

SINGABOUT

JUNE 2017

CONVICT MUSICIANS

A Report from 12th National Folklore Conference 2017

Prof Graham Seal opened the conference, which has been held at the National Library since 2006. Margy Burn, the Assistant Director-General, NLA spoke of the significance of folklore and research at the NLA and the delight they had working with Jessie Lloyd, the 2017 National Folk Fellow. Jessie built on her collection of indigenous songs by using the NLA folklore recordings to further her work on Mission songs. At the NFF Jessie won acclaim with her performances.

The first presenter was Emma Nixon, who also was the National Folk Fellow in 2012. She is a talented fiddler having won prestigious awards in playing and teaching and is currently completing her PhD at Queensland Conservatorium, Griffiths University researching Scottish fiddling in Australia. As many of us have found with our research, that anything outside the official documents and versions of history require different methods to sleuth out facts. Although the stigma of convict heritage has largely passed, so have the memories of what songs and music they might have played for their own entertainment. Emma found sketches of pub scenes and some of the contemporary cartoons held some clues to the music of our folk heritage.

Don and Sue Brian's presentation *Convict Musicians: A Hidden Heritage* of the history and 'mythconceptions' of Norfolk Island of the Second Convict Settlement gave a new insight into this field. Don was able to sing some of the recently discovered convict songs from this era while Sue presented many special images from the island. Don and Sue have been enthusiastic researchers and performers of Australian traditional history for over forty years. In 2009 they moved to Norfolk Island as Don took a teaching ap-

pointment there and Sue became immersed in the history of the Island after she volunteered at the museum. This enabled them to meet locals, hear their stories as well as investigating diaries and other documents relating to the Convict settlements. Don and Sue plan to present a fuller report in the future, but in the meantime they have sent these previously unpublished songs for inclusion (not from Norfolk, but still convict origin).

I could not conclude this report, without saying that the tour Don and Sue conduct on Norfolk Island is a great experience giving insight into folk heritage and convict history.

R. Dale Dengate

These songs were remembered by Stanley Cullen of Laggan NSW, as learnt 65 years earlier on his father's property, from an employee, a ticket of leave man. (about 1894) They were recorded in 1959 by his sons Mout and Pat and more recently copied from tape in possession of Pat's son Peter Cullen in 2008.

The Green Mossy Banks of the Lee

One May morn as I carelessly rambled
Way down by a sweet pearly stream
Its there I espied a fair creature
Some goddess appearing to be.

As she rose in the reeds of the waters
On the green mossy banks of the Lea
As she rose in the reeds of the waters
On the green mossy banks of the Lea

I stepped up and bid her good morning
Her fair cheeks they blush like a rose.
(I see your) green meadows are charming
Your guardian I'll be if you choose

Kind Sir, Oh I don't want a guardian
Kind Sir, you're a stranger to me
For yonder's my father a'coming
On the green mossy banks of the Lea
For yonder's my father a'coming
On the green mossy banks of the Lea

I waited till up came her father
Summoned my courage once more
Say aye that this may be your daughter
This beautiful maid I adore

Ten thousand a year be her fortune
And a lady your daughter will be
She'll ride in a chariot and horses
On the green mossy banks of the Lea

So they welcomed her home to the cottage
In wedlock next day they were bound
And now they live happy together
In splendour and (luxury found).....

So come all you pretty fair maidens
And a warning take by me
By flattery let no one persuade you
Except those that's got lots property

Similar versions are to be found in West Midlands songs in the George Butterworth manuscripts

<http://www.btinternet.com/~radical/thefolkmag/butterworth.htm>

and in:

Ballads and Sea Songs from Nova Scotia, Mackenzie, 1963.

More Irish Street Ballads, O'Lochlainn, 1960.

American Balladry from British Broadsides, G Malcolm Laws, 1957.

The Briar and the Rose

(Mother, mother, make my bed) as sung by Stanley Cullen 1959

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of two staves. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of lyrics, and the second staff contains the melody for the second line. The lyrics are: 'Oh where Oh where is my little foot boy_ That was my sister's joy' and 'Let him go and tell my lord his true love lies a dying and will die before he can come'.

Oh where, oh where is the little fat (foot?) boy
That was my sister's joy
Let him go and tell my lord that his true love
lies a dying
And will die before he can come

Now the first three miles this little boy walked
And the next three miles he ran
He ran till he came to a broad river side
Then he bent his back and he swam

He swam till he came to the other side
And he took to his heels and he ran
He ran till he came to a nobleman's hall
Where they all seated down to a meal (meat?)

If you knew what news I have brought
Not one more bite would you eat

What news have you brought for me my boy,
What news have you brought (my son) for me
I've come to tell you that your true love lies a
dying
And will die before you can come.

Saddle up, saddle up my dark bay horse
And bridle him up so neat
That I may kiss those cherry cold lips
That once to me were so sweet

It was when riding o'er those hills
At twelve o'clock in the night
It was there he met four jovial men
And the corpse was shining bright

Set her down, set her down my jovial men
Set her down upon her feet
That I may kiss those cherry cold lips
That once to me were so sweet

Now this lady she died of grief
And me Lord he died of sorrow
Out of my ladies grave there grew a White rose
And out of the Lords a sweet briar

Now the briar it grew to such a height
It grew till it couldn't grow any higher
It doubled and it trebled and it tied a true loves
knot
And the rose grew around the sweet briar.

Folklorists may see here a number of features of Child ballads and a type of song not commonly found in the canon of Australian collected folk-song.

At the 2017 National Folk Festival Bob Bolton received the Lifetime Achievement Award. In honour of this, Gail Copley has submitted a poem she wrote about him a few years ago.

Bob

Have you met a boring type, who always thinks that he is right,
Who struts and postures round displaying all he knows?
Well, I've met another guy, who, in fact, is kinda shy,
He's not a blowhard, nah, never one of those.

In fact, those 'know it alls' - he may give them a call -
To offer an idea they've never heard.
And they'll deny it, look down their noses, and strike some pouty poses;
But he'll be right - and they'll just look absurd.

The difference 'tween them and he, is plain for all to see:
While they're so busy trying to impress;
He'll just try - to be fair - to inspire us to care
About our history, about our Australian-ess

He doesn't stand very tall, in fact, he's kinda small
But he could recite bush poems in such a casual way,
That it seems coincidental, that the poems would rhyme at all
More like conversations from our past, brought here, today.

With a camera he is great - his photos are top rate.
His collection is an archive of it all,
Of the Duke, Sally Sloane and Merro, and of Helen and Tony Romeo,
Jamie, Dave, John, Ralphie, all at Tritton Hall.

And in his own, quiet way, he's promoted bush music to this day
Through: his knowledge, and his music, and his photos.
His memory, sad to say, is now slowly wafting away;
And he is not the only one sad to see it go.....

You'll see him playing a pair of bones, or maybe a lager phone.
He'll perform bush music - in all its Australian bush glory.
And if he comes your way, give him a smile and say giddyay.
He's still willing to teach, still willing to share his story.

Gail Copley