularised by the poet and anthologist John Manifold, and it gives new life to an otherwise hackneyed song. By the way, on September 17, 1900, Miss Péné gave birth to a son, named Robert Dagworth McPherson Péné.

Jim Jones at Botany Bay

Charles Macalister, who drove bullock-teams in south-eastern New South Wales in the 1840s, includes the text of this remarkable convict ballad in his book of reminiscences, *Old Pioneering Days in the Sunny South* (Goulburn, N.S.W., 1907). Otherwise, we’d never have known it. Macalister said it was sung to the tune of Irish Molly O, a vague title covering several melodies. The one used here is nowadays the most usual for Jim Jones. It appeared on a Sydney broadside in the 1950s.

The Wild Colonial Boy

In bush tradition, and in the folk song revival, this is surely the most widely-sung of all bushranger ballads. Who the Wild Colonial Boy was, we do not know, nor whether his native home was Castlemaine, Co. Kerry, or ditto in Victoria. Was his name Dowling, Dolan, Doolan, Duggan? ‘Did he commence his wild career’ in 1861, 63, 64? The sundry versions of the ballad do not agree on these and many other points. Nowadays, we generally presume he wasn’t a true-life character, but a mythological composite hero, the great archetypal Australian outlaw of the 1860s and 70s. The ballad goes to various tunes, of which the most dismal is the most familiar one, made by an Irish stage comedian, c. 1900. That’s not the one we use.

The Streets of Forbes

Some say the words of this song were written by Jacky McGuire, the partner and brother-in-law of Ben Hall. As the legend goes, McGuire was sitting on the verandah of a shop when the cavalcade went by with Hall’s bullet-riddled body strapped to a pack-horse, and the scene inspired the composition of the poem. Our knowledge of the tune comes from John Manifold, who reports that a lady sang it to him in the back room of a pub. It is an unusual melody.

The Hold-up at Eugowra Rocks

Francis Christie, alias Frank Gardiner, was born at Boro, about midway between Goulburn and Canberra, in 1830. The neighbourhood was one of smallholders, many of whom eased their economy by ‘duffing’ (annexing) unbranded cattle and horses from the big squatters. At the age of twenty, Gardiner was imprisoned for horse-stealing, and escaped after a few months. Four years later he was re-arrested for a similar crime, and stayed in gaol till 1859. For a while he ran a butcher’s shop on the gold diggings at Wombat Flat (Burrangong), but he abandoned the shop, took to the hills, and organised a bush-ranger band. Many youngsters joined Gardiner ‘for a flutter’, then left to start outlaw gangs of their own. The Eugowra hold-up was his greatest exploit, but not till two years later in 1864, did the police catch up with Gardiner. According to the police, the amounts stolen by Gardiner added up to £21,000. Public outcry secured the release of the outlaw after ten years (his sentence was for thirty-two) and like many Australian criminals he made for San Francisco, set up as a publican, and died comfortable. There are several ballads of Gardiner’s exploits. This is probably the best. The origin of the words is obscure; it doesn’t seem to have appeared in print. The tune, fitted by me, is that of the old immigrant-navvy song: The Shores of Botany Bay.

The Flash Stockman

In some versions the bold boaster is ‘Handsome Sam’, in others ‘Ugly Dave’, as here. Whoever he was, there’s general agreement that he’s the archetype of a familiar bush character, the skiter whose lies are partly a deliberate leg-pull. Behind the bold stare there’s a twinkle, and behind a twinkle a shadow of unease. The tune has served for several bush songs, notably of course The Drover’s Dream.

Five Miles from Gundagai

This celebrated and much commented song has its mysteries. It seems to have bred countless variants, some far-fetched, some close to the ‘original’ version published by Jack Moses in his *Beyond The City Gates* remembered from his travels as a whiskey salesman in the bush some fifty years previously. Perhaps the grandfather of the song is Bill the Bullocky, another Gundagai-dog epic whose words gained currency in the bush in the late 1850s, through being printed on a matchbox. Trevor Lucas likes to sing the morose words to the tune of Nicky Tams.

The Lime-Juice Tub

A lively shearer named Turnbull sang this over and over as he worked in a shed near Bethungra, New South Wales, around 1930. The tune is as I remember it from him. Likewise some of the words. The text has been filled out a bit from a version published in the *Sydney Bulletin* in 1898. The song is also known as Rub-a-dub-a-dub, or The Tar-boys’ Tub.

Euabalong Ball

Euabalong is on the Lachlan River some forty miles west of Condobolin, and the song was still around in those parts when I worked there in the early 1930s. A more genteel version than ours, called The Wooyeo Ball, was printed in Rob Webster’s *The First Fifty Years of Temora* (Temora, NSW, 1950), but the song belongs to the West, not the South. Webster puts the date of his version as 1888. In the course of more than thirty years singing the song, I’m sure I’ve tinkered around a lot with the tune.

The Banks of the Condamine

Throughout the fifty years from 1820 to 1870, broadside printers in London, Newcastle, Dublin and elsewhere did a good trade with the stall-ballad called The Banks of the Nile, a song from the Napoleonic Wars. The song spread to America and Australia, and in Queensland it became parodied as The Banks of the Condamine, with the hero no longer a soldier but a horsebreaker or a shearer. It has turned up in sundry shapes, to various tunes, many times over, mostly in Queensland. Our version, however, is mainly from Jack Lyons of Dubbo, N.S.W. In Ireland the tune is also used for another song: Mary Griffin. A 'selector' is a man who farms a plot made available by the government on cheap terms. A 'ram-stag' is an inferior male sheep, missed at castrating time, and now fully-grown, a menace to the quality of the flock, and so due for slaughter. Stag mutton is rank, and reckoned 'fit for shearers' consumption only'.

Click go the Shears

The great old stand-by among shearing songs. It started out as a parody of the popular American Civil War song, Ring the Bell, Watchman, by Henry Clay Work (the bell in question was rung to signify the end of the war). The 'tar-boy' has the job of dabbing antiseptic Stockholm tar on sheep cut by the shears.

Flash Jack from Gundagai

Banjo Paterson published a version in his Old Bush Songs in 1905. I heard it at Bethungra in the late 1920s. Some forty years or so later a Queenslander, Bill Scott, reported it from his state. Scott's version and mine are much the same as Paterson's, and presumably the song has been 'controlled' by its appearance in print. As it happens, Bethungra is only a few miles from Gundagai, but the song belongs pretty surely to the NSW south-west, to the hot country between Hay and Ivanhoe.

The Road to Gundagai

Again, Paterson's Old Bush Songs helped with the spread of this greatly admired song. Vance Palmer's Old Australian Bush Ballads gave it new impetus among revival folk singers in the 1950s. Roto is some 450 miles almost due west of Sydney, so it seems the characters in the song were well off the track, if their road led them as far south as Gundagai. Still, that's folklore. 'Rhino' is money. 'Humped our blues' means shouldered our blanket-rolls. 'Nobbler' is slang for a standard measure of drink.

Hard Tack

Published in John Lahey's Favourite Australian Ballads (1965), as recorded at the home of Mr. Jack Davies, a pioneer soldier-settler of the Leeton district on the Murrumbidgee, NSW. 'Tongs' are shears.

On the Road with Liddy

This unusual lyric was made, presumably in the 1920s, by a Northern Territory cattle-hand named William Miller. Tommy Liddy was a well-known drover and horseman of the time. The narrative concerns a cattle-drive to the north-west Australian port of Wyndham. I've not seen this one in print.

Australia nowadays is a modern industrial continent, and only about one-sixth of its twelve-and-a-half million inhabitants are country people, ‘bushwhackers’. For all that, there’s a general feeling that the ‘Australian spirit’, the national character, is closely connected with the bush, with bush workers, with Australia’s rural rather than urban past. As the excellent social historian Russel Ward puts it: “National character is not something inherited; nor is it entirely a figment of the imagination of poets, publicists and other feckless dreamers. It is rather a people’s idea of itself, and this stereotype, though often absurdly romanticized and exaggerated, is always connected with reality in two ways. It springs largely from a people’s past experience, and it often modifies current events by colouring men’s ideas of how they ought ‘typically’ to behave.”

The legend, the myth of the ‘typical Australian’ is summarized, above all, in the songs that the common folk have evolved for their own use during the various periods of Australia’s history, from the days of the ‘founding fathers’ of the convict settlements, through the turbulent times of the gold rushes and the rowdy days of bushranging, on to the consolidation of big-scale capitalist stock-raising, where the destiny of the sheep and cattle-hand, the shearer and the drover, lay ultimately in the hands of powerful city gentlemen in soft-carpetted offices.

This brief selection of songs unfolds for us a panorama of Australia’s history, and at the same time offers us a portrait of the typical hero of the great Australian legend, a hero with a hundred faces who sums up for us the kind of man whom generations of Australians have taken as typical of their race. The songs help us to understand Australian history, Australian people, Australian behaviour at home and in the world at large.

WALTZING MATILDA

By way of overture, raising the curtain on our panorama and portrait, Australia’s unofficial anthem, Waltzing Matilda, seems appropriate, with its presentation of the rootless restless swagman, tramping the continent afoot because he’s too poor to own a horse, ‘leading a water-bag’ instead (Australian humour is dry as the countryside), and humping his blanket-roll, his swag, his bluey, his Matilda. Some say the song epitomises the bushman’s attitude to authority. Some go further and say that the sheep-stealing swagman is the culture hero of Australian nationalism. Perhaps that’s pitching it rather high. Certainly, throughout the twentieth century, Waltzing Matilda seems to have been a powerful song for countryfolk and townsfolk too, and perhaps part of its charm is the curious mirage-like dreamy quality it shares with much of the Australian landscape.

There once was a swagman camped by a billabong
Under the shade of a coolibah tree,
And he sang as he watched his old billy boiling:
‘Who’ll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?’

chorus: Waltzing Matilda, Matilda me darling
Who’ll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?
Waltzing Matilda and leading a. water-bag,
Who’ll come a-waltzing Matilda wi .;h me?

Down came a jumbuck to drink at the waterhole,
And up jumped the swagman and grabbed him with glee.
And he sang as he stowed him away in his ‘tucker-bag:
‘You’ll come a-waltzing Matilda with me.’

Down came the squatter a-riding on his thoroughbred,
And down came the troopers, one, two, three.
‘Whose is that jumbuck you’ve got in your tucker-bag?
You’d better come a-waltzing Matilda with me.’

But the swagman he up and he jumped in the water-hole.
‘You’ll never take me alive!’ said he.
And his ghost may be heard a-singing in the billabong:
‘Who’ll come a-waltzing Matilda with ||e?’

swagman: a tramp, or an itinerant bush worker
billabong: a pond or small lake
coolibah: a species of eucalyptus
jumbuck: a sheep
sguatter: a large-scale landowner or grazier

JIM JONES AT BOTANY BAY

The Australian likes to think of himself as casual, independent, tough. For casualness, they tell of a station-hand taking an after-lunch nap by the stockyard rails. A deadly snake is making for him. A fellow shouts: 'Hey Snow, there's a snake by your foot!' 'Snow opens one eye and says: 'which foot?' Take independence. An old swagman is tramping across the empty plain with his blanket-roll. Up drives a wealthy sheep-owner in his car, asks: 'D'you want a lift?'. The swaggie says: 'No. Open your own flamin' gates'. As for toughness, here's a pioneer's report from the early days in New South Wales, on the flogging of convicts:

"On two occasions I saw men, bleeding as they were, deliberately spit, after the punishment, in the flogger's face. One of them told Black Francis he couldn't flog hard enough to kill a butterfly."

Black Francis was the flogger at Goulburn Gaol in the 1830's until someone shot him at Run o' Waters Creek. The grim song Jim Jones is from around that time, and perhaps the man who made it knew Black Francis. The composition of the song may be dated by its reference to the bushranger Jack Donahoe, who escaped the gallows and took to the bush in 1828, and was shot and killed by the mounted police near Campbelltown, N.S.W., on September 1, 1830. The song tells us much of the hardships of the old penal settlements, and of the feelings of the men transported from England to a strange, as yet unmade world.

Oh, listen for a moment, lads, and hear me tell me tale,
How o'er the sea from England's shore I was obliged to sail.
The jury says: 'He's guilty sir,' and says the judge, says he:
'For life, Jim Jones, I'm sending you across the stormy sea.

And take my tip before you ship to join the iron gang,
Don't be too gay at Botany Bay or else you'll surely hang.
Or else you'll surely hang, says he, and after that, Jim Jones,
High up upon the gallows tree the crows will pick your bones.
You'll have no chance for mischief then, remember what I say;
They'll flog the poaching out of you down there at Botany Bay.'

The wind blew high upon the sea and the pirates come along,
But the soldiers in our convict ship was nigh five hundred strong.
They opened fire and somehow drove that pirate ship away.
I'd rather have joined the skull-and-bones than go to Botany Bay.

Now night and day the irons clang, and like poor galley-slaves
We toil and strive, and when we die we fill dishonoured graves.
But by and by I'll break me chains and to the bush I'll go,
And join the brave bushrangers there like Donahue and Co.

And some dark night when everything is silent in the town,
'I'll kill them tyrants one by one and shoot the floggers down.
'I'll give the law a little shock, remember what I say.
'They'll yet regret they sent Jim Jones in chains to Botany Bay.

iron gang: changing, band of convicts who work while wearing fetters

WILD COLONIAL BOY

Desperate escaped convicts, Irishmen carrying on the old fight against English authority, men who had lost all they had in the Gold Rush of the 1850's, set the pattern for the 'peculiar institution' of bush-ranging. Some Australians will tell you that a good part of the national character is in the outlaw ballad of The Wild Colonial Boy. Who was the Wild Colonial Boy? In various versions of the song he's named as Jack Doolan, Jack Dowling, Jim Duggan, John Dollard - anyway, 'J.D.' like Jack Donahoe. The date when he 'commenced his wild career' is usually given as 1861. Most versions agree that he stuck up the Beechworth mail-coach and robbed Judge McEvoy. Well, there was a Judge Macoboy, and the Beechworth mail-coach was stuck up, but that was by the bushranger Harry Power, and the judge wasn't a passenger. Perhaps the Wild Colonial Boy never existed, and his song is simply a re-make of the ballad about Jack Donahoe. Whatever the cause, it became something like a rival to Waltzing Matilda for the title of 'unofficial national anthem'.

It's of a wild colonial boy, Jack Dolan was his name,
From the Colony of Victoria, not so far from Castlemain.
He was his father's only son, his mother's pride and joy,
And so dearly did his parents love the wild colonial boy.

When he was sixteen years of age he left his native home,
All through the bush of Australia as an outlaw to roam.
He robbed the wealthy squatters and their stock he did destroy,
And a terror to Australia was the wild colonial boy.

In eighteen hundred and sixty one he commenced his wild career,
His courage being undaunted and no danger he did fear.
He baled up the Beechworth mail coach and he robbed Judge MacEvoy,
Who trembling cold, gave up his gold to the wild colonial boy.

He bade the judge 'Good morning' and he told him to beware.
He'd never robbed a poor man nor one that acted square,
But a judge that would rob a mother of her only pride and joy,
Hell, he was a worse outlaw than the wild colonial boy.

One day as he was riding the mountainside along,
Listening to the kookaburra's pleasant laughing song,
He spied three mounted troopers, Kelly, Davis and Fitzroy
With a warrant for the capture of the wild colonial boy.

'Surrender now, John Dolan, you see we're three to one
Surrender in the Queen's name, for you're a plundering son.
Jack drew his pistol from his belt and he waved the little toy
'I'll fight but never surrender-' said the wild colonial boy.

He fired at Trooper Kelly and he brought him to the ground,
But in return, Bob Davis gave him his mortal wound.
All shattered through the jaws he lay, still firing at Fitzroy,
And that's the way they captured him, the wild colonial boy.

baled up: held up at pistol point
kookaburra: a bird, resembling a kingfisher
but with dull plumage, also called 'laughing
jackass'

THE STREETS OF FORBES

During the heyday of the bushrangers, many shepherds and smallholders had friendly contact with the outlaws, and would sometimes shelter them from the authorities - a hospitality that carried its special dangers. A young cattleman, Ben Hall, himself the son of a convict was known to be friendly with the bushranger Frank Gardiner, and perhaps it was on this account that the police arrested Hall on a trumped-up charge and, while he was in gaol, the authorities burnt down his homestead and left his cattle to starve. In fury and despair, Hall turned bushranger and for some three years he and his gang terrorised the district between Bathurst and Forbes, N.S.U., till finally, early in the morning of Hay 5, 1865, the police came upon Ben Hall alone and asleep by the banks of the Goobang Creek, and the outlaw was shot by the aborigine Billy Dargin, employed by the police as a tracker. It is said that the police, unable to believe the bushranger was dead, fired thirty bullets into his body than washed the corpse in the creek, strapped it to a horse, and led it in triumph to the township of Forbes. Several ballads testify to the popular admiration for Ben Hall, and the general sympathy for his horrid end.

Come all of you Lachlan men, and a sorrowful tale I'll tell,
Concerning of a hero bold who through misfortune fell.
His name it was Ben Hall, a man of good renown,
Who was hunted from his homestead and like a dog shot down.

For three years he roamed the roads, and he showed the traps some fun,
A thousand pounds was on his head, with Gilbert and John Dunn.
Ben parted from his comrades, the outlaws did agree
For to gve away bushranging and cross the raging sea.

Ben went to Yoobang Creek, and that was his downfall,
For riddled like a sieve was valiant Ben Hall.
'Twas early in the morning all on the fifth of May,
When the seven police surrounded him as in his sleep he lay.

Bill Dungan he was chosen for to shoot the outlaw dead.
All the others fired madly as though they were afraid,
Then they rolled him in the blanket and strapped him to his prad,
and they led him through the streets of Forbes for to show the prize they had.

Lachlan: a river in New South Wales
pad: horse

THE HOLD-UP AT EUGOWRA ROCKS

On January 15, 1862, the New South Hales government's armed escort started from the diggings at Forbes with fourteen thousand pounds worth of gold and currency. At the Eugowra Rocks, seven men in red shirts, with blackened faces, held up the escort at pistol-point. Their leader was Francis Christie, alias Frank Gardiner, who called himself the Prince of Tobeymen. When Gardiner was caught two years later, and sentenced to 32 years penal servitude, public agitation for his pardon was such that the government was nearly brought down; under pressure, the sentence was changed to one of exile.

The exploit at Eugowra Rocks moved a bush song-maker to produce one of the most mettlesome of all outlaw ballads.

It's all about bold Frank Gardiner, with the devil in his eye,
He said: 'We've work before us, lads, we've got to do or die.
So blacken up your faces before the dead of night,
And it's over by Eugowra Rocks we'll either fall or fight.'

chorus: You can sing of Johnny Gilbert, Dan Morgan and Ben Hall,
But the bold and reckless Gardiner he's the boy to beat 'em all.

'We'll stop the Orange escort with powder and with ball.
We'll shoot the coach to pieces and we'll down the peelers all.
We'll lift the diggers' money, we'll collar all their gold,
So ,mind your guns are killers now, my comrades true and bold.'

So now off go the rifles, the battle has begun.
The escort started running, boys, all in the setting sun.
The robbers seized their plunder so saucy and so bold,
And they're riding from Eugowra Rocks encumbered with their gold.

And as with savage laughter they left that fatal place,
They cried: 'we've struck bonanza, boys, we've won the steeplechase!'
And Gardiner their leader, he shouted loud: 'Hooray!
I think we've made our fortunes at Eugowra Rocks today!'

Orange: a town in New South Wales
peelers: police
escort: armed guards accompanying the coach
bonanza: prosperity, good luck

THE FLASH STOCKMAN

Brave men have quailed before the vast emptiness of the Australian outback. During the second half of the nineteenth century the continent was opened up for the cattle barons and the sheep kings, and the big pastoral companies began to form. But the struggle against hard nature and novel conditions, drought and distances, was a severe test of a man's character. The booster, the blowhard, has been a familiar figure of the Australian scene ever since the first man stepped into the bush with his shears and stockwhip and bolstered his courage by shouting into the void: 'I don't have to prove I'm the best man here. I admit it!' Since then, bush boasting has got wilder and windier. The conversation is reported of three men sitting by a camp-fire on the western plains:

'You've heard of Black Andy, who carried half a ton of corrugated iron on his back up the slippery creek-bank at Wilcannia? I'm the fellow who was carrying Black Andy.'

'I ever tell you about the time I was fencing up on Cowan Downs? I was putting up a hundred posts a day, a mile apart. Hard work.'

'I'm the man who rode the crowbar through the township of Wagga. It never threw me, but I had to get off because it was developing saddle-sores.'

I'm a stockman to my trade, and they call me Ugly Dave.
I'm old and grey and only got one eye.
In a yard I'm good, of course, but just put me on a horse,
And I'll go where lots of young 'uns daren't try.

I'll lead 'em through the gidgee over country rough and ridgy.
I'll lose 'em in the very worst of scrub.
I can ride both rough and easy, with a brumby I'm a daisy,
And a rightdown bobby-dazzler in a pub.

Just watch me use a whip, I can give the dawdlers gyp,
I can make the flamin' echoes roar and ring.
With a branding-iron, well, I'm a perfect flamin' swell,
In fact, I'm duke of every blasted thing.

To watch me skin a sheep, it's so perfect, you could weep.
I can act 'the silvertail as if my blood was blue.
You can strike me pink or dead, if I stood upon my head,
I'd be just as good as any other two.

I've a notion in my pate that it's luck, it isn't fate
That I'm so far above the common run.
So in everything I do, you could cut me square in two,
For I'm much too flamin' good to be in one.

gidgee: shrublike tree of the acacia family

brumby: wild horse

bobby-dazzler: a brilliantly impressive person

silvertail: a rich, fashionable person

FIVE MILES FROM GUNDAGAI

The bullock-driver with his waggon piled high with wool-bales, his eight or ten yoke of oxen, his long whip and fluent oaths, was eminent among the oldtime bushmen. We hear of Slabface Bill, whose bullock team was so long, he'd a telephone wire running along the tips of the horns, from the polers to the lead. He'd an aborigine for a helper, and whenever Bill wanted to stop, he would just ring through; the blackfellow would halt the lead bullocks, and twenty minutes later the polers could stop. Bill got a wrong number one day, and the team didn't halt in time and half the Tahratong wool-clip tipped into the Began River. Bill wasted two hours trying to ring the exchange to make his complaint; finally his curses burnt the cable and started the big bush fires of 1908.

One of the monuments of Australian folklore is the bullock-teamsters' song about the dog that 'sat' in the tucker-box five miles from Gundagai. On November 28, 1932, the Rt. Hon. J .A.Lyons Prime Minister of Australia, unveiled a statue to this redoubtable dog at the point where O'Brien's Creek crosses the main Gundagai Road, the site of an oldtime bullockies' camping-ground. Dog and tucker-box are set on a plinth, and there's a tablet with the sonorous words: 'Earth's self upholds this monument to conquerors who won her when wooing was dangerous, and are now gathered unto her again.' A dog souvenir shop is nearby, and the post-office put on the local letters a special dog postmark. Such is fame in Australia.

I'm used to punchin' bullock teams across the 'ills and plains.
I've teamed outback for forty years through bleedin' hail and rain.
I've lived a lot of troubles down, without a bloomin' lie,
But I can't forget what 'appened just five miles from Gundagai.

'Twas gettin' dark, the team got bogged, the axle snapped in two.
I lost me matches and me pipe, so what was I to do?
The rain it was comin' on, and hungry too was I,
And me dog shat in me tucker-box, five miles from Gundagai.

Some blokes I know has stacks of luck, no matter where they fall,
But there was I Lord love a duck, no bloody luck at all.
I couldn't heat a pot of tea or keep me trousers dry,
And me dog shat in me tucker-box, five miles from Gundagai.

Now, I can forgive the bleedin' team, I can forgive the rain.
I can forgive the damp and cold and go through it again.
I can forgive the rotten luck, but 'ang me till I die,
I can't forgive the bloody dog, five miles from Gundagsi.

THE LIME-JUICE TUB

In early Australia, cattle meant more than sheep, and the cattle-hand on his horse felt himself superior to the humble shepherd. But in the period 1860-80 the wire fence was extending over a large area of Australia and the well-sinkers were finding water, and sheep-raising was outstripping the cattle business. Between 1860 and 1890 the number of cattle remained fairly constant at about two-and-a-quarter million, but the number of sheep increased from six million to nearly tenfold that number. By that time, the shearers were considering themselves the kings of the earth, proud of their skill and speed

with the shears, and contemptuous not only of new-chum migrants who had arrived in Australia in English ships ('limejuice tubs') but also of the small mixed-farmers of the coastal districts (called 'cockies' because, it was said, their farms were too poor to raise anything but cockatoos). The champion shearer (the 'gun' or 'ringer') was idolised; clumsy practitioners such as immigrants and cockies' sons were ridiculed, as the favourite working song called The Lime-Juice Tub clearly shows:

When shearin' comes, lay down your drums.
And step on the board, you brand-new chums.

chorus: With a ra-dum, ra-dum rub-a-dub-dub,
We'll send 'em home in a lime-juice tub.

Thsre's brand-new chums and cockies' sons,
They fancy that they are great guns.

They fancy they can shear the wool,
But the beggars can only tear and pull.

You cocky farmers never need fret;
Your skinflint ways I'll not forget.
And I'm the fellow that's game to bet
You're over your head and heels in debt.

With your huts of bark and your old dirt floors,
And your daughters never wear any drawers
Nor any kind of boots or shoes.
They're wild in the bush like kangaroos!

A pannikin of flour and a sheet of bark,
To wallop up a damper in the dark.

Well, here we are in New South Wales,
Shearin lambs with daggy tails.

drums: 'swags', rools of blankets
the board: the shearing floor
brand-new chums: newly-arrived migrants
lime-juice tub: an English ship (on which
lime-juice is served to prevent scurvy)
cocky: small-scale farmer
damper: coarse bread, made with baking
soda for leavening
with daggy tails: with lumps of excrement
stuck to the wool of the tail

HARD TACK

Already in the nineteenth century, in South Australia and Victoria, vineyards were being planted, mostly by German settlers. And notably in the period between the World wars, with the establishment of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, the orchard and vineyard districts of New South Wales began to spread and encroach on regions that formerly had been devoted to sheep. To their astonishment, shearers found themselves drinking wine instead of their famed staple beverage, beer. The culture collision between vineyard and sheep land, wine and beer, is well expressed in the Hard Tack song.

I'm a shearer, yes, I am, and I've shorn both sheep and lamb,
From the Wimmera to the Darling Downs and back.
And I've rung a shed or two when the fleece was tough as glue,
But I'll tell you where I struck the 'ardest tack.

I was down round Yenda way, killin' time from day to day,
Till the big sheds started movin' further out,
When I met a bloke by chance that I summed up at a glance,
As a cocky from a vineyard round about.

Now it seems he'd picked me too - well, it wasn't hard to do,
'Cause I had some tongs a-hangin' at my hip.
'Well, I got a mob,' he said, 'just about two hundred head,
And I'd give a ten pound note to have the clip.'

I says: 'Right, I'll take the stand.' It meant gettin' in my hand.
And by nine o'clock we'd rounded up the mob,
In a shed sunk in the ground, with wine-casks all around;
And that was where I started on my job.

I goes easy for a bit while my hand was gettin' fit,
And by dinner time I'd done about a score,
With the cocky pickin' up, and handin' me a cup
Of pinkie after every sheep I shore.

Well, he had to go away about the seventh day,
After showin' me the kind of casks to use.
Then I'd do the pickin' up, and manipulate the cup,
Strollin' round them wine-casks just to pick and choose.

Then I'd stagger to the pen, grab a sheep and start again,
With a sound between an 'iccup and a sob,
And sometimes I'd fall asleep with my arms around a sheep,
Worn and weary from my over-arduous job.

And so six weeks went by, until one day, with a sigh,
I shoved the dear old cobbler through the door.
I gathered in the cocky's pay, and staggered on me way
From the hardest flamin' shed I'd ever shore.

tongs: hand shears
pickin' up: picking up and baling the fleeces
as they are shorn
pinkie: wine
cobbler: last sheep to be shorn

ON THE ROAD WITH LIDDY

They used to say that the heart of the Australian nation was the nomad tribe - the teamsters, shearers, drovers - always on the move across the continent. Men with plenty of resourcefulness and few responsibilities. At the head of the nomad tribe were the drovers, the overlanders, who shifted herds and flocks across the plains to distant stations or sale-yards. With the spread of railways, the need for the long drives diminished, but they haven't quite disappeared yet. The old forms of bush life have lasted best in the remote country of the Northern Territory and the northern part of West Australia. Mateship is a basic necessity in such empty country; a free and easy hospitality makes up for a life that is otherwise monotonous, repetitions, terribly short of event. Slowness, a certain melancholy, an eager snatch at a chance for diversion characterises the existence of the cattlemen of the far outback, even today. The relatively recent North-west drovers' song, On the Road with Liddy, shows it all.

I'm on the road with Liddy with five hundred head of fats.
We string 'em on the stony ground and wheel 'em on the flats,
And when the evenin' stars come out, with laughter and with song,
We round the cattle up, and camp by some quiet billabong.

Our cook's a ball of muscle when he's rustling up a feed,
And Bob Delany's home and dried when steadying the lead,
And if the cattle run at night, there's one chap out in front
Striking matches on the bullocks' horns, a chap named Georgie Hunt.

And when we get to Wyndham, there's Tom Cole with his whip
To steer the lead across the hill and put 'em on the ship.
And when the mob is all on board, we'll have some blasted fun,
We'll get Jack Roberts with his car to take us for a run.

We'll try and dig Bob Cooper up, then to that bag of tricks,
The Pub that's kept by Teddy Clark they call the Double-Six.
He'll sing again them drovin' songs we sang along the track,
Have a show on the screen for an hour or two, then off again out-back.

fats: beef cattle in good condition
string 'em on the stony ground and wheel
'em on the flats: where there is little grass the
cattle are pushed along reasonably fast, but
on the grassy flats the drovers are likely -
illegally - to make the cattle take their time
and eat all they can (to the annoyance of the
landowners through whose property they
pass].

EUABALONG BALL

Somebody once described the Australian outback as ‘a long agony of scrub and wire fence’. Sometimes the flow of life is so slow as to be barely perceptible. Still, just occasionally bush life had its pleasures. Here’s a description by Steele Rudd, a writer dearly loved by Australian countryfolk:

‘No matter how things were going - whether the corn wouldn’t come up or the wheat had failed or the pumpkins had given out or the water-hole run dry - we always had a concertina in the house. It never failed to attract company. Paddy Halony and the well-sinkers, after belting and blasting all day long, used to drop in at night and throw the table outside and take the girls up and prance about the floor with ‘em till all hours.

Sandy Taylor passed our place every evening and always stopped at the fence to yarn with Kate about dancing. When the dancing subject was exhausted, Sandy would drag some hair out of the horse’s mane and say: ‘How’s the concertina?’ ‘It’s in there,’ Kate would answer, and she’d call out: ‘J-oe, bring the concer’’. Joe would strut along with it, and Sandy for the fiftieth time would examine it and laugh at the kangaroo-skin strips that Dave had tacked to it, and the scraps of brown paper plastered over the ribs of it to keep the wind in; and cocking his left leg over the pommel of his saddle, he’d sound a full blast on it as a preliminary. Then he’d strike up The Rocky Road to Dublin or The Wind among the Barley, or some other beautiful air, and grind away till it got dark, till mother came and asked him if he wouldn’t come in and have supper, and of course he would, and after supper he’d play some more. Then there would be a dance.

Oh, who hasn’t heard of Euabalong Ball,
Where the lads of the Lachlan, the great and the small,
Come bent on diversion from far and from near,
To cast off their troubles for just once a year.

Like stringy old wethers, the shearers in force
All rushed to the bar as a matter of course.
While waltzin’ his cliner the manager cursed
Because someone had caught him a jab with his spurs.

There was sheilas in plenty, some two or three score,
Some two-tooths; some weaners, some maybe some more,
With their fleeces all dipped and so fluffy and clean,
The finest young shearlings that ever was seen.

The boundary-riders was friskin’ about,
But the well-sinkers seemed to be feelin’ the drought.
If the water was scarce, well, the whisky was there,
And what they couldn’t drink, boys, they rubbed in their hair.

There was music and dancin’ and goin’ the pace.
Some went at a canter, some went at a race.
There was buckin’ and glidin’ and rootin’ and slidin’,
And to vary the gait, some couples collidin’.

Oh, Euabalong Ball was a wonderful sight.
Rams among two-tooths the whole flamin’ night.
And many young girls will regret to recall
The polkas they danced at Euabalong Ball.

cliner: girl-friend
sheilas: girls
two-tooths: young sheep with so far only two permanent teeth
weaners: young sheep just out of the lamb stage
shearlings: sheep at their first shearing
boundary-riders: men whose main job is to see that the remoter fences and stock are in order
well-sinkers: men who bore or dig for water
rootin’: kicking up at the beck like a flighty horse

THE BANKS OF THE CONDAMINE

'In the interior of New South Wales is a famine of females. Both sides of the Barwon River for three hundred miles are occupied by sheep and cattle stations and there is not one white woman in the whole distance. These creatures are as rare as black swans in Europe.' So said a voice from far up country in the middle of the last century.

Folk songs about work are common in Australia; folk songs about love are astonishingly scarce. The Banks of the Condamine is perhaps the best known of this rare species.

Oh hark, the dogs are barking, I can no longer stay.
The men have all gone mustering, I heard the publican say.
And I must be off in the mornin', love, before the sun does shine
To meet the contract shearers on the banks of the Condamine.

O Willie, dearest Willie, don't leave me here to mourn.
Don't make me curse and rue the day that ever I was born,
For parting with you, Willie, it's like parting with my life,
So stay and be a selector, love, and I will be your wife.

O Nancy, dearest Nancy, you know that I must go.
Old Halloran is expectin' me his shearin' for to do.
But when I'm on the board, my love, I'll think of you with pride,
And my shears they will go freely when I'm on the whippin' side.

Oh, I'll cut off my yellow hair and go along with you.
I'll dress meself in men's attire and be a shearer too.
I'll cook and count your tally, love, while ringer-O you shine,
And I'll wash your greasy moleskins on the banks of the Condamine.

O Nancy, dearest Nancy, you know that can't be so.
The boss has given orders, love, no woman there may go.
And your delicate constitution's not equal unto mine
To eat the ram-stag mutton on the banks of the Condamine.

But when the shearing's over, love, I'll make you my wife.
I'll take up a selection and I'll settle down for life.
And when the day's work's over, love, and the evening's clear and
I'll tell of them sandy cobblers on the banks of the Condamine.

mustering: rounding up the sheep (or cattle)
selector: a man who farms a plot made available by the government on cheap terms
whippin' side: the last side of the sheep to be shorn
tally: number of sheep shorn by a shearer in a day's work
ringer: champion shearer, man who shears the greatest number in a given shearing shed
ram-stag: an inferior male sheep, missed at castrating time. fully grown, a menace to the quality of the stock, and so due for slaughter. Stag mutton is rank, and was reckoned "fit for consumption only"
sandy cobblers: sheep with a fair quantity of sand in their are hard to shear, and shearers tend to leave them till last
'Cobbler' because the cobbler sticks to his last (Australian humour).

CLICK GO THE SHEARS

Characteristically, among Australia's mythological heroes is Crooked Mick, the giant shearer. He'd shear five hundred sheep a day; more, if they were ewes. He worked so fast, his shears ran hot; he'd have half-a-dozen pairs of blades in the water-pot at a time, cooling off. He was a bit rough, though. He kept five tar-boys running, dabbing on Stockholm tar each time he cut a sheep. They say that once, in the old Dunlop shed, the boss got annoyed: the way Mick was handling the sheep, and said: 'That'll do, you're sacked,' Mick was going all out at the time, and he had a dozen more sheep shorn before he could straighten up and hang his shears on the hook.

Out on the board the old shearer stands,
Graspin' his shears in his thin bony hands,
And his bleary eyes are fixed on a blue-bellied yowe
Sayin': If I get you, gal, I'll make the ringer go.

Click go the shears, boys, click, click, click.
Wide is his blow and his hands are movin' quick,
And the ringer looks around and he's heated by a blow
'nd he curses that old snaggiar with the blue-bellied yowe

In the middle of the floor in his cane-bellied chair
Sits the boss of the board with his eyes everywhere.
He notes every fleece as it comes to the screen,
Paying close attention that it's took off clean.

The colonial experience man, he is there, of course,
With his shiny leggings, just off his horse;
Castin' round his eyes like a real connoosoor,
Brilliantine and scented soap and smelling like a whoor (Who said that?)

The tar-boy is there and waiting on demand
with his old tar-pot and in his tarry hand.
Sees an old yowe with a cut upon her back.
This is what he's waitin' for: Tar here, Jack!

First you take the belly-wool and niggler out the crutch,
Go up the neck, for the rules they are such,
Clean around the horns and the first shoulder down,
A long blow up the back and turn her around.

Click, click, click, that's how the shearin' goes.
Click, clicketty click, oh my boys, it isn't slow.
A fellow pulls out a sheep and it lands him a kick,
And still you hear the shears a-goin': Click, click, click.

Now the shearing's over and we've all got our cheque,
Roll up your swags and we're off along the track.
The first pub we come to, it's there we'll have a spree,
And to everyone that comes along it's: Have a drink on me.

Down by the bar, the blade-shearer stands,
Grasping his glass in his thin bony hands.
His eyes are on the barrel which now is lowerin' fast,
He works hard and he drinks hard and goes to hell at last.

board: shearing~floor
blue-bellied yowe: a ewe with fleece so thin that her skin shows through on her belly
blow: swathe cut by the shears
snagger: a clumsy shearer
screen: a table on which each fleece is spread, as it is shorn, for the wool-classers to determine its quality
tar-boy: youngster with the job of dabbing antiseptic Stockholm tar on sheen cut by the shears
swag: bundle of belongings and camping gear, usually rolled in a blanket and hung from the shoulder - also called 'bluey', 'drum', and more rarely, 'matilda'
blade-shearer: one who uses hand-shears, not machine-shears

FLASH JACK FROM GUNDAGAI

If Crooked Mick is a mythical figure, the real-life shearer is also heroic. In a single day on October 10, 1892, Jacky Howe shore 321 weaners at Alice Downs, Central Queensland. That was with the blade-shears. With the machines, Daniel Cooper shore 325 ewes at Langkoop, Victoria, on October 2, 1947. Shearers still think of themselves as aristocrats of labour, with vast pride in their skill. The song Flash Jack from Gundagai grew up in the slap huts of the shearers' quarters, amid the smell of greasy wool, fried lamb-chops, shag tobacco and old newspapers. It gives the portrait of a dignified old workman whose boasts are just and sober.

I've shore at Burrabogie and I've shore at Toganmain,
I've shore at big Willandra and out on the Coleraine,
And before the shearin' was over I wished meself back again
Shearin' for old Tom Patterson on the One-Tree Plain.

All among the wool, boys, all among the wool.
Keep your blades full, boys, keep your blades full.
I can do a respectable tally meself, whenever I like to try,
And I'm known around the country as Flash Jack from Gundagai.

I've shore at Goorianawa, likewise at Tilberoo,
And once I drew my blades, boys, upon the famous Barcoo,
At Cowan Downs and Trida and as far as Moulamein,
And I was always glad to get back again on the One-Tree Plain.

I've pinked 'em with the Wolseleys and I've rushed with B-bows too.
I've shaved 'em in the grease, boys, with the grass-seeds showin' through.
I never slummed a pen, my lads, whatever it might contain,
When shearin' for old Tom Patterson on the One-Tree Plain.

I been whalin' up the Lachlan, and I've dossed at Cooper's Creek,
And once I rung Cudjingingie shed and blued it in a week.
And when Gabriel blows his horn, lads, I'll catch the mornin' train,
And I'll push for old Tom Patterson's on the One-Tree Plain.

swore: shorn
currabogie, etc: most of the place-names in this song refer to sheep-stations in south-western New South Wales.
The Barcoo is a river running - when it has water - from south-west Queensland into South Australia
pinked 'em: taken off the wool so close that the pink skin sh
Wolseleys: machine shears
B-bows: hand shears
shaved 'em in the grease: shorn the sheep when they were undimmed and thus had unusually greasy fleeces
grass-seed shown': through: some kinds of grass-seed have sharp pointed seed-cases, which penetrate the sheep's skin like splinters.
These 'splinters' are visible, embedded in the skin, when the sheep is shorn. They may also be a source of pain and annoyance to the shearer.
slummed a pen: shorn a penful of sheep hastily, carelessly
whalin' up the Lachlan: tramping along the Lachlan River, living at least partly on fish caught in its waters
Cooper's Creek: name of a stretch of the Barcoo River
rung Cudjingingie shed: shore more sheep than any other shearer in the Cudjingingie shearing shed, by the end of the shearing term
blued it in a week: 'it' is the shearers pay-cheque for the whole shearing-term

THE ROAD TO GUNDAGAI

Work like horses, spend like asses, used to be said of the old-time shearers. They would knock up a sizeable cheque in the shearing shed and then set out for a spree in the distant city. The chances were they'd get no more than halfway before they'd spent the lot. Perhaps that's why the otherwise unremarkable town of Gundagai shows so prominently in the folk songs. It lies just about midway between big sheds of the New South Wales Riverina and the bright lights of Sydney. Many a shearer, making his way towards the capital with his cheque, got no further than Lazy Harry's grog-shop on the road from Wagga to Gundagai.

Oh, we started out from Roto, when the sheds had all cut out.
Ve'd whips and whips of rhino as we meant to push about,
And we humped our blues serenely and made for Sydney town
with a three-spot cheque between us as wanted knockin' down.

And we camped at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai
The road to Gundagai, five miles from Boonabri;
Yes, we camped at Lazy Han-y's on the road to Gundagai.

Hell, we struck the Murrumbidgee near the Yanco in a week,
And passed through old Narrandera and crossed the Burnett Creek,
And we never stopped at Wagga for we'd Sydney :Ln our eye
But we camped at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai.

Yes, we camped at Lazy Harry's, etc.

Well, I've seen a lot of girls, my lads, and drunk a lot of beer,
And I've met with some of both me lads, as left me pretty queer.
But for beer to knock you sideways and for girls to make you cry
You should camp at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai.

You should camp at Lazy Harry'a, etc.

Well, we chucked our flaming' swags off and we walked up to the bar
we called xor rum BAG raspberry and a shillin' each cigar.
But the girl that served the poison, she winked at Bill and I,
So we camped at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai.

Oh, we camped at Lazy Harry's, etc.

In a week the spree was over and our cheque was all knocked down,
So we shouldered our Matildas and turned our backs on town,
And the girls stood us a nobbler as we sadly said goodbye,
And we tramped from Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai.

Yes, we tramped from Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai,
The road to Gundagai, five miles from Boonabri;

Yes, we tramped flat broke from Harry's on the road to Gundagai.

rhino: money

blues: swags, blanket-rolls

three-spot cheque: cheque for a hundred pounds or more

wanted knocking down: just had to be spent

Matildas: see 'blues'

nobbler: a standard measure of liquor



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