

# REAL FOLK



---

JOHN  
MEREDITH

---



# REAL FOLK

---

J O H N  
M E R E D I T H

---

National Library of Australia

Front Cover: Dick Beazley  
Turill NSW

Some content in this online publication may be in copyright. You may only use in copyright material for permitted uses, please see <http://www.nla.gov.au/copiedirect/help/copyright.html> for further information. If in doubt about whether your use is permitted, seek permission from the copyright holder. In addition, please follow the links or otherwise contact the relevant institutional owners of images to seek permission if you wish to use their material.

© National Library of Australia 1995

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Meredith, John, 1920-  
Real folk.

ISBN 0 642 10638 X.

1. Meredith, John, 1920- . 2. Folklore—Australia.  
3. Folklore—Australia—Pictorial works. 4. Folk music—  
Australia. 5. Folk music—Australia—Pictorial works.  
6. Folk songs—Australia. 7. Folk songs—Australia—  
Pictorial works. 8. Musicians—Australia—Portraits.  
9. Musicians—Australia. I. National Library of Australia.  
II. Title.

781.620092294

Designer: Andrew Rankine  
Editor: Julie Stokes  
Editorial Assistant: Jan Sarah

Printed by Goanna Print, Canberra

## CONTENTS

iii

Preface .....	v
Introduction by Daniel Connell .....	xi
Real Folk .....	1
Name Index .....	71
Locality Index .....	72



## PREFACE

*Real Folk* is the culmination of a lifelong interest in Australian folklore and photography. Strangely enough, I was attracted to these two activities at the same time. I was about 13 years old and had a couple of after-school jobs that brought me an income of three shillings a week.

The first job began when I arrived home from school. I had to feed a couple of cows for the old lady who lived next door. It consisted of mixing a bucket of chaff with bran, pollard and water, and carrying it to her cow paddock. The feed was divided between two troughs. Then I had to mount guard and drive off a couple of hungry horses who very much wanted to share the meal. This occupied half an hour, during which I sat on the fence rail and read my *Triumph* weekly boys' magazine. A five-days-a-week job, my pay was sixpence a week.

The other job was easier and better paid. A dairy on the edge of town kept its milking herd on agistment in a paddock about half a mile down the Albury Road. On completion of the first job, I had to walk down, open the gate and drive the cows to the milking yards, keeping them off the roadway. For this I was paid, daily, sixpence a time.

With my first week's pay burning a hole in my pocket, I hurried to the local paper shop where, for two-and-ninepence, I became the proud owner of a

book I had coveted for some weeks—Banjo Paterson's collection of *Old Bush Songs*. This was the first of innumerable books I was to buy during the rest of my life, and I never dreamed at the time that I would devote much of my life in later years to chasing up songs that Banjo had missed. During the following school holidays I spent many summer afternoons sprawled in a home-made wheat bag hammock under a shady cherry-plum tree, reading over and over the texts of such ballads as 'The Wild Colonial Boy', 'The Old Bullock Dray' and 'A Wild Rover No More'.

During that period, in 1933, the popular pastime in my school class was having overseas penfriends. We collected them like stamps and cigarette cards. Mine were located in South Africa, Malta, Fiji, USA, France and New Zealand. June Howell, my Kiwi pen pal, and I used to write almost on a fortnightly basis, and in one letter she enclosed a couple of photographs, proudly announcing that she had taken, developed and printed them herself.

'How do you do that?', I asked in my reply. In due course a letter came containing illustrated directions for developing a film using the see-saw technique with three soup plates and a safelight made from a bike lamp covered with red cellophane. Later she told me how to make contact prints, using Seltona self-toning daylight printing paper which, after exposure for about ten minutes in the sun, only required to be fixed in a dish of hypo solution, all processes being carried out in daylight.

In another letter my correspondent directed me in the making of black-and-white prints on Velox gaslight paper, which needed both developing and fixing. Watching the picture appear magically in the developer fascinated me, and very soon I was permanently hooked on photography. In spite of maternal lectures about wasting money, a great deal of my 'cow cash' was spent on films, paper and chemicals.

In our home we had my late father's old Mezon Grand Organ button accordion. It had been knocked about and roughly mended, but was still playable. One day, after a visitor had pumped out a couple of tunes on it, I began mucking about with the

old instrument. Mum told me that if I could learn to play a tune properly she would buy me a new one. In a few weeks I qualified with 'Swanee River' and 'Home Sweet Home', and so became the owner of a two-pounds-ten-shillings Melba accordion. Like the Mezon, it had been made in Saxony. An accordion was something we really could not afford, but Mum paid ten shillings deposit and the balance at two-and-sixpence a week.

The combined effect of these three seemingly separate events—buying a book of folk songs, mastering basic photography and acquiring an accordion—was to influence the rest of my life.

Learning more accordion tunes from my sister's father-in-law, Pop Wright, and from a boarder in our house, Sid Woodland, and some others from gramophone records, I was soon skilled enough to play some extras at the local two-bob dances. Later, with the more experienced Pop Craythorne, we played for entire dance programs.

I was educated at the Holbrook Public School and, at the age of 12, moved from primary school to the first of three years of secondary education. In the 1930s, third year high school students sat for the Intermediate Certificate and, after a further two years (not available in Holbrook), did the Leaving Certificate, the equivalent of the present Higher School Certificate. I mucked up during first year and got a bad report, part of which has stuck in my memory: 'This report should be better. John is capable of higher achievement—he can do anything if he will only set his mind to it.'

Heeding the report, I worked harder and, at the end of second year, at the annual prize-giving, I was amazed to hear my name called as Dux of the School! During that Christmas holiday I turned 14, and in January began what was to be my third and last year of secondary school, but I was not destined to sit for the Intermediate Certificate.

I was the youngest of a family of seven, and the others had either left home or were working at 'live-in' jobs. When I turned 14, my mother's widow's pension ceased, and we had to live as best we could. During my first week at school I was given a list of required

textbooks, which we did not have the money to buy. So, when I ought to have been completing my education, or as much as was locally available, I had to leave school and find a job.

I had been buying photographic chemicals, sixpence worth at a time from the Holbrook Pharmacy, and the chemist, Ray Harrison, offered me a job. At first I was the bottle-washer and messenger boy, then learnt the art of dispensing from Mr Harrison, and functioned as his unregistered assistant. This was in the days when prescriptions were actual recipes which had to be made up individually, and a registered pharmacist was permitted by law to have an unregistered man working under his supervision.

From the shop, I bought a folding Kodak 'Six-20 Junior' camera for two pounds, my first step upward from a borrowed Box Brownie. With its 1/8 lens and two shutter speeds, in addition to 'time' and 'bulb', it was a more versatile instrument than the box camera. After some experimenting with the 'Six-20', I began to sell a few pictures. A shot of a neighbour's dog against the sky as it leapt after a ball brought me ten shillings and sixpence from *Australasian Post*. To *Man* magazine I sold a landscape of a hillside paddock of stooked hay, framed by an old yellow box tree. A striking cloud effect had been achieved in that shot by the use of a yellow-green filter made from the lens of an old pair of sunglasses, held in place by a rubber band. *Man* magazine used the picture as the cover of their Australian section and paid me one guinea (or 21 shillings) for it. A still life of four roses in a Chinese vase, starkly lit by a single lamp and fancifully titled *Canvas*, was accepted by another magazine, *Man Junior*.

Then a cadet from the local newspaper and I tried our hands at photo-journalism. Jack Furze interviewed and I photographed two elderly blind men, the brothers Petts, who lived in a shack at the end of town. I got a good shot of the younger one carrying a bundle of firewood and tapping his way along a wire fence with a stick. My other shot was a close-up of the elder brother plaiting one of the greenhide whips for which he was noted. We were very proud when we sold this feature to the *Albury Banner*.





*Steve Power at his home in Madgee being recorded by John Meredith. Steve had a remarkable memory for the words of songs, ballads and recitations. In addition to his vast repertoire of ballads, Steve has absorbed a lot of local folklore, particularly relating to the use of herbs and wild plants.*

Then I discovered that if I used a magnifying glass between my lens and the eye-piece of a mate's microscope, I could make photomicrographs. Illuminated by burning magnesium ribbon, our one great success in this field was a shot of a bee-sting and the tip of a sewing needle juxtaposed. We sold this one to the *Australasian Beekeeper* magazine, where it appeared on the cover.

I was becoming known around Holbrook as a photographer, and I scored several commissions to photograph babies and prize-winning gardens. Then my boss lent me to the Shire Engineer on a couple of occasions to make a pictorial record of work on a new road he was putting through from Woomargama to the Murray River at Dora Dora.

For several years I had been entitled to the full adult wage, but the chemist claimed that he could not afford this. So, in 1944 I left both him and my home town and pedalled my bike down to Melbourne, where I worked for three years. Not long after I arrived there, my room was burgled and, among other items, my camera was stolen. Due to wartime shortages I was not able to replace it, so for the next six years I did no photography at all. I grew tired of Melbourne, and of city life in general, so I spent 1947 carrying my swag on the push bike. Periodically I worked at seasonal fruit-picking for a living, but unfortunately without a camera to record my experiences. During the year I covered some 6000 miles, wandering about between Melbourne and the Atherton Tablelands and back south as far as Sydney, where I decided to settle.

New post-war cameras had not yet come onto the market, so I looked about for a second-hand instrument. I decided on a 'VP Exacta', one of the early SLR cameras. It had a good Zeiss lens and a remarkable focal plane shutter with a speed range of from 12 seconds to one thousandth of a second. The first work I did with it was a series of macro shots of a cicada emerging from its chrysalis, expanding and drying its wings. Titled *The Birth of a Black Prince*, the set of six prints was awarded a special prize at the agricultural show in my home town of Holbrook.

By 1952 the folksong revival was getting under way and, with two mates, Brian Loughlin and Jack Barrie, we formed a group called the Bushwhackers. It turned out to be the forerunner of, and the model for, an outbreak of similar bush bands all over the continent. Our aim was to sing Australian songs accompanied by traditional instruments, such as the button accordion and the mouth organ.

While searching for suitable items for performance, Hilda Lane of North Sydney introduced me to a retired shearer named 'Hoop-iron' Jack Lee, who sang a number of old bush songs. With Chris Kempster, I spent a Saturday afternoon trying unsuccessfully to take down a song on paper. Later, when telling my neighbour of this problem, he offered to lend me his reel-to-reel magnetic tape recorder. This marvellous new machine had just come onto the consumer market and, with its help on the following Saturday afternoon, we recorded the old man's entire repertoire.

I was enthralled by the new machine and I could foresee its possibilities. I just had to have one, but the problem was finance. They cost about £155 and I was earning a little over £6 a week. So I sold my Exacta camera to raise the deposit and signed an agreement to pay off the balance at £6 a month. With the tape recorder I was able to collect songs, tunes and recitations for performance by the Bushwhackers, and our performances enabled me to meet many old people who were willing to pass on their traditions for preservation. For the first couple of years I was not able to photograph the performers but, as soon as the

recorder had been paid for, I looked about for a new camera.

The Zeiss Contallex, a 35 mm SLR, had just become available and I settled for the No. 1 model. It was fitted with the classic Zeiss Tessar f/2.8 lens and the blade shutter had flash synchronisation at all speeds from one second to one five-hundredth of a second. It was with this camera that most of my 1950s and early 1980s pictures were made. Then, finding the need for a camera with interchangeable lenses, I purchased a Pentax K-1000, mainly because its all-manual operation did not depend on batteries.

Tape recording and photographing were expensive pastimes in the 1950s when a reel of magnetic tape cost almost one week's wages, and when all my photographic processing was being done commercially. Nevertheless, I carried on with these activities until 1960. Then, having bought a block of bushland at Balmoral Village in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales, I set about creating a weekend hobby farm.

Soon after building a shack on my land, I was awarded a six-month fellowship by the Commonwealth Literature Board, to work on the publication of a volume of my collected material. Completed with the assistance of Hugh Anderson, the book was published by Ure Smith under the title *Folk Songs of Australia*. Illustrated with my 1950s photographs of the performers and issued in 1968, it has run through several editions.

Commitment to weekend farming meant that I could no longer go away collecting in my spare time. Instead, after work, I spent my week nights in the Mitchell Library carrying out research based on my recorded material. From 20 years of this work, I wrote and had published a dozen or so books. Dealing with folklore and social history, most of them were illustrated with my photographs. During this period I also wrote several plays and numerous articles, and I was the founding editor of *Singabout*, the journal of the Bush Music Club which I had helped to establish. After publication of *Folk Songs of Australia*, my 1950s tape recordings were acquired by the National Library of Australia.

In 1978, when I was 58, I retired to the farm and lived by my writing until I qualified for the aged pension. In 1980 I sold the Balmoral property and moved into the nearby town of Thirlmere. At the same time, I again began collecting songs, music and oral history by means of tape recordings. The National Library of Australia heard of this renewed activity and offered me funding, to the extent of reimbursement of travelling and incidental expenses. Additionally, they supplied a recording kit plus tapes and in return received all my master tapes.

I don't drive a car and soon discovered that travelling by public transport presented problems and involved a great deal of foot-slogging. Then, in return for travelling expenses, several friends came to my assistance with their cars, enabling me to travel widely, both intra- and inter-state. For this help I am grateful to Chris Sullivan, Martin Fallding, Peter Ellis, Jamie Carlin, Ian Tait, Chris Woodland, Rob Willis, Reg Kurtz and many, many others.

The *Real Folk* exhibition was originally put together in 1988 as a tribute to the people of the Mudgee district, where I had carried out so much of my collecting, and was shown as part of the Mudgee Bicentennial Folklore Festival. Afterward, the pictures were offered to and accepted by the National Library of Australia, where they were hung, in two sections, in an exhibition that ran for over 12 months.

The exhibition attracted a good deal of attention and this was very gratifying to me, as I had worked under great difficulty and had to overcome a number of problems when making the prints. My darkroom consists of the temporarily blacked-out kitchen of my 100-year-old cottage, operable only after dark. No sooner had I worked out a pattern of blackout curtains than a traffic roundabout was built at my front door, lighted by four big mercury-sodium floodlights. I had just coped with this menace when the corner pub installed a halogen floodlight on its roof, for security purposes. Of course it shone in straight through my

ix



*On the Nullarbor Plain, somewhere near the 'Head of the Gulf', Peter Ellis and John Meredith serenade the wilderness during their great coast to coast field trip in 1991, travelling in Peter's original FJ Holden.*

glass front door, and so further blackout curtains were necessary. The old iron-piped plumbing then began discharging rust into my developing and toning solutions, so that I had to buy bottles of purified water, and so it went on!

My aim in selecting prints for this collection has been to document one aspect of our heritage of traditional song and music. I feel that, in order to fully appreciate the audio part of this tradition, it is necessary to see what sort of people kept it alive and passed it on for others to enjoy. Over 700 performers have been recorded and photographed, and they have provided nearly 8000 catalogued items. When it has been conveniently possible I have photographed them, with their instruments, in their home environment in the rooms in which they performed. Sideboards and mantelpieces have frequently formed a background because I feel that the treasured icons and

bric-a-brac displayed there tell much about the character of the subject.

Some folk revival performers have become very commercially minded, to such an extent that, in many cases, I feel the artists are more interested in the financial reward than the material they perform. It was to distinguish between these people and the pioneer performers, who have given freely of their time, their songs and their music, that I coined the title of my exhibition and my book.

To me, these kind-hearted, hospitable and friendly people have come to represent the Real Folk of Australia.

John Meredith  
December 1994

## INTRODUCTION

John Meredith's photographs present creative, energetic people who have been great contributors to their communities, entertaining families and friends on countless occasions. However, their portraits do not lend themselves to comfortable reflections about the way things used to be. Sitting in their kitchens and lounge rooms, talking or demonstrating their instruments, the faces of the Real Folk have a look that suggests life confronted and endured. They carry shadows and lines that hint at memories of others long dead, still lingering in the daydreams and silences. Their bodies are stiff with old injuries, their hands worn and lumpy. The stoicism of these people has been hard-won, the result of struggles that went on too long.

Born in 1920, John Meredith grew up in and around the southern New South Wales town of Holbrook, a community of people much like those he would later record with his camera, tape recorder and notebook. His father was a drover who died when Meredith was eight. His mother supplemented her widow's pension by working as a kitchen hand and taking in washing for some of the bachelors around town. They kept chooks and had a cow and, as the youngest of seven, Meredith grew up dressed in his brothers' hand-me-downs. Their house was an old colonial vernacular weatherboard, with carpet snakes in

the ceiling, walls lined with newspapers and internal partitions made of hessian. It was lit with hurricane lamps, the cooking was done on a wood stove, and on washing days the clothes were boiled in a copper.

Entertainment was largely self-made.

Neighbours would come together and, with the large families common in those times, it was not hard to get the numbers needed for a dance. A typical memory of Meredith's was that of visiting a nearby family, the Wrights. At some stage during the evening the remark would be made, 'Let's do the lancers', and they would all troop down to an empty room where Pop Wright would sit in the corner and play his accordion while someone else did the calls.

Contact with the likes of Steele Rudd came from readings by his mother, sitting in front of the fire at night. More extensive immersion in the confident Australiana of Paterson and Lawson happened later, through books lent by a neighbour.

Attitudes echoing earlier times of convicts and bushrangers still lingered. Just before Meredith was born, a local man named Claudie Batson went on a rampage, shot a number of people and vanished into the surrounding hills. Early one morning, after he had eluded his pursuers for a number of weeks, he came down to a dairy and asked for milk. While the other dairy hands kept him talking, one ran for the police. Subsequently, many people in the district felt sympathy for Batson and were not happy with the manner of his capture. As Meredith's mother said, 'You never know, one day it may be one of your own'.

Life was hard, but not without hope. At that time rural Australia was a place of thriving small towns, selectors' blocks and large families. The population was young and energetic and the mood favoured self-improvement. People knew politics could make a difference. The history of Australia was one of great achievements for radical democrats. In recent decades Australians had demanded and got universal adult suffrage, world-leading industrial legislation and radical land reform, and succeeded in merging six squabbling colonies into a strong federal system that unified a continent.

One of the great breakthroughs in Meredith's life came with the arrival in Holbrook of Charley Welsh, who worked at the local radio station. A rationalist and Marxist, he and his wife, Nell, were the first people to introduce Meredith to the joys of frank and intelligent conversation. It was now that Meredith read *The Socialist Sixth* by the 'red' Dean of Canterbury, the Very Reverend Dr Hewlett Johnson.

When Meredith arrived in Sydney in 1948 there was a high sense of purpose among radical people of the left, of whom he was now one. The relationship between politics and culture during the post-war period was complex but for many people it felt right to combine radical politics with a crusading interest in Australian culture. Meredith and others were drawn to the republicanism of Lawson and many of the *Bulletin* crowd. They were attracted to the songs of bushranging, shearing and unionism which they felt expressed the radical working-class spirit of an earlier golden age.

Meredith's interests developed and changed as he continued to collect. His early concern for authenticity, weighing whether a song was really 'Australian' and hence worthy of recording, began to seem artificial. The source of his songs, and the process of transformation in a new place, became increasingly interesting. Frequently, as with the Irish–Australian song 'Dennis O'Reilly', elements of the old clearly remain: the hero wanders the Australian bush still carrying the blackthorn in his hand, as in the original Irish version. Meredith came to welcome the anomalies, feeling that the introduction of so-called mistakes was frequently the mechanism by which a tune or a song was adapted to its Australian setting.

With time he became aware of the vital role of dance music in a popular culture where people made their own fun. This led him to explore the extraordinary musical significance of the early German settlers, many of whom were in Australia decades before Germany became a nation. With his connections to Holbrook (Germantown before the First World War), Meredith knew how nationalistic intolerance could lead to injustice. Consequently it gave him particular

pleasure to document the extent to which Australian cultural life had been enriched by adaptations of German and Austrian *schottisches* and *varsavianas* during the previous century.

Similarly, some of Meredith's most valued material has come from Aboriginal people. One of his long-standing interests has been their response to the various musical influences that they have encountered over the last 200 years. Meredith's sound recordings include many interesting products of that interaction, including gumleaf playing, a traditional Aboriginal art that has been adapted to produce European tunes with spectacular results.

When he began collecting in the 1950s, Meredith was looking for material that the Bushwhackers, a radical band of folk singers he helped found, could use in their performances. However, he soon began to feel that the old musicians he was recording were the last who would know their songs. Soon his search became a mission, albeit an enjoyable one. Many collectors working in this field have felt that they were grabbing at material drifting away like leaves in an autumn wind. Meredith has described the urgent feelings of earlier collectors such as Reverend Baring Gould, who drove himself hard in his search through rural England in the 1870s and 1880s, and Percy Grainger, who collected some of the first sound recordings of English folk songs with his Edison phonograph. While on tour Grainger would worry that priceless tunes and songs were being lost (through the death of their custodians) while he was away performing.

In Meredith's case the search has a sequel. For 20 years after he collected his original recordings and photographs in the 1950s, his energies were diverted in other directions—wage work, writing and small-scale farming. During this period he continued his involvement with his chosen themes, producing books like *Duke of the Outback* (the adventures of a shearer named Tritton), *The Donahue Ballads*, *The Coo-ee March*, *Frank the Poet* (the life and works of Francis MacNamara), *Ned Kelly after a Century of Acrimony* and others. Eventually in the early 1980s he returned to collecting with his tape recorder and camera.

Encouragement came from an incident at the Henry Lawson Festival in Gulgong in 1981. Meredith was there as a guest of the Kurtz family who were well known round about for their Stringybark Bush Band. During the performance a member of the audience asked for a strange dance tune which she then whistled. It was an old German schottische but quite new to Meredith. When he arranged to record it, word went round and neighbours came forward with other tunes. He was soon collecting once again, discovering that the age-old process of passing on favourite tunes and songs to relatives and friends had continued, despite his pessimistic expectations of 20 years before.

Over the next decade Meredith's search took him all over south-eastern Australia ranging from the Eyre Peninsula to the Huon Valley, south of Hobart. Public recognition for his work also began to grow with the republication in 1985 of the first volume of his *Folk Songs of Australia*, followed by the second volume in 1987, and the broadcast of the two-part series, *John Meredith's People*, by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 1990 and 1991. John Meredith was awarded the Medal of the

Order of Australia in 1986 and became a Member of the Order for services to the arts, particularly for the collection and preservation of Australian folklore in 1992.

Meredith's work has been more than a study of the products of Australia's pioneering folk culture. Whether using a camera, tape recorder or notebook, he paid as much attention to the people he met as he did to the material he was ostensibly collecting. The photographs in *Real Folk* convey a sense of the individuality of normal people, a dimension that is difficult to record when sought directly. Often such things are best caught in passing, as a result of meetings arranged for other purposes, in this case to record and preserve Australia's old songs and tunes. The result is a collection that makes us aware of the complex, often quirky, human qualities of people in an earlier age, and helps us resist the never-ending pressure from fading memories to simplify the past.

Daniel Connell  
December 1994

The link with the past has not been twisted.  
It has been broken and we shall have to relearn our lesson ...  
It is helpful, therefore, to go and observe the way and practices  
of those who have not been seduced  
away from tradition.

Philip Oyster  
*The Generous Earth*  
(London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1950)



## OSSIE ARTERY

*Black Springs NSW*

Black Springs is a small village south of Bathurst, lying in what was known in the early 19th century as 'the New Country'. At the local store, they said he played accordion, and lived in a shack out in the bush. I found the galvanised iron shack standing in the middle of about a hectare of derelict farm machinery, but Ossie Artery was not at home.

Eventually I found Ossie visiting a mate who lived right alongside the black soil spring from which the village took its name. He was sitting on the edge of the verandah, armed with a pea rifle and shooting parrots out of a big pear tree. The mate's shack had been built from the remains of the old Black Springs Post Office, the huge old stone fireplace of which had been netted in for use as



*Scorning socks, a fag hanging from the corner of his mouth, Ossie Artery is typical of the hard-bitten Australian bushman.*

a hen-house. The verandah was littered with all the old artefacts and icons treasured by the solitary bushman—rabbit traps, camp ovens, kerosene tins and old bottles abounded.

Ossie was not a genius on the accordion, nor did he have a big repertoire of tunes, but with his rag hat, laceless boots and a fag-end

hanging out of his mouth, he looked, and was, the archetypal Australian bushman.

## JOE CASHMERE

*Sylvania NSW*

A recording session with Joe Cashmere, a man with a buoyant sense of humour, always assumed the character of an entertaining musical afternoon. I would take along my button accordion, Jeff Way his guitar, and Joe would bring out his fiddle, which had been in use for over 60 years. Born in 1870, Joe was 85 when first recorded in 1955. His fiddle had a big crack along the belly, hence the tone was somewhat scratchy, but Joe's playing, with a marked dance rhythm, effectively masked this, and his foot-tapping music was always a delight to hear.

Cashmere was one of those bush workers who used to write and send in pieces to the *Albury Banner*, the *Bulletin* and *The Worker*, and he was also a polished performer of bush songs, recitations and yarns. One of

Joe's tricks was to make the fiddle sound like the bagpipes. He would slip his tobacco pipe or his pocket knife under the strings, just behind the bridge, making for a strangely distorted tone. The D string was played as a drone and the

melody beaten out on the A string.

He played a very distinctive tune for the varsoviana and told the story of how he had played it during a dance at a back-country woolshed, which was attended by a young

policeman from Booligal. Thirty years later, when he had given up shearing and was driving a bullock team, he was stopped at Molong by a police sergeant with a big red moustache. It was the same officer, and he remembered Joe by that very tune!



*Joe Cashmere was 85 when photographed in 1955 with his battered old fiddle. He came from Booligal where he worked as a shearer and later as a bullock teamster.*



**ORIEL (OLLY)  
BUSCH**

3

*Hillston NSW*

Olly Busch is a niece of Joe Cashmere of Booligal and later of Sylvania, where he was recorded in the 1950s. She sits in front of Joe's piano which she bought from him when he moved to Sydney. She plays by ear and knows a waltz tune that closely resembles the well-known 'Mudgee Waltz'. She had many reminiscences of Uncle Joe, who in later years gave up shearing and bullock driving to run a dairy farm at Hillston.

## BERT JAMIESON

*Cootamundra NSW*

Ian Finlay of Young discovered Bert Jamieson and sent me a tape of his playing. In company with Rob Willis, I made the first of several trips to Cootamundra to record Bert playing his mouth organ. The youngest in a family of 14, Bert was born on New Year's Day in 1903. Ten family members were musical, as well as both parents, so it was natural for there to be a Jamieson Family Band.

The Jamiesons played for dances in most of the little Upper Murray townships, and descendants still have a Jamieson band that plays in the Bombala-Delegate district. Like most musicians who have regularly played

*Aged 85 when visited, Bert Jamieson was born near Khancoban in 1903, and used to play with his father and brothers in the Jamieson family dance band. His repertoire of old dance tunes, all learnt from his father, contains many surprises. A vigorous player, he still practises for about five hours a day!*

for dancing, Bert plays with a pronounced rhythm, beating time with both feet, rather than the usual one.

Bert Jamieson is featured in a monograph, *The Tunes of Bert Jamieson*, published by Carrawobbity Press, with an accompanying cassette. His playing is amazing for a 90-year-old man, and is mainly due to the fact that he practises for up to five hours a day as part of his therapy for defeating asthma.



*Born in Violet Town, Victoria, around the turn of the century, sisters Nell Dwyer and Margaret Connelly were both music teachers and had a repertoire of old dance tunes learnt at dances held at their parents' grazing property near Forbes.*

## NELL DWYER AND MARGARET CONNELLY

*Forbes NSW*

Miss Nell Dwyer (born 1898) and her sister, Mrs Margaret Connelly (born 1909), were born in Violet Town, Victoria, and grew up at 'Daisy Park', a grazing property in the Forbes district. Their mother used to sing a version of the old ballad 'Barbara Allen' which normally begins with the line:

'In Scarlet Town where I was born...'

But possibly in deference to their birthplace, the sisters sang:

'In Violet Town where I was born...'

Unfortunately, neither of them could go beyond the first verse.

Margaret played a few of the tunes used for dances at 'Daisy Park', including 'The Sunbeam Dance' for the schottische, a varsoviana and a song tune, 'O Willy We Have Missed You'. They used to dance the varsoviana using slip-steps for the second part of the dance, instead of the more usual mazurka step. The slip-step version seems to have been in vogue in central New South Wales.



## HERB ARCHER

*Ulan NSW*

Born on 8 January 1895, Herb was a bush musician of the old school. Working as a sleeper cutter, he lived all his life in Ulan—now the site of a gigantic open-cut coal mine—and told fascinating stories about the pioneering days. He told me how the names of some of the local creeks originated, often with a blood-curdling tale behind each name. He described how, in his young days, the

economy of the area was based on dairying, with hand milking twice a day, seven days a week being the usual order of things; of how the cream was separated by hand-operated machines and taken down to the Mudgee butter factory three times a week; of how a man in a horse-drawn cart took two full days for each return trip; and of how the farmers and their families reared poddy calves and pigs on the skim milk that remained after separating.

Herb Archer used to be a noted fiddler and played for the Ulan dances for many years. He said he didn't enjoy playing for dances because 'While you were up there playing, some other fellow was getting off with your girlfriend!'

Alas, Herb's fiddling days were finished by arthritis, the scourge of old bush musicians—his once nimble fingers were bent and stiff. All he could do with the fiddle when I visited was to pose for some pictures, but he did hit many of his old tunes for me to record, in good pitch and with perfect dance tempo.



*Herb Archer, with his fiddle, supplied the music for many years for dances in the Cooles Gap, Ulan and Wollai districts. Finally he was silenced by the musician's enemy, arthritis in the hands.*

## ADOLPH (‘DOLPHY’) BLACKERT

*Mudgee NSW*

A kindly, gentle old man, Dolphy Blackert was born of German parents in 1892 and was passionately fond of his music. His father, an organ builder, migrated to Australia, and built an organ in a church at either Bendigo or Ballarat—Dolphy could not remember which—then moved to join the German enclave in the Mudgee district. The family lived on the Munghorn Gap, where a bush road crosses the Great Divide.

Dolphy played violin, viola and cello, and he taught these instruments to many Mudgee children. To avoid persecution during the First World War, he changed his name to Reg Black, and the only work he could find was playing trick fiddle in a travelling vaudeville show. Although he was a trained musician, Dolphy never lost his love for the simple dance

tunes of the country folk among whom he had grown to manhood.

He spent his last years in the Macquarie Homes for the Aged at Bathurst. Dolphy was a great admirer of Pablo Cassals, so, on what turned out to be my last visit to him, I took along a Walkman, Koss earphones and a tape of Bach's *Suites for Cello*, nos 5 and 6. With the volume turned well up, I put

the earphones on him and watched, entranced, as Dolphy sat there smiling and listening to the great master. When it ended, he sighed and exclaimed, 'Ah, that was like a little bit of heaven!' On my next visit I enquired after Dolphy, to be told by a fellow resident, simply, 'Dolphy's gone'. At Macquarie no one ever died—they were just said to have 'gone'.

6

## BILL GILBERT

*Singleton NSW*

Bill Gilbert always played his Hohner accordion with great enjoyment. Born in 1907, Billy had an irrepressible sense of humour and was renowned for his practical jokes. Working in the Brown Mountain area as a young man, he helped to cut timber for the first Parliament House in Canberra.



*Descended from German migrants, Dolphy Blackert's family used to live near the Munghorn Gap. In his younger days Dolphy taught many Mudgee children to play the violin.*

Doll Bishop at home in Fingal, a residence she shared with numerous cats, dogs and possums. In her nineties, Doll still played her mouth organ or button accordion, with a characteristic twinkle in her eye.



7

## ETHEL ('DOLL') BISHOP

*Fingal Tas.*

Born Ethel Curran in north-eastern Tasmania in 1895. 'Doll' Bishop was of Irish descent, and was Irish in her outlook. Her tune list included such items as 'The Wearing of the Green' and 'The Hat McGuinness Wore' and she sang a delightfully bawdy fragment of the song 'The Cuckoo's Nest'.

I found Doll Bishop living in a small tumbledown cottage in Fingal, Tasmania. She shared her dwelling with numerous cats and dogs, and possums—the latter occupying the ceiling. Local authorities wanted to move her into a little retirement unit, where only one pet was permitted. That was no good to Doll. Since she couldn't take her extended animal family with her, she firmly refused to budge!

Doll was quite a character—a strong

individualist. She had a great sense of humour, telling many funny yarns of her experiences at Fingal. The ceiling of her kitchen was covered in poster-sized pin-ups of male pop-singers, as personified by Tom Jones, Rod Stewart and the Rolling Stones. Whenever she felt lonely, she got out her mouth organ or button accordion and played a few tunes. Aged 90 when I met her, she was sporting a bright orange wig with great aplomb.

## DICK BEAZLEY

*Turill NSW*

A loner who lived in a cluster of huts in a bush clearing near Turill, New South Wales, music-lover Dick Beazley was an inveterate collector and hoarder of things musical and other treasures. He

attended every clearing sale held in the district and had collections of old clocks, camp ovens, vintage tractors, musical instruments, books and old 78 rpm recordings.

He had three violins (one French, one labelled 'Made in Nippon' with a beautiful rosewood finish), plus several banjo-mandolins and a rare bandonion. Dick was probably the only person in Australia to own a complete set of the scarce *Bill Bowyang Bush Recitations*—all six of them,

something that even the Mitchell Library does not possess! A self-taught musician, Dick played a number of old dance tunes for recording, most of them on his treasured French violin.

When making field recordings, all sorts of extraneous background noises intrude. In Dick's case, it was his blue cattle dog which insisted on lying at his feet while it noisily crunched a kangaroo legbone!

8



*Musician, music-lover and collector of things musical, Dick Beazley had a wonderful collection of instruments, sheet music and old gramophone records.*



## BEN BORMANN

Woodside SA

Accordionist Ben Bormann, of Woodside in South Australia, used to practise secretly on his father's accordion when he was only seven years old. One day he was caught in the act, but his father was so pleased with little Ben's talent that he

gave the lad permission to use the instrument whenever he pleased.

Ben was born on his parents' farm at Milendella, near Palmer, in 1916. His grandparents had been migrants who fled from north-eastern Germany around 1838, to avoid religious persecution. Like many others, they settled in South Australia and prospered there as farmers. Following their national tradition, Ben's father as the *youngest* son, inherited the family property.

Both Ben and his dad used to play accordion for local dances and at 'Fedderschleischen' parties. These peculiarly Germanic functions were neighbourly gatherings where the hosts and their visitors drank wine and sang songs as they stripped the down from feathers for use in mattresses and quilts. Many dance tunes brought to Australia by these German migrants survive today in the repertoire of bush musicians. Such a song tune is titled 'Montag gibst Kartoffel supp' which translates as 'On Mondays we have potato soup', and was played by Ben as a schottische. In Mudgee the tune has been speeded up and is called 'Fred Holland's Polka'.



*Born in 1916, Ben Bormann is descended from the German folk who settled and developed the Hahndorf district of South Australia. His repertoire of songs and tunes come from his accordion-playing father.*

*One of a number of accordion-playing musicians in Geeveston, Norm Burgess is pictured with his Hohner accordion, but he preferred playing on his old 'Mezon Grand Organ' instrument.*

## NORMAN BURGESS

*Geeveston Tas*

Geeveston is situated in the heart of the Tasmanian apple-growing area. Norm Burgess' first memory of music was of his father playing the 'windjammer' (Tasmanian for

accordion) at apple-shed dances.

Apple sheds, each the size of a small community hall, were in use from March until June for grading and packing the fruit, then stood empty for the rest of the year. Most of them were built with a good wooden floor, and local people soon developed the custom of holding regular shed dances. The music was provided by a 'windjammer', occasionally backed by a banjo. The program included such dances as the waltz,

slow foxtrot (which they called 'The Blues'), Alberts, quickstep, modern waltz, tango, schottische, military two-step and, occasionally, the three-hop polka and the polka-mazurka.

Born in 1914, Norm learnt accordion from his father, and played at apple-shed dances until the late 1930s. Unfortunately, in post-war years, the introduction of electric guitars and grog to the venues killed off the custom. Noise problems and hooliganism forced local councils to invoke the *Public Halls Act*, which enabled them to close down rowdy functions. Now, those happy gatherings have become a thing of the past.



## DUKE TRITTON

*Cullenbone NSW*

'The Duke', who was in his late seventies when he died in 1965, spent most of his life knocking about the bush working at almost every possible occupation. At various times he was shearer, fencer, goldminer,

professional boxer, carrier and farmer. He had also carried his swag many times. The story of this remarkable man's early life is told in his book *Time Means Tucker*, which has sold out three editions.

Duke knew a great many songs and fragments of songs that he picked up during his travels and while working as a shearer. In addition he wrote several songs himself, all very much in the style of the traditional bush ballad. He sang several

Lawson ballads, telling me that Henry Lawson's poems were sung as much as they were recited in the outback. He thought this came about because so much of Lawson's verse was written in ballad metre, and so fitted easily to traditional tunes.

In 1956, Alan Scott took advantage of a visit to Mudgee by the Bushwhackers to record Duke singing some songs of his own composition, in addition to traditional bush songs.



*Alan Scott records Duke Tritton at Mudgee during a visit by the Bushwhackers to the town in 1956 to commemorate the death of Henry Lawson.*

## HOWARD AND ETHEL SUTCLIFFE

*Gracemere Qld*

The Sutcliffe household was a musical one. Howard, born 1907, played accordion, tin whistle and banjo-mandolin, with reverse stringing—he

was a southpaw! His wife, Ethel, born 1915, played accordion and Oscar, the dog, vocalised. Oscar remained silent when only one accordion played, but whenever two played together, he threw back his head and howled!

Howard and Ethel were Christians and some of their dance tunes came from lively revivalist hymns. Other dance tunes had unusual names, such as 'Op Lap Loo', 'Old Alec Fraser's Waltz' and 'The Nanango'. Howard was

quite versatile, and often would play a tune on accordion and then repeat it on whistle.

Many of their dance tunes were learnt from Howard's father, who did not play an instrument, but who was forever whistling around the house. Their son Lyall, who was not present when I visited, is a musician and songwriter, and some of his compositions have been recorded. A conservationist, he uses his songs to plead for protection of our wildlife.

12



*The Sutcliffe household was a musical one—Howard played accordion, tin whistle and banjo-mandolin; Ethel played accordion; and Oscar the dog vocalised. Their son Lyall is also a noted musician and songwriter.*



*Born in the goldfields village of Windeyer in 1882, Frank Adams lost his arm in a chaff-cutter at the age of 18. He strung his fiddle back to front and played for local dances for the next 60 years.*

## FRANK ADAMS

*Windeyer NSW.*

Perhaps one of the most interesting musicians I met was Frank Adams, the one-armed fiddler of Windeyer. Once a thriving goldrush town with many pubs, when I visited in 1955 there was just one, serving half a dozen houses. At the age of

16, Adams was already an accomplished dance fiddler and was in great demand for social functions in the district. Then, at the age of 18, while cutting chaff, he slipped and his arm went into the machine and was severed below the elbow.

'You might as well sell your fiddle, Frank', his mother told him, 'because you'll never play it again.' Frank thought about this for a while, then, moving the sound post and reversing the bridge, he strung the instrument back to front. Strapping the bow to a leather cup on the stump of the amputated left arm, he taught himself to finger with the right hand, then proceeded to play for local dances for the next 60 years!

On my first visit to Frank, in company with Jeff Way, I discovered that there was no electric power available. Later, Dud Mills drove me from Mudgee to Windeyer, equipped with Dud's DC inverter to operate the recorder, but Frank had gone to Lithgow for the weekend. Three months later we called again—to find that Frank had died and his tumbledown old house had been bulldozed out of existence! I was not fated to record this remarkable and courageous musician, and this was one of the greatest disappointments I met with in my career as a collector.

## JOHN WARN AND PETER PAINTER

*Crooked Corner NSW*

John Warn with his big accordion and Peter Painter on tenor banjo often played at local dances. Together with Peter's father, Bill Painter, on mouth organ, they made up the Crooked Corner Band which mainly played tunes learnt from Bill's father and John's great-grandfather.



## BILLY COUGHLIN

*Gulgong NSW*

During my first visit to Gulgong, Billy Coughlin walked into the pub where I was recording and announced that he knew a song. He told me he suffered a bit from 'stomach nerves' and it took a

couple of middies of stout to quieten them before he could perform.

Born in 1885, Billy knew a few shearing songs that he had learnt about the turn of the century, when he was a teenager.

Years later, Rita Baker told me that Billy was born

in Uarbry, and that he was the town 'character'. He had a limited but ready wit and often the retort he delivered to his tormentors was too close to reality for comfort. 'I wasn't born yester'd'y' was a favourite remark. One day, in response to a question, he said that he might get married some time, and a local wag asked, 'But what would you do with a wife, Billy?' 'Ah, well', drawled Billy, 'I suppose I could starve her like the rest of yers do.'

Coughlin had the job of cutting out the burrs in the Uarbry cemetery. One day, a relative of Rita Baker came visiting, and took a short-cut through the graveyard. To her horror she encountered the body of a man lying face down in the grass. She ran for help and, returning with a constable, discovered that the body was that of Billy who was taking a midday nap in the sun. She was so exasperated, she took to him with her buggy whip and quickly restored him to wide awakesness.



*Once Billy Coughlin was the town character of Uarbry, later on he was the first singer recorded when John Meredith made his first visit to Gulgong in the 1950s.*

## RITA BAKER

*Gulgong NSW*

In June 1981 I attended a Henry Lawson Festival at Gulgong. I was a guest of the Kurtz family who are well known in the district for their Stringybark Bush Band. After the Sunday morning function, Reg Kurtz and I were approached by an elderly lady who remarked 'Reg, I have a nice little schottische tune which I've never heard you play'. Then she whistled it!

The lady was Rita Baker and that chance remark led to my resumption of collecting traditional songs and music with the tape recorder. Mrs Baker was born Rita Adams at Gulgong in 1906 to Australian parents, her mother of Irish descent and her father

English. Soon after Rita's birth the family moved to the locality of Bundella in the Liverpool Ranges, in country so rough they had to take their buggy apart to get it into their land.

There was always a fiddle in their bark house,

and one day Rita's father played 'The Harvest Home Hornpipe', promising the fiddle to the first child who could play it. Seven-year-old Rita qualified, and subsequently learnt many old tunes from her mother and father.



*Rita Baker (nee Adams) learnt all of her tunes from her mother and father, both of whom were competent fiddlers.*



## LEN DAVIS

*Young NSW*

The musical saw is not often met with these days. All the players are old men and young musicians have not been attracted to it. A straight-backed saw is

needed for playing and the handle is held between the knees; one heel is raised off the floor. The tip of the blade is held between thumb and fingers and the blade is bent over—the more it is bent, the higher the note produced. The tip of the blade is bent

back a little in the opposite direction to produce a sort of 'S' contour and this creates the ringing tone. The raised heel is moved up and down quickly to provide a vibrato. A saw is not bowed legato like a violin, but given deft staccato touches to set the blade ringing.

In company with Jamie Carlin, I found Len Davis (born 1915) taking part in a free lunchtime concert for aged pensioners. A quartet was playing, made up of piano, violin, saw and tenor voice. Len played in unison with the violin and the overall effect was like that of a phantom soprano joining the tenor. The group performed popular songs from the early part of this century.

I had previously heard of two cross-cut saw players, one in Tasmania and one in Western Australia, but both died before I was able to record them. In playing the cross-cut saw the bottom end of the two metre blade is placed in a slot cut in a wood block, on which the player stands; the tip is fitted into a small wood block with a handle to facilitate creating the 'S' curve. The Tasmanian player used a bow on the big blade, while the Western Australian man hammered it with a double-ended stick such as is used to play the bodhran.



*Len Davis playing the musical saw in company with Jean Goodridge on piano at a pensioners' lunchtime concert.*



## BILL PAINTER

*Crooked Corner NSW*

Bill Painter on mouth organ, his son Peter on banjo and John Warn with his big four-row button accordion made up the Crooked Corner Band. Having missed getting a photo of Bill with the band, I spotted him next morning in a paddock feeding his sheep (it was the time of the 1980s drought). By good luck Bill happened to have his instrument with him, and as he sat on the tailboard of his truck playing and posing for his photo, a lamb came up and stood listening intently to the varsoviana he was playing. One almost expected it to bleat out a special request: 'Hey mister! Can you play "Click go the Shears"?'

*Fred Large (left), a noted bush songster, and Arthur Davis on accordion introduced John Meredith to many local musicians in the Gulgong and Ulan areas.*



## ARTHUR DAVIS AND FRED LARGE

*Ulan NSW*

Arthur Davis was born at Avisford on Meroo Creek, an alluvial goldfield about 30 km from Mudgee, where his father and his uncle, George Davis, worked a claim. Arthur had a small farming property at Cullenbone,

halfway between Mudgee and Gulgong, where Duke Tritton was his next-door neighbour. Whenever I went to Gulgong Arthur and his son Les would turn up, in company with Duke. Invariably they knew of somebody who had not yet been recorded, so away we would all go in Arthur's small car.

Fred Large lived at Cooks Gap on the road to

Ulan. He was a son of the late Bill Large, a noted bush songster and concertina player. Bill had achieved local fame when he was recorded on Edison cylinders in the mid-1920s. Most of Fred's tunes and songs had been learnt from his father. In the 1950s not many rural properties had an electrical supply, so it meant a trip to Ulan looking for one. The local pub had electricity, but

unfortunately Fred had been 'barred' for some misdemeanour, so we couldn't go there. We spotted a power line going into a nearby cottage, and asked the lady of the house if we might use her power point. She was just going out to church, but told us to go in and make ourselves at home during her absence—a rare kind of hospitality!

## VERA LEE

*Terang Vic.*

Most of the musicians in this book were self-taught and played by ear—'lug players'. Not so Vera Lee, born 1901, who was a highly qualified pianist and who, for many years, had taught piano, harmony and counterpoint in Terang. She used to play piano in John McKinnon's Orchestra, and in the 1920s and 1930s played piano for the silent movies in Terang.

I was in company with Lyndon Badcoe and we were highly entertained when we demanded on-the-spot mood music for various scenarios, such as: 'What



She informed us that she had had a heart attack a couple of weeks earlier, was pronounced dead, but then responded to heart massage. A month after our visit she had another attack, this time fatal. So we recorded her between her two deaths, as it were!

*Sprightly pianist Vera Lee had, only two weeks earlier, been clinically dead from a heart attack. Revived by prompt medical attention, she recorded old-time dance tunes and silent movie music, then died again a month later.*

did you play when the Indians were chasing the cowboys? when the soldiers returned from the war? when a baby died? when Rudolph Valentino was making love in the desert? and so on. Vera Lee played some traditional dance tunes for us to record, including music for the 'ser' dances and a rattling good version of 'The Mountain Belle' schottische.

## PERCY YARNOLD

*Wingham NSW*

Up in the town of bats, Percy Yarnold demonstrates the 'swing' of a concertina on his large 'Chinese Lantern' instrument. Percy came from a family in which everyone played a musical instrument. Percy could also play the button accordion, piano accordion and electronic organ. A member of Keightley's Dance Band, Percy used to receive 12 shillings for a whole night's playing.



## KATE (MA) SEAL

*Kimba SA*

Born in 1901, Ma Seal is probably the most remarkable accordion player I have met. She learnt to play at the age of five and played for her first dance when she was nine. The dance was held in a wheat shed, where they sat her on a couple of bags of wheat. Halfway through the night the dirt floor began to break up and the poor little musician was almost smothered in dust!

20

Ma Seal learnt many of her old dance tunes from an Irishman named John Dolman, while she was still a young girl. She has a very individual style of playing; light of touch, she decorates her tunes with grace notes, inverted mordents and other variations I have not identified. Sometimes the decoration renders the tune almost unrecognisable. In spite of this, she maintains a perfect dance tempo and always ends a piece with a sort of triumphant swell.

In company with Martin Fallding, then Jamie Carlin, and finally Peter Ellis, I made three trips to Kimba to record this remarkable lady. They resulted in the taping of 131 items, over a third of which were quite new to me. Also, she introduced us to a dance which was completely new to us, the waltz-mazurka. A monograph on Ma including a selection of her tunes has recently been published by Carrawobbit Press.



*Ma Seal learnt to play the accordion when she was five and played for her first dance when she was nine. She dances as she plays, with fingering as light and dainty as a butterfly on the keys. She was 85 years old when photographed and recorded.*

## THE DAWSONS

*Franklin Tas.*

The Dawsons are berry farmers, living on a hillside above the Huon Valley. The family consists of two brothers and two sisters, all unmarried—Ivy (born 1915), George (born 1918), Paddy (born 1919) and Edie (born 1925). George, Paddy and Edie all play accordion, but during the period of my visits in 1985–86 George was ill and unable to handle an instrument. There was also Louie, the dog who struck a pose every time he sighted a camera.

Most of the Dawsons' tunes came from their parents, both of whom played accordion and sang. Other items came from uncles and neighbours. One neighbour, Evi Mansfield, lived across a valley from the Dawsons and, when he sat on his verandah and played on summer evenings, the Dawsons would go out and sit on their woodheap to listen. This way they learnt quite a number of pieces from Evi.

The Dawsons had their own names for tunes. As Edie remarked about one item, 'That's not its real name—it's a name that's been put on it'. Frequently it would be a name 'that the music says when you play it'. Thus an English folk dance tune became 'Doo Doo Dootchity', and 'Jack's Waltz', as named by Sally Sloane, became 'Tom Don't Want Any Apples' Working

through their little book of tune titles certainly had many surprises for me. In three visits I recorded 130 items from the Dawsons.



*The Dawsons: from left Ivy, Paddy 'Louie', Edie and George.*

## GEORGE BLACKMAN

*Mudgee NSW*

The Blackman family were among the first settlers in the Cudgegong Valley at Mudgee, and George is the fourth generation of Mudgee musicians to carry the name. Many of the traditional dance tunes played by local musicians can be traced back to his grandfather, Tom Blackman Senior.

George's songs and tunes have been learnt from such old masters as Fred Holland, George Davis and his father, Tom Blackman. A few of

them came from the Oakley family of Cooks Gap. Of course George knew and played all of the Mudgee classics such as 'A Starry Night for a Ramble', 'The Mudgee Schottische', 'Spookendyke's Waltz' and 'The Mudgee Waltz'.

He surprised me by saying that all of the old hands used to sing a bit of a song to the last-mentioned tune. He could not remember much of it, but told me it commenced with: 'Here I float in my golden boat...' Perhaps one day somebody might trace the

rest of these words and provide the original title to one of our best-known and best-loved traditional waltz tunes.



*Great-grandson of one of Mudgee's pioneer settlers, George Blackman carries on the family musical tradition playing tunes learnt from his father, Tom Blackman, and from Fred Holland.*

**EDDY AND ALBY  
LASSICH***Lower Dargo Vic*

Eddy and Alby Lassich are of German descent. In their younger days the Lassich brothers both played button accordion and liked to play Scottish and Irish song tunes. Born in the early 1900s they live on their father's old selection in a rundown log cabin on the river bank. Grandfather Lassich migrated to Australia during the goldrush years.



## HARRY DICKS

*Timboon Vic.*



*Legendary bush singer Harry Dicks farmed in the western district of Victoria, but originally came from Bearbong near Gilgandra in New South Wales.*

While on a visit to Gilgandra, I met a local farmer, Bob Dicks, who told me about his uncle, Harry Dicks. Harry had grown up at nearby Bearbong, but had moved to Timboon in western Victoria. 'Uncle Harry knows dozens of old shearers' songs', he assured. The following year, in company with Lyndon Badcoe, I was able to call on Harry, and we found that Bob had told the truth. Not only was Harry a wealth of information with shearers' songs and folklore, but he knew several rare old British ballads as well.

'Sometimes,' remarked Harry, 'you hear a song and it means something to you and you take it up. Then sometimes you hear something and it means nothing to you, and you still take it up—like that "Chicken and the Bone" thing.' We were curious and asked for the song. When he sang it we were

dumbfounded. It was a full and complete version of the 15th century Scottish riddle ballad, 'Captain Wedderburn's Courtship'. Not only that, but investigation showed it to be the rare Ulster version, known only from a manuscript in the British Museum! Harry had picked it up from a pen-mate in Oberon named Hilton Hogan, who had apparently drunk himself to death not long afterwards.

A rough bushman with only an elementary education, Harry had a great singing voice, a ready sense of humour and an infectious laugh. In proof of the old saying that 'laughter is a good tonic', one always left the Dicks' home in a lighter mood than when one arrived!

## WILLIAM COOPER

*Parkees NSW*

Born in 1898, Bill Cooper was a youthful-looking 88 when I visited him, in company with Rob Willis of Forbes. Self-taught, he played both fiddle and button accordion and had an extensive list of tunes he had picked up during a life-long association with other bush musicians. His violin, a German Stradivarius copy, had been bought for his sister for 35 shillings but, after a couple of terms with a teacher, she decided not to go on with it, so Bill scored the instrument.

Bill had read a book of how the British Gypsies liked to play fiddle while sitting on the ground. He tried this position and found it suited him better than standing or sitting in a chair, although to a spectator it looks most awkward and uncomfortable.



*Bill Cooper playing his fiddle in the unusual sitting position he adopted after reading of how gypsies liked to play while sitting on the ground*

He had a double-row accordion in the keys of C and G. He preferred playing in the key of C, as he then could play the F# from the G row when occasionally he needed that note. Bill rattled off 35 tunes during a recording session with us, most of them played on the fiddle in the unique sitting position.



## VIOLET ENDACOTT

*Mudgee NSW*

Reg Kurtz has located numerous performers in the Mudgee district for me to record. One of them was an elfin-like lady named Violet



Endacott. Born at Rylstone in 1905, she was a daughter of Arthur Gosper of Rylstone and Yarragrin, in his day a noted fiddler who played for dances in those districts. Violet was a frail-looking little lady; when introduced, I went to give her a light handshake, and was startled to receive in response a veritable 'knuckle-cruncher'!

But the strong-fisted lady had a lighter touch when she played both piano and button accordion for us. Her tunes, of course, had all descended from her father's playing. He, as well as being a competent fiddler, had played organ for services in the Rylstone church.

In Rylstone, I heard a legend about one of the Gosper ancestors who had discovered a route through the mountains from Scone to Bathurst via Capertee Valley, subsequently putting his knowledge to a profitable use. He used to lift mobs of clean-skins—and perhaps a few branded beasts—driving them through what is now Wollemi National Park via his 'Gosper Track', and then sell them in the Bathurst district!

*Violet Endacott came from a musical family, the Gospers, her father, Arthur Gosper of Yarragrin, being a noted fiddler. Her grandfather pioneered stock routes from the Upper Hunter Valley across to the Bathurst and Mudgee districts.*

## DAISY SUTTON

*Wedderburn Vic.*

Daisy lived in a little old weatherboard cottage in the main street of Wedderburn, the old goldrush township in central Victoria. Born in 1905, she was rather shy about playing for a tape

recording, and would not play in the evening because 'it upset her heart' and she could not sleep afterward.

We organised a morning session, with her neighbour, Lindsay Holt, backing her up with his accordion. Once Daisy got started, there was no holding her! Mazurkas, polkas, waltzes, schottisches, jigs and reels came flying out of her fiddle in rapid succession. It took several recording sessions before her repertoire even looked like being exhausted.

Daisy Sutton's cottage was filled with her oil paintings, chiefly landscapes which she painted from colour photographs. Daisy was a foundation member of the Wedderburn Oldtimers Orchestra.



*A foundation member of the Wedderburn Oldtimers Orchestra, Daisy Sutton had an enormous repertoire of mazurkas, polkas, waltzes, schottisches, jigs and reels.*

## CHIP HARDING

*Parilla SA*

It was May 1985. Martin Fallding and I had crossed the border into South Australia on our big field trip, then headed north for Parilla via Pinaroo. We were looking for Artie Schumaker and Brian Harding, both accordion players. I knocked at the Harding door, a lady



*Dressed in his white nightshirt and looking like a 'bald-headed angel', Chip Harding played long into the night at a recording session with John Meredith.*

answered and I asked for Mr Harding. 'He lives here, but don't call him Mister—his name is Chip.' 'Right-oh, Mrs Harding.' 'Don't call me Missus! The name's Bubbles.'

We talked on, and I told her why we were there. She said her husband would play for us, that Artie was their next-door neighbour and they would ask him to come in. I offered to find a camping spot down by the river and call after tea. She laughed. 'The nearest river is 100 kilometres away. You'll be camping here with us, and you'll have your tea with us too.' I had no argument against that.

Chip arrived home from work soon after. He had been smashing up mallee roots with a block-buster and was smothered in dust. He went for a shower and emerged in a long, white cotton-knit nightshirt, looking for all the world like a bald-headed angel! Then it was tea-time, and what a wonderful meal Bubbles served—spicy home-made sausages and home-grown vegies, followed by home-preserved fruit and ice-cream, home-made also! Then we settled down for music-making long into the night, aided by niddy glasses of port!

## TOM GIBBONS

*Gulgong NSW*

Tom Gibbons, 88 years old when recorded at Gulgong by John Meredith, sang several old bush songs, including the bawdy 'My Beautiful Muff', a great favourite with drinkers in the back parlour of the Centennial Hotel.



## WALTER TRANTER

*Mudgee NSW*

Mouth organist, singer and yarn spinner, Walter Tranter was 100 years old when this photo was taken. Tranter sang a few songs for Meredith to record, then produced a big Hohner chromatic harmonica and played for him. In his younger days Walter had been a champion dancer and had won many prizes for his waltzing. He described old-time waltz competitions in

which one rule was that the gentlemen's heels must not touch the floor and, to ensure against this, half eggshells were attached to their heels with sealing wax. On one occasion, Walter Tranter danced for eight minutes before he cracked his eggshells. He died in his 103rd year.





**JACK LUSCOMBE**

*Ryde NSW*

The shearers strike of 1891 is legendary in trade union history, and I was amazed when, in 1953, I met a man who took part in the momentous event. Jack Luscombe told me: 'I wasn't too old. I was 11 years picking up; I started shearing at 15. I started in the sheds in '84. I was born in '73. I was 15 when I started to shear. I was one of the first shearing with the machines.'

As well as telling me exciting stories about the great strike, Jack Luscombe

sang several important ballads of that time—'The Ribuck Shearer' (sung by every bush band ever since), 'Click, Click, That's How the Shears Go', 'Sam Griffith' (a ballad about a vacillating politician) and a Ned Kelly song. He used an old bush tradition of speaking the last three words of a song, in the manner common to quite a few of the older singers.

Jack Luscombe strengthened my conviction that Banjo Paterson did not write the words of 'Waltzing Matilda' for Christina McPherson on the occasion of his visit in 1894, but merely wrote down for her

the words of an already existing song. Luscombe told me that 'The Bold Fusilier', the song on which 'Matilda' was parodied, was popular in Queensland in the 1880s and 1890s. Later, I collected other evidence that 'Matilda' was being sung at an earlier date—Fred Sloane told me that his father had picked up the song in the Monaro district in 1876, and Arthur Buchanan's father had learnt it as a shearer prior to 1885.

*Jack Luscombe was born in 1873 and provided John Meredith with first-hand accounts and exciting stories about such legendary events as the shearers strike of 1891.*

## TOM O'BRIEN

*Aberdeen NSW*

Born in 1903, Tom O'Brien learnt most of his tunes from a father of Irish descent. In addition to fiddle, he played accordion, mouth organ, jew's harp, tenor banjo and leaf.

Like many other leaf players, Tom declined the gum leaf in favour of the thin, young leaves from a lemon tree. Unfortunately a heart condition cut short his leaf demonstration for me, but after slipping an Angenine tablet under his tongue, he was able to go on with the fiddle.

His fiddle playing was good, but was made more remarkable by the fact that it was all played on three strings. Visiting grandsons had heard Tom complain that his G-string peg kept slipping, so when he was absent they decided to do something about it. With a tube of glue, they cemented



*Tom O'Brien specialised in Irish jigs and reels, learnt from a father of Irish descent. As well as tenor banjo, he played accordion, mouth organ, jew's harp, fiddle and leaf.*

the peg firmly in place, and certainly it no longer slipped! Undaunted, Tom played all his pieces in a higher key to avoid using the G string.

Despite this handicap he was able to rattle off a program of dance tunes that favoured Irish jigs and reels, such as 'Saint Patrick's Day', 'The Wind that Shakes the Barley' and 'The Connaught Man's Ramble'. Tom ended

his recital with a demonstration of that rarely heard little instrument, the jew's harp, which he played by plucking the reed with an inward rather than the usual outward stroke.



## JUSTIN O'BYRNE

31

*Newstead Tas.*

Better known as a Tasmanian senator, holding the position of President of the Senate during the Whitlam Government, Justin O'Byrne was a self-taught mouth organ player. He delighted in singing songs written by his political mate, Les Haylen, who was an author, editor, poet and songwriter.



## OLIVE COTTON

*Koorawatha NSW*

Born in 1911, noted photographer Olive Cotton lives on their 'Spring Forest' property near Cowra with her husband, Ross McInerney, a bird-loving farmer. By way of a change, John Meredith persuaded Olive to pose in front of a camera. With her beloved twin-lens Rollicflex, Olive praised this shot as the first one in which she did not look self-conscious.

*Spending his youth working in the South Australian Mallee, cheery Errol Rodda learnt many of his tunes and his style of playing from the Germanic farmers of the Eyre Peninsula.*

## ERROL RODDA

*Purlewaugh NSW*

Cheerful Errol Rodda had a farm not far from the small village of Purlewaugh, in an area where vast paddocks of sunflowers are cultivated for their oilseed. Born in 1914, he grew up in the South Australian Mallee; at the top end of the Eyre Peninsula during the depression years. He recalled, as a lad, seeing



Cornish miners who, when they met on a street corner, instead of yarning, would break out into harmonised singing. He gave me the addresses of several people with whom he played accordion for dances in those days.

Errol played his two-row accordion in the German style using chords, and many of the polkas, waltzes and mazurkas he had learnt as a young man were of Germanic origin. All the bush accordion players I had met previously had played their melody using single notes, and it was not until I began recording Germanic players in South Australia that I encountered others using the same chordal style as Errol. I asked Jack Muster of Birdwood why he played that way, and he replied, 'Well, I used to sing tenor in the church choir, with the basses behind me and the altos in front, so it seemed just natural to add those parts when I played the accordion'.

As a result of meeting and talking with Errol, I subsequently made seven collecting trips to South Australia to record the music and traditions of the descendants of the mid-19th century German migrants. It was during the first of these trips that I discovered Ma Seal and had the first of three recording sessions with her. It was also the occasion of my visit to Kangaroo Island to meet and record the master musician and singer Tim Whelan.





## CHARLIE FOSTER

*Willygobung Hills,  
Tumbarumba NSW*

Charlie Foster lived on the family farm, free-selected by his father in the Willygobung Hills near Tumbarumba. Most of his tunes were learnt from his father's fiddling.

## FRED RICHARDS

Wingham NSW

Fred Richards was 90 years old when recorded and photographed by John Meredith. He played an enormous heavyweight piano accordion which had to be lifted up and strapped onto him. He was well known for his outrageous yarns and leg-pulling.



## ARNIE AND GARRIE SCHILLER

Murray Bridge SA

The Schiller brothers, Garrie (born in 1920) and Arnie (born in 1924), played mouth organs, and it seemed the natural thing for them to play in harmony. When they began to play some song tunes, their wives joined in, singing in harmony, of course. I was surprised to discover the unusual circumstance of two brothers married to two

sisters—Garrie to Rita and Arnie to Gladys—which, they said, made their children 'double cousins'!

When I asked on a subsequent visit if I could film them performing, Garrie said the filming would be at Arnie's place because he had an organ, and they could sing to that. I had visions of one of those Japanese electronic monstrosities, so I was agreeably surprised to find that the instrument in question was a small pedal-operated German reed organ. They said

that, when they were young, on Saturday nights one of their parents would play while the rest of the family sang their Lutheran hymns and German folk songs in harmony.

They wanted to re-create that scene and I shot a little classic film as Rita played and they all joined in singing 'Der Herrliche Strom'. The scene was suggestive of an old Dutch painting and I regretted that I was so concerned with shooting the movie I had not brought my still camera with me.

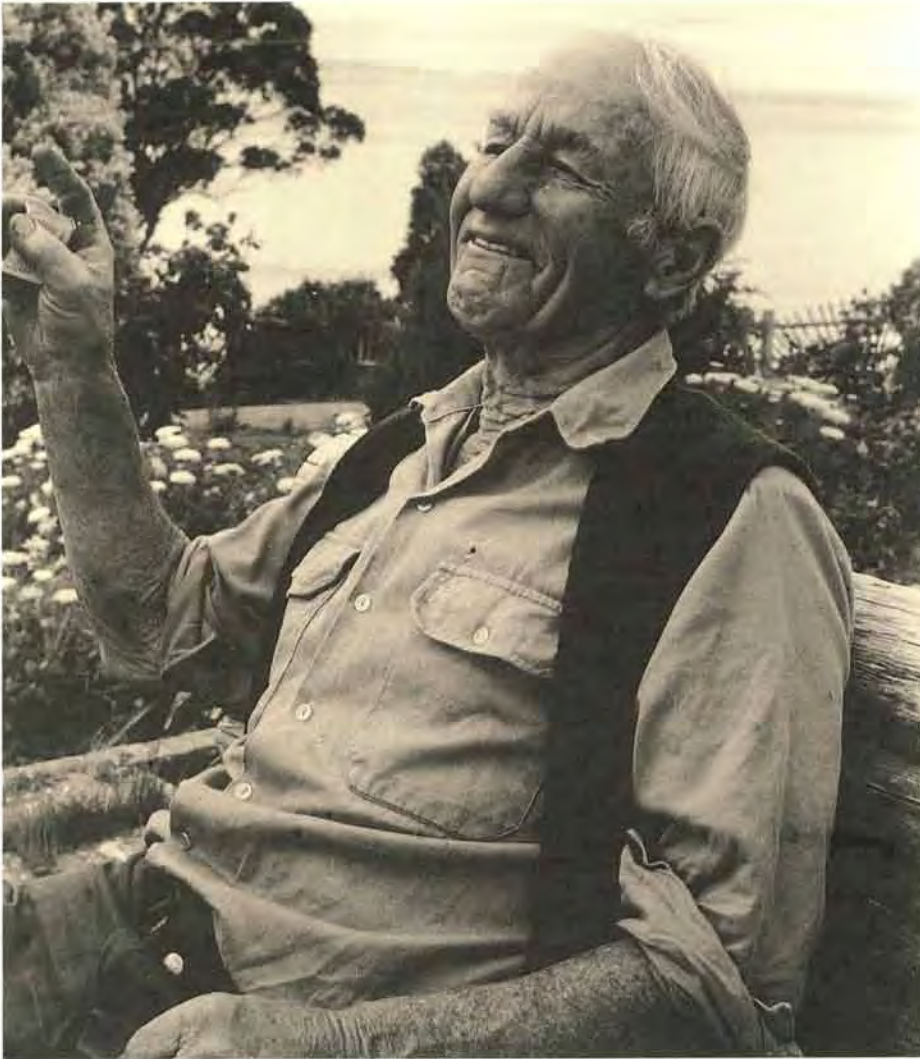


*Garrie and Arnie Schiller came from a background where, as children, they would gather around the family's pedal-operated reed organ on Saturday nights to sing Lutheran hymns and German folk songs. They liked nothing better than to play their mouth organs in harmony while their wives sang, also in harmony.*

## JOHN SHOBRIDGE

*Bruny Island Tas.*

From his home on a clifftop overlooking the Tasman Sea off eastern Tasmania, John Shoobridge is as far removed as is possible from his earlier life of cattle droving in the Northern Territory. In this picturesque setting, he entertains with old drovers' songs and recitations, including his own poetry.



*Shearer and shearing contractor, Mick Pilley was famous throughout the central west of New South Wales for his wonderful fiddle playing, and many local musicians learnt their tunes from him.*



**MICK PILLEY**  
*Mudgee NSW*

Shearer and later shearing contractor, Mick Pilley was famous throughout the central west of New South Wales for his wonderful fiddle playing. When he played for a dance he would

be accompanied by his daughter Merle on piano and her emphatic beat added a foot-tapping lightness to their music.

Mick learnt most of his tunes from his father, who also showed him how to play. His dad had been taught by an old Irish fiddler on the goldfields, about whom Mick told a fantastic tale. The story was that the

old fiddler occasionally got so drunk he couldn't play properly. This upset him so much he'd swear never to play again and, to make certain, he would chop off the ends of his vagrant fingers with an axe. Sober again, and remorseful, he would play once more with shortened digits!

Several musicians in the Mudgee district had tunes

they had learnt from Mick. Years after Mick's death, I was gratified when Herb Archer gave me two schottisches of Mick Pilley's which I had not heard Mick play. A delightful waltz tune, called by Pilley 'I've Got a Saviour That's Mighty to Keep', was later discovered to be a version of Joseph Lanner's 'Evening Star Waltz'.

## SALLY SLOANE

*Eithgow and Teralba NSW*

Sally Sloane was born in Parkes in 1894. Her grandmother, Sarah Alexander, came from County Kerry, Ireland, by sailing ship in 1838 when she was 22 years old. She

was a trained singer and, during the voyage to Australia, she so impressed the captain with her singing she was given a permanent place at his table and frequently asked to perform.

Soon after arrival she married Dick Burrowes and then, after he died, Charles Dean. Her first daughter, also named Sarah, learnt to play concertina, button accordion, jew's harp and piano. Sarah the second married Tom Frost, a driver for Cobb and Co., and

passed on her musical skills and her mother's songs to her own daughter, also named Sarah, but later called by the diminutive of Sally. As well as mastering her mother's instruments, Sally learnt to play tin whistle and fiddle.

I first met Sally and her husband, Fred Sloane, in 1954 and visited them with my tape recorder at intervals during the next seven years. Sally's stepfather, William Clegg, had been a railway construction worker, travelling and camping wherever the work was available. Some of Sally's tunes and songs were learnt from him and other bush people while living this itinerant lifestyle.

One of her outstanding songs was a lament, 'Ben Hall', learnt from her mother. Coincidentally, Ben Hall's sister-in-law was the midwife who attended when Sally was born.



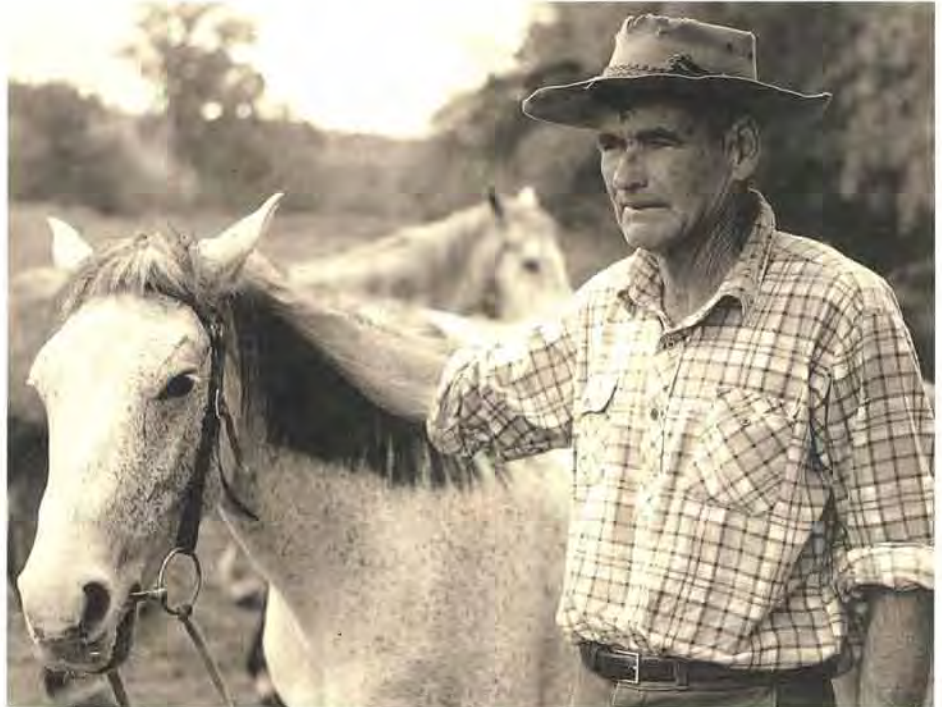
*Sally Sloane played a variety of instruments including tin whistle, mouth organ, accordion and violin. Many of her tunes and songs were learnt from her stepfather, a railway construction worker, and from other itinerant workers, with whom her family travelled and camped in the search for available work.*

## BILL DONOVAN

*Wellington NSW*

Tall, lean, slow-speaking, sincere in his views, and a handy man with a horse, Bill Donovan summed up the average Australian's conception of a typical bushman. He had knocked about the bush and tried his hand at most sorts of jobs on offer, including a long spell as a cattle drover in the Northern Territory. He settled down on a small farm near Wellington where he and his wife, Anne, conducted a riding school with a string of fine-looking mounts.

Bill could recite a ballad or two and sang some bush songs, but, best of all, I enjoyed just sitting back and letting him talk about his droving experiences. He told me of an interesting custom observed in some bush pubs when a mob of shearers or drovers got together for a few beers. This was the



*Bush worker, drover and author Bill Donovan ran a riding school near the Wellington Caves with his wife, Anne.*

holding of a 'Boree Log', a social evening during which each person took a turn to 'stoke the fire', or take the chair and entertain the others. It could be with a song, a tune, a recitation or just a story.

He described how, in the absence of women, if music was available, the men would get up a buck-set of the lancers or the quadrilles. Also, he told me about several sightings of that mysterious phenomenon, the min min, a phantom light regularly observed on the northern plains.

Her father had taught her to waltz when she was a little girl by letting her stand on his feet as he waltzed around the room. When she had learnt the movements, she would step down and dance by herself. I was interested to hear this, as my own mother had taught me to waltz using the same method.

Sally played bones taken from the sun-bleached skeleton of a beast found in a

paddock. With the marrow eaten out by insects, leaving bony coral filling, these bones had a softer and richer tone than the 'green' bones obtained from a butcher, which were then boiled and scraped. And, of course, they were superior to those imitations made from plastic or hardwood. Aged 65 when photographed, Sally's hands had lost none of their dexterity.



*Sally Tompkinson learnt to play bones from an Aboriginal lad. She had hung around him until he agreed to show her how to hold and rattle them. She was so adept that he showed her many of the finer points, and then presented her with his own set of bones.*

## SALLY TOMPKINSON

*Gulgong NSW*

Bones player Sally Tompkinson was born at Coolah and her parents moved to Beryl, near Gulgong, when she was three. One day, when she was about 16 years old, she heard an Aboriginal lad playing the bones. Intrigued, she hung around him until he showed her how to hold and rattle them. She was so adept that he taught her some of the finer points, such as playing a roll, then presented her with his set of bones.

Sally's dad was a drover, as well as being a blacksmith and a wheelwright, and frequently drove sheep interstate. When he was homeward bound, he would send word, and Sally and her mum would saddle up their horses and ride out to meet him, often several days from home. Then she would ride home in the wagonette.

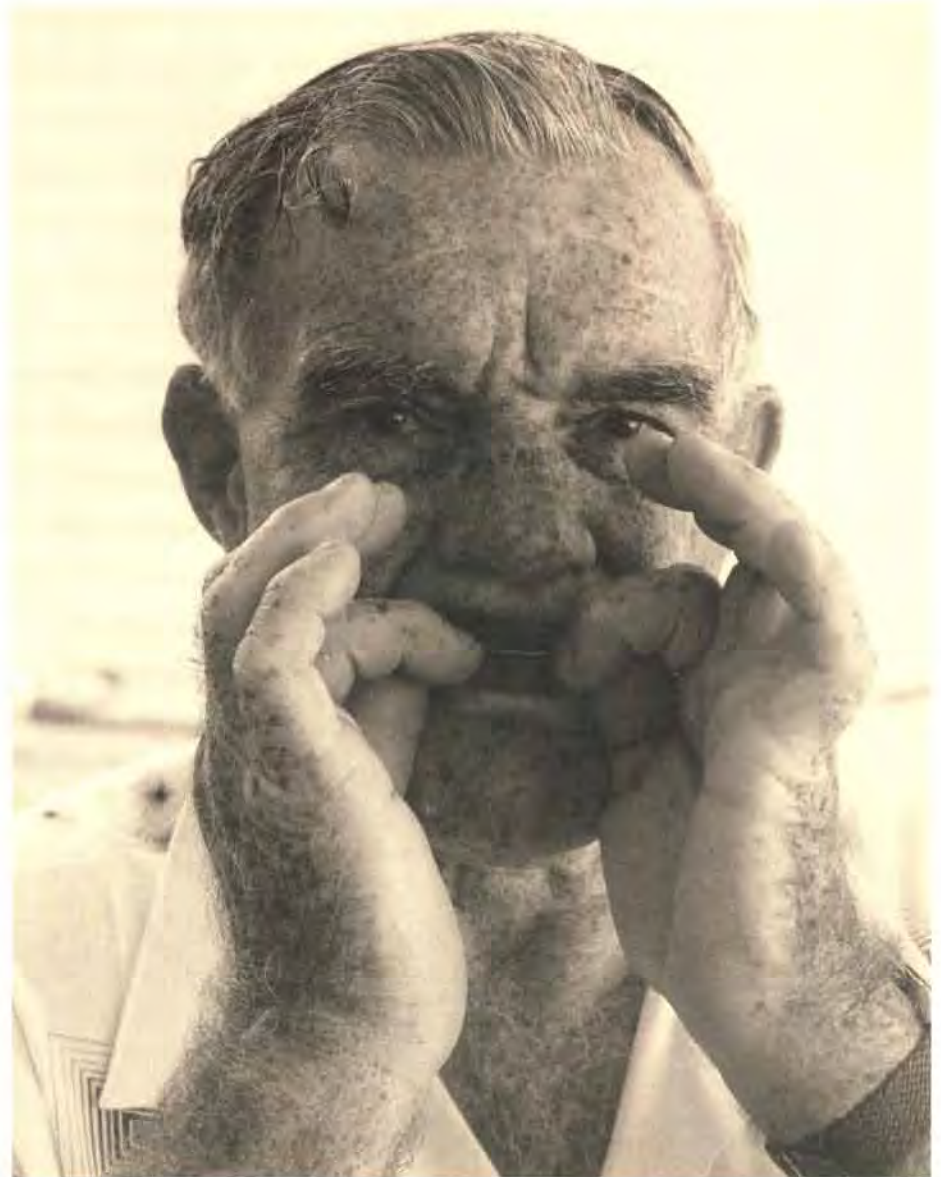


## DUDLEY CARTER

*Narramine NSW*

Each year the town of Maryborough in Victoria holds its Golden Wattle Festival. The main event of the festival is the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship, a contest that carries a prize of \$1000 and a golden gumleaf trophy. During the 1980s Dudley Carter carried off the crown four years in succession!

Peculiarly Australian, gumleaf blowing originated with the autochthonous people of this country, the Aborigines. It was used by the hunter either to attract or to distract game, or to communicate with a fellow hunter. For example, a 'coo-ee', meaning 'come here', softly blown on the leaf would be ignored by a kangaroo, when the same word called out would send the game flying. Sometime during the 19th century, with cultural dislocation, the



Koori learnt to play white man's music on the leaf. The gumleaf made its way into dance music, and leaf-and-drum marching bands were in vogue.

Most players hold the leaf with two fingers on the

lower lip and allow the free edge to vibrate against the top one. Dudley Carter did the reverse. Holding the leaf on the upper lip with one hand, he cupped the other hand around like a mouth-organ player and, moving it

*Several times winner of the coveted Golden Gumleaf Award, Dudley Carter, with his unique way of holding and playing the gumleaf, was an acclaimed Australian champion.*

rapidly, created a tremolo effect—a sweet vibrant tone that made him a repeated winner.



**FRANK  
THOMPSON,  
OSCAR WILDE  
AND STAN LAIETY**

*Manangatang Vix*

With Rob Willis driving, I travelled to Manangatang, in the Victorian Mallee, to visit and record Frank and Lester Thompson. Frank drove us into town to meet Oscar

Wilde—no, not that one, but another just as interesting! As I set up the recorder, I noticed that Oscar had pictures of three women stuck up on his wall, instead of the usual three flying ducks. The top one was the Virgin Mary, number two was the Queen and the third was a bare-bosomed beauty on a Poll centrefold!

After recording Oscar playing his accordion and then his home-made set of chimes, Frank drove us first

to the pub, and then to Stan Laiety's house. There, we emptied an astonishing number of tinnies while the trio discussed local folklore, sang, argued, recited and told yarns. Probably one of the most interesting items was a recitation delivered by Oscar. Born in 1896, he had learnt the piece as a lad at school 80 years earlier. It was titled 'The Discovery of the Inland Sea' and concerned Captain Sturt's expedition in search of that supposed feature.

Driving back to the Thompsons' house in the dusk was almost as astonishing an experience as the afternoon's entertainment. Frank slipped a Jimmy Shand cassette into the player, and then proceeded to beat a lively 6/8 time on the accelerator, causing his station wagon to bound through the mallee like a kangaroo!



*Frank Thompson (right) discusses local folklore over a few drinks with Oscar Wilde (centre) and Stan Laiety. Whenever together, the trio delighted in singing, arguing, reciting and yarn-telling.*



**BILL CHUN**

*Parkes NSW*

Bill Chun's grandfather migrated from China in 1838 and settled on a farm at World's End near the Turon River, in an area that was to become the centre of the New South Wales gold rush. Bill, born in 1906, plays a 'Chinese Lantern' concertina which he swings for tonal effect as he plays, looking as though he is performing his Tai Chi exercises.

**VERA REGAN**

*Capel WA*

Born Vera Machin in 1929, Vera Regan once sang in the locally famed Machin Sisters, a yodelling hillbilly trio. She plays piano, piano-accordion and that odd sort of zither known as a 'guitar-mandolin-banjo'.

Unfortunately, owing to a throat complaint, she is no longer able to yodel.

Her tunes range from hillbilly song tunes to hymns and traditional tunes and ditties she learnt from her grandfather, such as 'Won't You Buy a Man a Drink?' and 'Two Old Washerwomen'.

I was on a recording trip with Peter Ellis when I met Vera! She laughingly showed us her hymn book—the music was written in the tonic solfa system, but, because she did not

understand time signatures, she had added marginal notes to signify the rhythm, such as 'schottische', 'quickstep', 'modern waltz', 'mazurka'. Doubtless Percy Grainger would have been entertained to hear Vera play his 'Country Gardens' as a barndance tune!



*Vera Regan lives in the coastal town of Capel in Western Australia. Born in 1929 she once sang in the locally famed 'Machin Sisters', a hillbilly trio. She plays zither, piano-accordion and piano, but due to a throat ailment can no longer yodel as she used to do with her sisters.*



*A wonderful fiddle player, Stan Treacy grew up in the Limerick district, in what used to be called 'the New Country', a west of the mountains stronghold of Irish settlers in the 19th century.*

## STAN TREACY

*Crookwell NSW*

A wonderful fiddle player, Stan Treacy grew up in the Limerick district in what used to be called 'the New

Country', an area lying west of the Blue Mountains and extending from Bathurst down to Goulburn. In the 19th century it was a stronghold of Irish settlers. In 1983 I travelled through that area on a field trip with Chris Sullivan. Wherever we called, the story was the same: 'You should have been here ten years ago'—until we

tired of hearing about the brilliant fiddle and concertina players who had passed on. Then, while recording the Crooked Corner musicians, we heard about an old fiddler living in Crookwell by the name of Stan Treacy.

Stan was a living example of the sort of musician I had hoped to

meet up with in 'the New Country'. His tune list included jigs, reels and hornpipes; waltzes, mazurkas, varsovianas and polkas; plus, of course, tunes for all of the popular set dances. He played with a lively bouncy rhythm using a strong emphasis on the first beat of each bar. It must have been great music to dance to.

Treacy was the first of many musicians who play 'Clementine' for the mazurka, and he assured us it was one of the best for that dance. But Stan and all the subsequent players used a four-line tune repeated, while all other mazurka tunes consisted of two distinct parts. Some seven years and many 'Clementines' later, Mary Curtiss of Kerang, while being recorded by Rob Willis and me, amazed us both by playing the long sought-after two-part 'Clementine' for a mazurka!

## DOROTHY WARD

*Cooyal NSW*

Dorothy Ward and her husband, George, lived in a little cottage beyond Cooyal, near a geographical feature known locally as 'The Drip'. Born in 1915, Dorothy was the daughter of Charlie Blackman and a niece of Tom Blackman, so she naturally played a number of the Blackman family tunes on her fiddle.

She played a waltz tune for me which she had learnt from Orley Benson of Mudgee, to which she gave the strange name of 'Glon's Alice'. The mystery of the strange name was revealed when I later recorded Orley Benson, and he referred to the tune as 'Gonzallus Waltz'. Further questioning of Orley revealed this to be his pronunciation of 'Gonzales' Waltz'. When Orley was a lad, a swagman fiddler came and camped in a shed near their house, and

he said his name was Gonzales. From listening to the old chap play, Orley and his brother Leo learnt a waltz and a schottische tune. One night they went down to the shed to listen to him and discovered that he had rolled his swag and departed, leaving behind just the two tunes. The Benson brothers always

referred to them as 'Gonzales' Waltz' and 'Gonzales' Schottische'.

Dorothy Ward played another pretty waltz tune she had learnt from her father. Since she had no name for it, I christened it 'Charlie Blackman's Waltz'. Later, when I played the tune at the Kurtz home, Rita Kurtz told me that its

correct name was 'You're Always in the Way', a song her father used to sing.

*Born Dorothy Blackman, Dorothy Ward had a family tradition of music making and learnt some of her tunes from the Benson brothers, Orley (accordion) and Leo (fiddle), who were close neighbours.*



## HARRY MCQUEEN

*Castlemaine Vic.*

Born in 1910, Harry McQueen played in Bill McGlashan's dance band while still a teenager. A skilled player of both the accordion and the mouth organ, Harry provided John Meredith with an extensive list of old-time dance tunes. In later years he formed his own dance band, and gave much of his spare time to teach younger musicians.



## DAVE MATHIAS

*Forbes NSW*

Dave Mathias, the merry musician of Forbes, can play 'Swanee River' in six different dance tempos. A mouth organ virtuoso, he was taught to play by the famous Australian mouth organist, Percy Spouse. Dave Mathias can probably best be described as an instrumental mechanist—he is never so happy as when dismantling and re-assembling musical instruments. As well as playing mouth organ and button accordion, he recites, sings bush ballads and writes little comic dramatic pieces.



*Descended from the Germanic Lutheran refugees of 1838, fiddler Ottie Pfeiffer played many of the lovely old German songs that have been handed down from his ancestors.*

46



## **OTTIE PFEIFFER**

*Trungley Hall NSW*

At the age of 83, Ottie Pfeiffer was still a lively performer on button accordion and fiddle when Martin Fallding and I recorded him in 1985. Ottie and his wife Gertie were both grandchildren of German migrants of the mid-19th century. The women descendants spoke their traditional language much better than the men, and Gertie was no exception. Her

English was so strongly accented one would imagine she had just recently arrived from Berlin!

Ottie had learnt some of his old dance tunes from an Australian mate named Don Hyde, with whom he had a fencing contract at nearby Barellan. But the majority were old Germanic tunes, such as the lovely Christmas song, 'The Christmas Tree is a Beautiful Tree'.

Ottie told me that when he first got his fiddle, his

mother barred him from playing it in the house. Until he ceased making unbearable noises with it, he used to go down the paddock and sit behind the haystack to practise!

*Bush butler and old-time dance musician, Pearly Watling grew up in the Boxers Creek region just north of Goulburn. She can match any man when it comes to swinging a shovel or an axe.*



## PEARLY WATLING

*Goulburn NSW*

Pearly Watling was born Pearl Collins in 1904. Her great-grandfather, George James, was transported from England for stealing. When he was released from servitude he settled on a block of land at Boxers Creek near Goulburn. A member of his English family offered him £200 to change his name and thus protect the family honour, so he took on the name of Collins. He married and had a son, William, born in 1846, who became a good fiddler. William married and had 12 children, most of whom were musicians, including three sons, William, Frank and Lynn, all of whom took up the fiddle. William the second was Pearly's father.

Pearly's great-grandfather, George Collins, was in the habit of visiting a local shanty called the Old

Arrow Inn. He used to get blind drunk and his son Billy used to be sent down to wait outside the shanty to lead his dad home. While doing so he learnt a schottische tune by listening to a fiddler who played in the bar. Later he taught the tune to his musical family, one of whom was Pearly's dad. It was the same tune played by Stan Treacy, John Warn and Vince Holland! One wonders if Warn's great-grandfather, Bill Edwards, might have been the fiddler in the shanty?

A remarkable woman, Pearly handled her big button accordion with ease—the same ease with which she used to dig out 30 tons of shale per week, or cut six tons of baker's wood in the same period. And for 26 years she played championship women's cricket!

## EB WREN

*Forbes NSW*

'Mister Piano Man' would be a better name for a musician with a shed full of gutted and dismembered pianos. Eb Wren used to restore and tune them, occasionally completely rebuilding them. He seemed to have an endless repertoire and enjoyed playing and singing old bush tunes and music hall ditties.



## WALLY WILESMITH

*Tumbarumba NSW*

I first visited Wally Wilesmith at Tumbarumba in order to record his accordion playing. Then I discovered by accident that Wally could sing and had a number of old songs, both music hall and traditional bush ballads. He sang six songs straight off, prompted by his wife, Ivy, when he forgot the words. His first bush ballad was a strange lament dating from the First World War, and set to the tune of 'The Road to Dundee'. The parody is called 'On the Banks of the Murray' and I had heard this item from several other singers.

Then one of the children begged, 'Sing "Jacksons" dad, go on!' In response, Wally sang one of the most significant songs I have come across in recent years. Its correct title is 'The Road to



Omeo' and it was composed and sung by a local character in the 1920s. It is a parody on 'The Road to Gundagai', a shearers' song probably better known these days as 'Lazy Harry's'. The traditional tune for this song had never been collected and it was being sung to various settings made by folk revival performers. Wally had learnt the song from 'Uncle Bill Cook and his boys'.

Uncle Bill Cook was long dead, but I succeeded in

*Bush musician and singer of old bush songs, Wally Wilesmith is the latest of the old-timers who have passed into The Silence. He died on 28 November 1987.*

## CHRIS WOODLAND

*Canberra ACT*

Although he lives in the Australian Capital Territory, 'Woody' is a bushman at heart. Skilled at playing mouth organ and accordion, he was an active member of the Bush Music Club almost from its inception. This picture of his serenade to a wattle was taken in 1957. Now living in retirement, Chris Woodland still maintains a keen interest in



the collection, preservation and performance of our traditional songs, music and recitations, both white Australian and Koori, as well as oral history.

tracing the whereabouts of three of 'the boys', who sang their versions of 'Jacksons' and told me of its origin. In the discovery of 'Jacksons', I had also discovered the original traditional tune for 'Lazy Harry's'.



*A wizard at playing the bones, Dud Mills was also a crack horseman, he could sing, recite, tell yarns and has three published books to his credit.*



49

## DUD MILLS

*Mudgee, NSW*

Dud Mills was a man among men, a bushman among bushmen—they don't come any straighter. A crack horseman and a wizard at playing the bones, he could sing, recite, tell yarns and has three published books to his credit.

Fred Holland's son Vince was Dud's special mate, and

they played together in a bush band in which Dud rode a hybrid pogo-stick/lagerphone around the stage, keeping strictly to the beat, of course.

In 1956 the irrepressible pair came to Sydney to attend a Bush Music Club Singabout Night. They booked into the exclusive Wentworth Hotel—at that time, one of Sydney's best—with Dud worrying the reception desk when he arrived with a lagerphone over his shoulder. When I arrived to have lunch with them, I stepped out of the lift on their floor to find

chamber maids having hysterics and Dud and Vince, for all the world like a couple of old man kangaroos, bounding up and down the corridor on their newly bought pogo-sticks!

Dud had a few eccentric ideas. Once, for a bet, he trained his black barb dog Boo to pace, and drove up the main street of Mudgee with his pacing mare in a jinker and Boo, in white mini-hopples, pacing along behind. Another time, he broke in a couple of steers to the saddle and used to ride around his stock on steer-back.

## CHARLIE BURGESS

*Tumbarumba NSW*

Responding to a letter inserted in a local newspaper, Charlie Burgess was the first of a number of Tumbarumba performers to be recorded by John Meredith. He played button accordion and had a good stock of dance tunes he had learnt from his dad, all played at a brisk pace, and with a tapping foot.



One of Tim Whelan's prized possessions was a walking-stick flute which had once belonged to Oliver Goldsmith, who, according to family tradition, carried it during his rambles through Europe in the 1750s.



### TIM WHELAN

Kangaroo Island SA

Tim Whelan was one of those men you were glad to have met. A pleasant, hospitable, outgoing sort of bloke, he was a virtuoso of the tin whistle, playing many rare tunes he had learnt from old harpists during his youth in Ireland. I made three trips over to Kangaroo Island, each time staying for two or three days, just to record Tim. He played whistle for me, sang songs he had learnt from his parents, and related stories, both traditional and from his own experiences.

Born in 1914, he migrated to Australia as a young man. He was almost a legend among the Celts in Adelaide, and for many years was a big feature at the Port Fairy Folk Festival where he conducted workshops and master classes for the whistle. One of his prized possessions was a walking-stick flute which had

belonged to Oliver Goldsmith. According to family tradition, Goldsmith had carried the walking-stick flute during his rambles through Europe in the 1750s, when he would stroll into an inn, lift his walking-stick and play to the customers. Doubtless it brought him many a free drink!

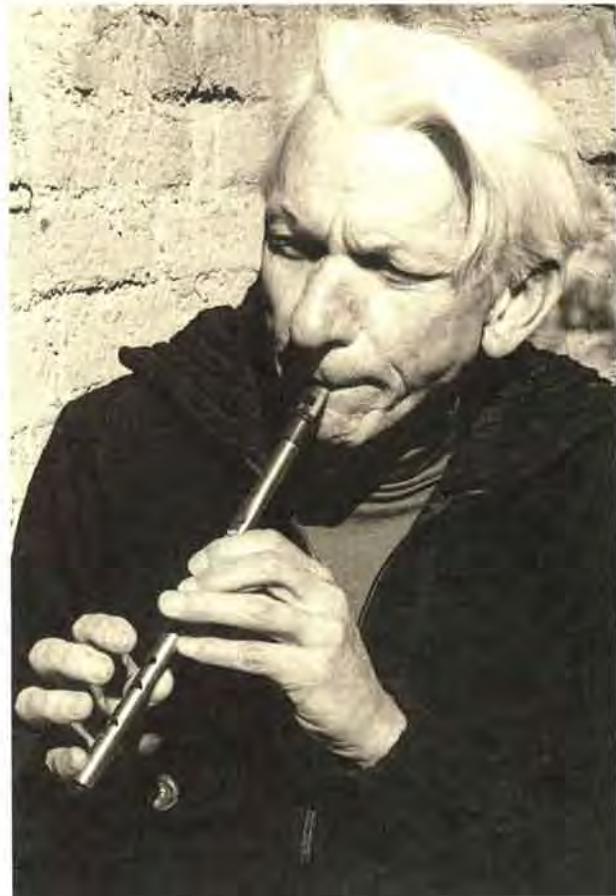
This interesting relic had passed down to a descendant who fell upon hard times and put it up for sale, when it was secured by Tim. It had needed a small repair and, on my last visit in company with Jamie Carlin, Tim, having fixed it, brought it out and played several tunes for us. Shortly after this visit, in December 1989, Tim Whelan died of lung cancer.

### ALAN SCOTT

Balmoral Village NSW

Pioneer collector of Australia folklore, Alan Scott performs many of the tunes he has collected on his tin whistle or concertina. Alan is distinguished as being probably the only Australian nose-flautist, having played

the nose flute or 'tin handkerchief' in the original Bushwhackers Band. He is now well known around Sydney's Rocks area and, with Keith McHenry, has issued a couple of recordings on the Fanged Wombat label.



Keith Graetz was the Australian champion gumleaf player at the Maryborough Bicentennial Golden Wattle Festival carrying a prize of \$1000 and a Golden Gumleaf Trophy. Of German descent, Keith plays an ironbark gumleaf and uses a fresh leaf for each tune. He also plays piano by ear, mainly German dance tunes and New Vogue.



## KEITH GRAETZ

*Stuart Mill Vic.*

Keith Graetz was born in 1928. As a teenager he worked at the Springton logging camp in the Barossa region of South Australia. Once, at a Saturday night dance where the music was supplied by six Aboriginal leaf players, they offered a ten shilling prize to the first person who could play a leaf. Keith won, and spent his prize on cigarettes.

He heard about the Maryborough leaf playing championship contest and first entered in 1981.

Unsuccessful, he persevered and at last, after seven years, he won the championship in the year of the bicentenary, 1988, taking home the legendary golden gumleaf plus a cheque for \$1000. He said the contest gains in popularity every year, with ages of contestants ranging from about 20 up to old men in their 80s.

Although he has tried all sorts of leaves, Keith prefers the leaf of the ironbark gumtree, it being a fairly soft leaf and easy to blow. It is not very durable so he uses a fresh leaf for each tune. His commercial cassette recording *Whistling Gum Leaves* is probably the only one of its kind in Australia.

Of German descent, Keith Graetz also plays piano by ear, mainly German dance tunes plus a little bit of New Vogue music.



## NEVILLE SIMPSON

*Nariel Vic.*

Long-time player with the Nariel Oldtime Band, Neville Simpson has recently taken over the leadership of the band from Keith Klippel whose ill-health forced him to take a back seat, although still playing in the group. The Nariel Band has a big repertoire of old-time dance tunes, and plays for all the dances held in the Nariel Hall. Any player who knows the old song tunes is invited to sit in with the band—often with 12 or more accordions, mouth organs and fiddles belting it out together.

The inimitable Baulch brothers, of 'Loddon Downs' in the Mystic Park region near Swan Hill, have been performing their harmonised stage acts since the mid-1920s. Lloyd, Arthur and Les (Digger) have a riotous act which needs to be seen to be appreciated.



## BAULCH BROTHERS

*Mystic Park  
near Swan Hill Vic.*

Rob Willis and I were recording Garnet Robinson of Lake Kangaroo when I asked if I could film him performing a comic song, 'You Can't Change It'. This brought to light an unusual tradition existing among folk singers—the ownership of songs. 'I wouldn't like to', replied Garnie. 'You see,

that's really Digger Baulch's song. I would rather you filmed Digger doing it.' That led to a meeting with the inimitable Baulch brothers, Digger (born 1915), Lloyd (born 1919) and Arthur (born 1912). The trio, accompanied by Arthur's ukelele, have been performing music hall ditties in harmonised arrangement since the mid-1920s.

Garnie and his wife, Marjory, accompanied us to the Baulch home,

thoughtfully bringing along a large parcel of sandwiches for lunch. As advised by Garnie, we took enough tinnies to 'loosen up' the performers. Then we were treated to the most hilarious recording session I had ever encountered.

Quite a few of the Baulch brothers' items are done as character songs, with actions and impersonations. Some of them are racist, but so frankly racist it is hard for

anybody to take offence—numbers such as 'Nigger Brown' and 'Chin Chin Chinaman'. These items came one after the other, with machine-gun rapidity, while we sat listening, gasping for breath and with tears running down our faces from laughter. Since then, the Baulch brothers have appeared at a National Folk Festival, been featured in a video and have had an album of their songs published by Carrawobbity Press.

## THE KURTZ FAMILY

*Mudgee NSW*

Rita Kurtz is a daughter of Fred Holland and is married to Reg Kurtz, a farmer at Stony Creek, on the Cooyal Road from Mudgee. Reg is descended from two German families, and his father played the violin. It is little wonder then that their two sons, Bruce and Ross, are both talented musicians. The Kurtz family, with the addition of Reg's brother Les and retired school teacher Keith Denny, formed a bush band called Stringybark, which is one of the oldest of its kind in existence.

Since its formation in the early 1950s, the line-up of Stringybark has undergone several changes. The band now consists of Rita and Reg Kurtz, their two sons, Bruce and Ross, and Ross' wife, Judy, who handles vocals and percussion. Since they live in the neighbourhood of Henry

Lawson's boyhood home at Eurunderee, many of their songs are the settings of Lawson poems.

Bruce and Ross between them play a bewildering number of instruments, such as accordion, concertina, mandolin, banjo-mandolin,

tin whistle and guitar. Reg follows in his father's footsteps with fiddle and Rita plays mouth organ. Most of their tunes have been inherited from their musical ancestors, and many others from the old traditional musicians of the Mudgee district.



*Between them, the Kurtz family play a bewildering array of musical instruments including accordion, violin, mouth organ, concertina, mandolin, banjo-mandolin, tin whistle and guitar.*



## DODDY MURPHY

*Bathurst NSW*

About the middle of the 19th century a young Irish migrant named John Murphy bought a bullock team and wagon and commenced carrying supplies from the Sydney Haymarket to Bourke. When he had saved enough money he bought a small farm at The Mount, not far from The Lagoon, south of Bathurst. The area extending southward to Goulburn on the western slopes of the dividing range was largely an Irish enclave known as 'the New Country'.

One of John's sons, Michael (or Mick) Murphy, married Evie McMahon and settled at The Lagoon. Three of their children were musical, learning to play accordion and concertina from their parents. Duddy, Bill and May all sing the songs and play the tunes inherited from their parents. So deeply have they become imbued with the family traditions, all three sing with a marked Irish accent, inherited from their grandfather. Bill plays the piano-accordion, but Duddy favours the more traditional button accordion and concertina. He has a strongly individual style of playing, using a staccato touch on the treble end of the accordion while his legato bass carries a strong dance rhythm.

*Son of Mick Murphy, one of the Irish settlers forming an enclave at The Lagoon and Wisemans Creek, south of Bathurst, Duddy plays his father's old tunes on both Anglo-concertina and accordion.*

A tribal elder of Wallaga Lake, Percy Mumbulla was well known as a singer of his people's traditional songs and a performer on the gumleaf. Born in 1906 he was photographed early in 1990 at the age of 84. He died 18 months later.

## PERCY MUMBULLA

Wallaga Lake NSW

Percy Mumbulla was an elder of the Yuin People in the Tilba-Wallaga Lake area on the New South Wales south coast. He used to play in the famous Wallaga Lake Gumleaf Band during the 1920s and was known to his mates as Uncle Bing, because of his fondness for singing. In his later years he was respected as a poet and a songman. Many of his songs and stories were recorded on tape by poet Roland Robinson during the early 1950s and appear in several volumes of his published work.

Robinson's last book consisted of a selection from these recordings and was titled *The Nearest the White Man Gets*. The pieces he collected from Percy Mumbulla are: 'Jarrangulli', 'Ejenak the Porcupine', 'The Little People', 'The Bugeen',



'The Whalers', 'Uncle Abraham Whose Blackfeller's Name was Minah', 'Bill Bulloo', 'The Surprise Attack', 'Captain Cook' and 'Bees'.

Percy Mumbulla was born in 1906 and died on 17 June 1991, Henry

Lawson's birthday. In company with Ian Tait, I visited Percy early in 1990 and, with the permission of his brother Frank, took some photos of the old man. I attended his funeral service 18 months later, and was disappointed that no

mention was made of his tribal standing, nor of his status as a songman. The ceremony combined Christian rites with the tribal rite of wailing for the dead, which was carried out by Frank as the coffin was carried from the church.

## FRANK POVAH

*Wollar NSW*

One of the younger 'Real Folk', Frank Povah was born in 1940. He began playing ukelele at the age of 11, 'when I was a boy soprano', he said. Later he took up guitar and later still, in 1961, learnt to play the auto-harp. A student of early hillbilly music, Frank soon graduated to jazz and blues. He has knocked about all over Australia from Cape Barren Island to places like Kalgoorlie and Meekatharra.

He can turn his hand to most kinds of bush work and lives in a remarkable two-storeyed slab hut he has built on the banks of the Goulburn River, not far from Wollar, New South Wales. He said that one of the best-paid jobs he ever had was playing guitar and singing in a Kalgoorlie brothel where he got £25 for a night's work and where

the most popular number was 'Frankie and Johnnie'.

In addition to bush ballads, he knows and performs dozens of cowboy and blues songs. He also has a strong interest in Aboriginal traditions, so his repertoire contains quite a few Koori numbers.

Following the police shooting of David Gundy, Frank sat up all night composing a blues lament, 'A Song for David Gundy', which he recorded on tape and subsequently in a film I made featuring Frank and

*Frank Povah lives in an old self-built colonial cottage at O'Briens Crossing near Wollar. He plays blues guitar and auto-harp and is well known as a folklorist, author and singer.*



his music, titled *Back of Wollar*. Also featured in this film was his composition for the auto-harp, the lovely 'Ironbark Waltz'.





### **BILLY CARTNER**

*Lower Dargo Vic.*

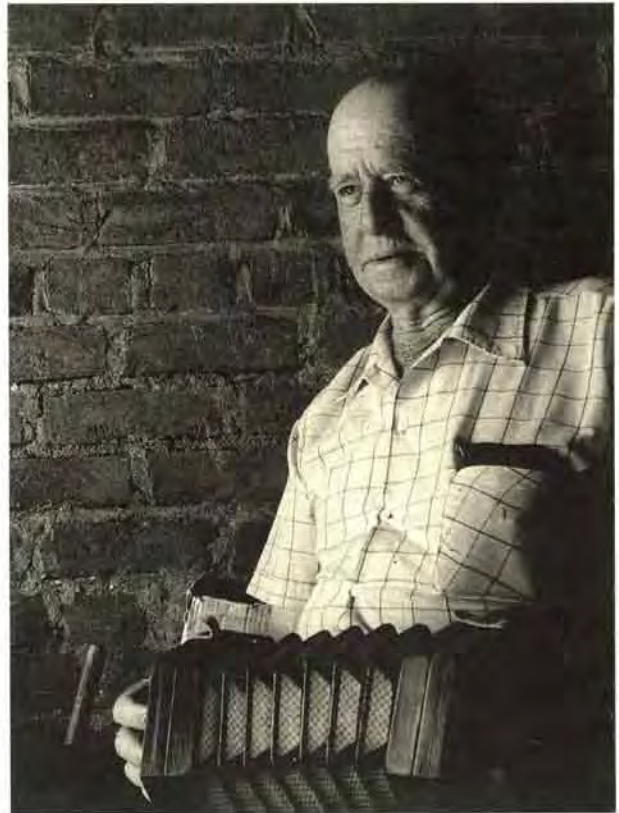
A whimsical larrikin born in 1899, Billy Cartner lived in a remote spot on the Lower Dargo River in Gippsland. One of his favourite songs was the 'Wild Colonial Boy'. When photographed by John Meredith, Billy and his garb seemed to have been strangers to soap and water for quite a while.

### **JIM HARRISON**

*Khancoban NSW*

Son of one of the Upper Murray pioneers, Jim Harrison's father was probably the model for the man in Banjo Paterson's poem: 'There was Harrison who made his pile when Pardon won the cup'.

Jim was born in 1911 and still lives on the original family property near Khancoban. He loves to play his Anglo-German concertina with a swinging motion, resulting in a ringing tone. He once swung his instrument with such gusto that he pulled it in half!



**JIM GIBBONS***Gulgong, NSW*

Jim Gibbons recited 22 stanzas of 'How Tattersall's Cup Was Won' for John Meredith during a recording session at Gulgong. He became so excited during the recitation that he ended up reeling it off like a racing commentator. This and several other pieces were learnt while Jim was shearing at Coonamble.



## BOB AND BERT MURRAY

*Burrell Creek,  
near Wingham NSW*

On a northern field trip Rob Willis and I drove out to Burrell Creek hoping to record a fiddler named Ernie Wells. His son answered the door and told us: 'You won't be able to tape the old man.

He doesn't play anymore; he's given his fiddle to the bloke next door. Anyhow he's still in bed. He celebrated his 80th birthday last night and he's sleeping it off.' Next door, we found the recipient of the fiddle, Bert Murray (born 1922) and his brother, piano-vamping Bob (born 1917).

The brothers batched together in a remarkable, big H-shaped house built by their grandfather. Constructed of timber cut on the property, the dwelling

was lined with wainscoting of alternate red and white cedar boards, with an open-fronted dancing room occupying the top of the 'H' and with verandahs all the way around.

The brothers performed for us in the music room, which opened onto the dance space, with Bob remarking: 'Gosh, I haven't been in here for over a month!' Bert and Bob knew most of Ernie Wells' tunes, in addition to many other old dance tunes inherited from their parents and their Uncle Willy. Bob demonstrated how he could vamp in the keys of G and D, and Bert kept a heavily-booted foot tapping throughout every tune. And, all the time, he played on the old Ernie Wells' fiddle!



*Bob Murray vamps piano by ear and his brother Bert plays the violin. They learnt their tunes from their parents and from a fiddler neighbour, Ernie Wells, whose violin Bert still plays.*

*Babs Vincent is a Koori who works on Wilkaboos Station, near Mount Hope.*

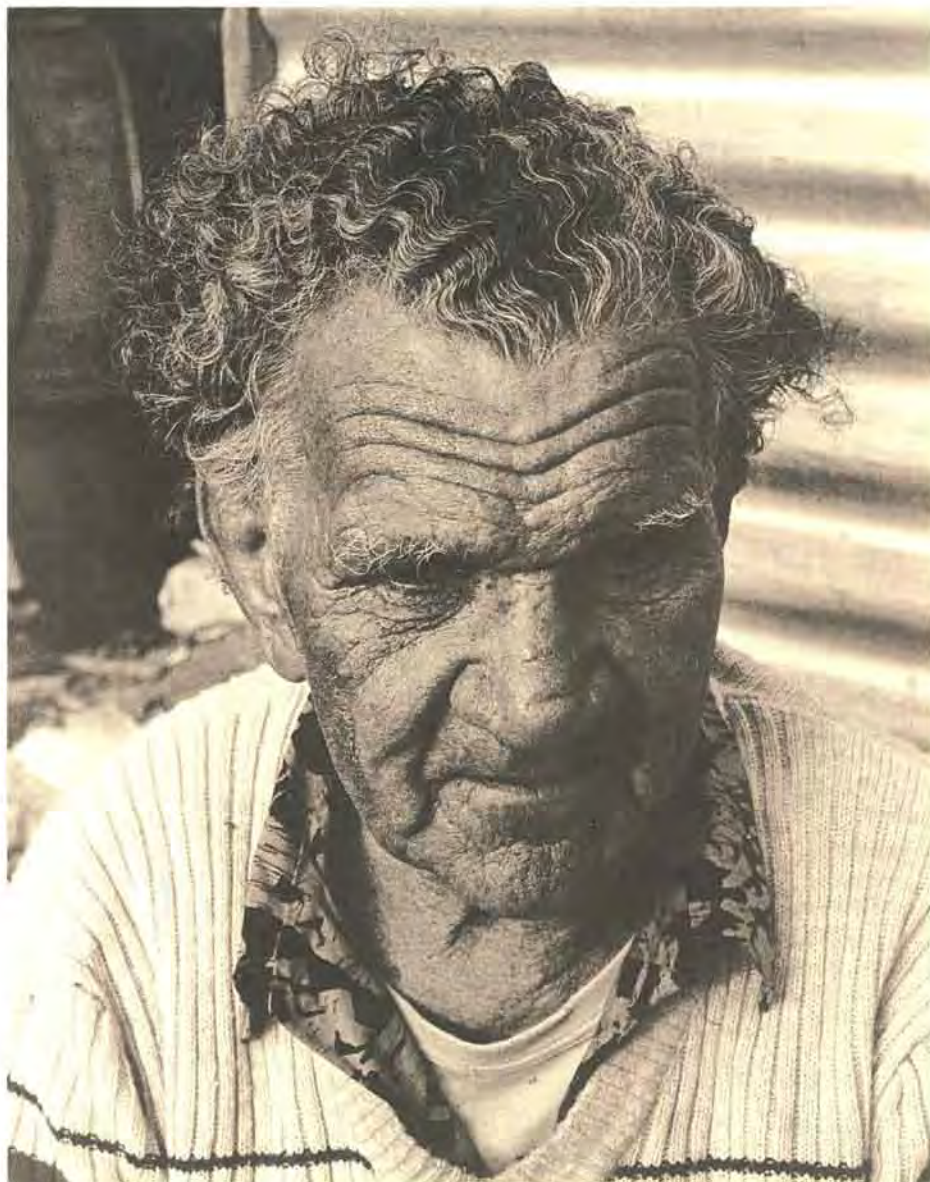
*Good-humoured Babs, well-known locally as a songwriter, sings, recites and tells stories with local themes.*

## BABS VINCENT

*Wilkaboos Station,  
Mount Hope NSW*

Babs Vincent, born 1915, is a Koori who works on Wilkaboos Station, which is situated roughly between Mount Hope and Cobar. He is well known to most western shearers and to anybody connected with rabbit freezers in the central west of New South Wales. Most of them have entertaining yarns to tell of Babs and his doings.

But Babs gets his own back on them. A sharp observer of human behaviour, he writes brilliant satirical songs and poems about both white and black, a good example of which is his ballad titled 'Mitchy's Talking Shearers'. This is yet another one of those poems on the 'shearing in a bar' theme—about shearers who can talk of nothing else but sex when they are out in the



sheds and of nothing but shearing when they come to town to knock down a cheque and have a good time.

Babs comes from Euabalong, and he has very strong feelings about the song recorded by A.L. Lloyd as 'The Euabalong Ball'. He insists that the song should be, and always has been, 'The Wooyeo Ball'. Babs

kept Rob Willis and me rocking with laughter as he told story after story, like the one about when his dad was playing gumleaf—with piano—for a dance. Old man Vincent laid his leaf down while he rolled a smoke and somebody walked on it. 'Hey!' yelled the old chap. 'Get yer bloody number nines orf my instrument!'

## FRED HOLLAND

*Mudgee NSW*

Fred Holland was 88 years old when recorded in 1957. He lived all his life in the Mudgee district and earned his living as a bush worker. He played a concertina, bought 45 years earlier, which had been made by the well-known instrument maker, John Stanley of Bathurst.

I found it difficult to record Fred, because he lived with his son in a remote area

that had no electric power, and he rarely visited Mudgee. At last pastoralist Dud Mills came to my rescue. Dud had a Landrover fitted with an inverter, which could supply the required 240 volts AC power from its battery. 'Gulgamree', the Holland homestead, was set in a deep valley surrounded by precipitous hills, and Dud took delight in going in 'the back way', down the steepest slopes imaginable, and I had to cling to the crash bar while he crept down headlong

descents in low double-reduced gear!

Fred Holland taught most of the old Mudgee musicians to play those lovely local tunes which have become known as 'The Mudgee Waltz' and 'The Mudgee Schottische'. Fred's children, four sons and a daughter, all played musical instruments. Vince and Keith Holland played accordion and often teamed up, playing as a duo for local dances—two of the best accordion players I had met.



*A proud owner of a 'John Stanley' concertina, Fred Holland was renowned throughout the Mudgee area for his musical talent. He passed on his knowledge and skill to his children and to many old Mudgee musicians.*

## ARTHUR GALLAGHER

*Wisemans Creek NSW*

In the late 19th century there was a thriving enclave of Irish settlers and gold fossickers living at Wisemans Creek and nearby Lagoon. Now there is just a scattering of their descendants, mostly



*Arthur Gallagher and his wife, Jean, are the last of what used to be a thriving enclave of descendants of the Irish settler pioneers of Wisemans Creek and The Lagoon. Arthur plays the mouth organ.*

small farmers. Arthur Gallagher and his wife, Jean, are a couple of those who still live in much the same style as their parents did.

Born in 1906, Arthur built the small cottage they live in. It is a mud dwelling, either pisé or wattle-and-daub, with a ceiling of calico nailed to the rafters. Outside is a magnificent view over grassy flats to Wisemans Creek. Shortly before my arrival, Arthur had been skinning rabbits and, although he had scrubbed up, there must have been a lingering scent which attracted a blowfly. As I recorded Arthur playing on his mouth organ, the damned thing kept zooming over the microphone, sounding for all the world like an old prop-driven dive bomber!

Arthur's tunes were a mixture of traditional Irish melodies, learnt from his father and other nearby players, plus many old-time song tunes—a similar repertoire to that of Doddy Murphy, a musician who grew up nearby at The Lagoon.

## JOHN (JACK) ARGUS

*Ora Banda WA*

One of the most exciting field trips I have undertaken was in 1991 when Peter Ellis drove me to Western Australia in a beautifully

restored FJ Holden. On arrival at Kambalda my cousin Errol Meredith told us about a 91-year-old fiddler who lived at Ora Banda, an abandoned goldfield north-west of Kalgoorlie. In common with other goldrush towns, all the dwellings, built

of galvanised iron, had been jacked up and carted away when the field was worked out, leaving just the old stone Ora Banda Hotel. This has become a tourist attraction—the pub with no town! Mallee regrowth has covered the town site, with street signs scattered through the scrub.

Jack Argus lived in a tin hut about a mile from the pub. He said there was no room in his hut and took us to a tin shed, open at both ends. Here I set up the DAT recorder on the back of an old flat-top truck. Ora Banda was being reworked with modern equipment and, just as we began recording, a mammoth earthmover started up in opposition. By moving Jack closer to the microphone and recording at a lower level, we managed to push the noise of the intruder into the background.

The old chap had a wide-ranging bag of tunes, from Dvorak's 'Humoresque' and 'The Merry Widow Waltz' to Irish jigs and Scottish reels. He played 'The Billy Boiled Over' in both jig-time and waltz-time, pausing in the middle to give vent to a few lurid curses directed at the little bush flies in his eyes! At the end of the recital we took him to the pub for a few beers and the biggest hamburgers I had ever seen, the famous Ora Banda burger.

63



*Jack Argus lives in a shack on the abandoned gold diggings of Ora Banda in Western Australia. Born in 1900 and recorded in 1991, he plays a wide-ranging bag of tunes, from Dvorak's 'Humoresque' to Irish jigs, Scottish reels and popular songs. At 91 he still appreciated a few beers each day at the local.*

## JOE YATES

*Sofala NSW*

'Old Joe' Yates loved living in the old mining village of Sofala, where he played his fiddle and grew prize-winning vegetables in his kitchen garden. Joe's repertoire of dance tunes and music hall songs was inexhaustible—John Meredith recorded over 150 items. All his family either played or sang. Joe grew up at Hill End and knew many tunes that were popular on the goldfields.



64



## HARRY BORMANN

*Claypans SA*

Harry Bormann (born 1901) is pictured with his irrepressible singing dog, 'Bobby', who enthusiastically joined in whenever his master played the accordion. Since Jamie Carlin and John Meredith were recording Harry on the verandah, there was no escaping the melodious mutt.



## LENNIE COOK

*Tumbarumba NSW*

The Cooks and the Wilesmiths are the traditional song-carriers of the Tumbarumba district. The families are interrelated. Wally Wilesmith told me that he learnt most of his

songs from Uncle Bill Cook and his sons, Jack and Bert. Lennie Cook's dad and Uncle Bill were brothers. Lennie's sister Ivy married her cousin Wally Wilesmith, and they all seem to know each other's songs.

I was chasing a particular shearers' song, in which the name of a creek referred to is generally localised, and I was told that Lennie knew a 'Tumbarumba Creek'

version. He was adamant that he did not know it but, after some thought, remarked that he knew a 'Batlow Creek' song, and that is how we came to get yet another version. Lennie knows several other traditional songs, as well as music hall ditties and yodelling songs of the 1930s. He is particularly fond of the latter, and will burst into a yodel at the drop of a hat!

He has a fascinating old farm out on Union Jack Road, where he runs a few horses. He has a pack of his own breed of hunting dogs, a staghound-greyhound cross. 'Fast enough to catch a rabbit and strong enough to hold a pig', says Len, and what more could you ask of a hunting dog? He also breeds ferrets, with hutches scattered about all over the place. At the time of my first visit there were over 90 of the sinuous beasts.

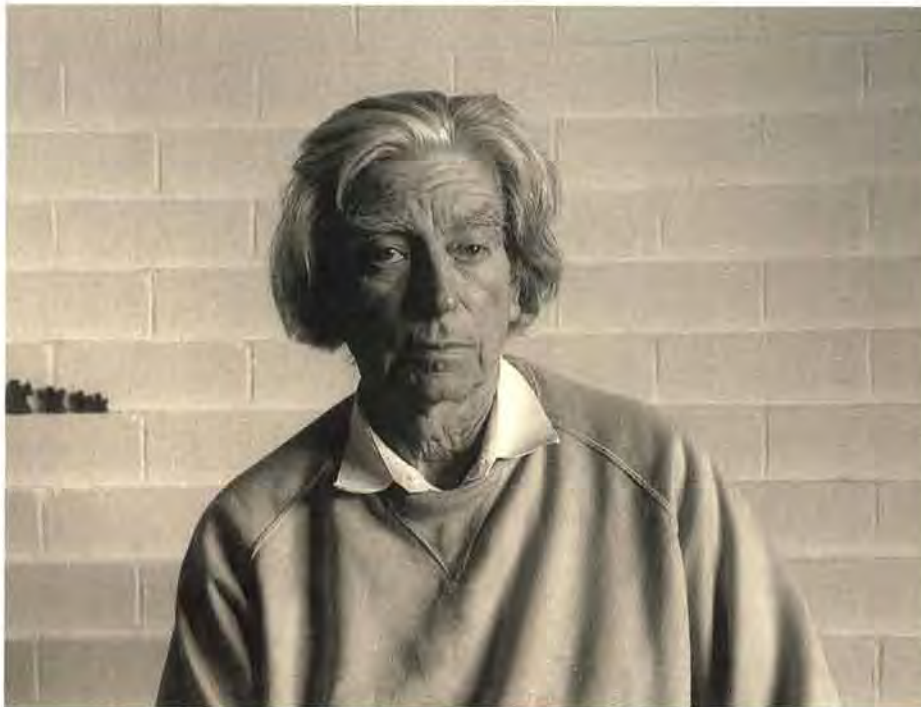


*The Cooks and the Wilesmiths are the legendary song-carriers of the Tumbarumba district, on the western edge of the New South Wales Alps. The families are interrelated. In addition to sharing in the family repertoire of bush and comic songs, Lennie Cook is a competent yodeller in the tradition of the 1930s. He is also famous for his breed of hunting dogs (staghound-greyhound cross) and his ferrets.*

**EDDIE JANTKE***Murray Bridge SA*

Leaving his wheat farm in the South Australian Mallee, Eddie Jantke retired to Murray Bridge, where he frequently teamed up with Eddie Samuel to entertain locals with their 'Mezon Grand Organ' accordions. Born in 1904, Eddie lived at Galga for 60 years. Of German descent, he knew many old German children's songs which his mother had taught him, as well as polkas, waltzes, varsovianas and a polka-mazurka.





*Roland (Roly) Robinson was born in Ireland of English parents in 1912. He worked at many jobs including railway fettle, fencer, station hand, art school model and dancer, but is best known as a poet and collector of Australian folklore and Aboriginal mythology, legends and contemporary songs.*

1912, he came to Australia when he was nine, and died in 1992, six months after Dr Edgar Waters and I recorded his lifetime memories. He has had several volumes of poetry published as well as a prize-winning three-volume autobiography.

Toward the end of his life Roland Robinson won several prestigious literary awards, and was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia as well as an honorary doctorate from the University of Newcastle. His ability to distil the essential beauty out of his rough experiences in a rugged landscape is typified in these closing lines from his poem, 'Black Cockatoo':

*So shall I find me  
harsh and blendless words,  
of barbarous beauty enough,  
to sing this land.*



**JACK  
CAWTHORNE**

*Braidwood NSW*

Born in 1906, Jack Cawthorne plays an odd instrument known as a 'Strohviol', a sort of fiddle fitted with a diaphragm that conducts the sound into a saxophone-like horn. The 'Stroh' instruments came in several sizes ranging from violin to cello.

**ROLAND  
ROBINSON**

*Belmont NSW*

I first met Roly Robinson in 1950 and our paths crossed periodically during the years that followed. Primarily a poet and a collector of Aboriginal mythology, legends and contemporary songs, Roly led a nomadic life, roaming all over the continent on an old motor bike. Carrying a minimum amount of gear—a blanket, a billy and a battery-powered Grundig Cub tape recorder, he camped with Koori mates and recorded their stories and songs.

Roland worked at any jobs that came his way—railway fettle, fencer, station hand, greenkeeper, art school model and dancer in the Kirsova ballet. Born in Ireland of English parents in

*Proudly Aboriginal, Evelyn Crawford is a remarkable woman. She spent her early adult life working as a buckjump rider, then as a musterer, drover, horse-tailer and fencer. More recently, she was appointed TAFE Aboriginal regional coordinator for the Far West region of New South Wales.*

## EVELYN CRAWFORD

*Brewarrina NSW*

Evelyn Crawford is a most remarkable woman. Proudly Aboriginal, born in 1928, she spent her early adult life working as a buckjump rider, then as a musterer, drover, horse-tailer and fencer. After her marriage, and with children attending a State school, she began work as a volunteer consultant to white teachers in their classes. While doing this job, she began to educate herself as well as raising a large family. The end result was that she was appointed as a TAFE Aboriginal regional coordinator for the Far West region of New South Wales. She was invited to have lunch with Her Majesty the Queen at the opening of Darling Harbour, and was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia.

When Chris Woodland and I visited Evelyn to record an interview, we wanted to ask about more mundane things. For a start I



wanted to ask about the identification of an antibiotic healing herb known to the Kooris as 'Gweeyuhmuddah'. Ev asked Chris to drive us out to a reserve where she pointed out the plant I was seeking.

Evelyn was also able to describe claypan dances. Barred from using dance halls in the town, the Kooris would select a claypan, then set fire to a couple of old tyres to provide light. A musician with a button accordion would sit on an oil drum and play while they went through a complete social dance program. During our visit, Ev got out her old button accordion and, in perfect old-time

waltz tempo, played many tunes for us, ending with an old tune called 'On the Sidewalks of New York'.

## SID BRIGGS

*Young NSW*

Born in 1893, Sid was 92 years old when first recorded. He learnt button accordion from his parents, both of whom played. At the age of 14, his brother George began learning violin from the local nuns, but had to give up after a term—possibly he reached the age

limit convents imposed on male students. So George bought a violin tutor from Palings in Sydney and, as he taught himself, young Sid learned by watching his big brother.

Sid Briggs played in the Young Brass Band for over 60 years. His instrument was the double B-flat bass, now better known as the tuba. The band was a good one and won many interstate contests. Working as a barber all his life, Sid told of how local tradespeople in Young supported those out of work during the depression. He put aside one slack day of the week for free haircuts for the 'doloes'; a local butcher killed a beast each week for free distribution; and the milkman used to leave a free billy of milk at the homes of those unemployed people with children.

In later years, there were touching scenes when these 'unfortunates', having secured work, came and paid for the free tucker and services they had enjoyed.



*Born in 1893, fiddler Sid Briggs of Young was the town's barber and had a fine repertoire of tunes and bush songs. He died in 1986.*



**OLLIE MOORE**

*Swan Hill Vic*

Born in 1906, Ollie Moore is well known in the Swan Hill district as a singer and accordion player. He has an endless repertoire of music hall ditties and parodies, some of a rather dubious nature!

**CYRIL  
(‘BUNNY’)  
ABBOTT**  
*Mudgee NSW*

The first time I heard the captivating tune which came to be known as ‘The Mudgee Waltz’, it was played to me on a strange home-made instrument, a kerosene-tin dulcimer. The musician, Cyril ‘Bunny’ Abbott, had used the instrument during the depression years for busking outside country showgrounds and picture-show halls. The instrument was made from a four-gallon ‘kero’ tin and the broom-handle neck was fitted with a bridge at each end. The three strings were tuned in unison, then one was sharpened slightly to provide a beat. Strummed with a plectrum and stopped with a guitar steel, the overall sound was something like a banjo-mandolin played in unison with a fiddle. Bunny Abbott also had a good repertoire on the button accordion which

included another localised tune, ‘The Mudgee Schottische’.

Bunny lived with his wife and numerous small children in an old weatherboard house on the edge of town. They were poor, so the kids always appreciated the bag of lollies I would take for them or, if bonfire night was near, the parcel of fireworks. The little ones loved the music and would sit around, wide-eyed, absorbing every note, and joining in when we came to a chorus song.

When recording in Mudgee, I generally spent Saturday nights having a session at Bunny Abbott’s place. Don Brennan (spoons) and the Davis men, Les (fiddle) and his father, Arthur (accor-

dion), and occasionally Duke Tritton, would turn up and join in the free-for-all music-making.



*John Meredith attended many musical nights at ‘Bunny’ Abbott’s home. Bunny is pictured with friends Don Brennan (spoons) and the Davis men, Les (fiddle) and Arthur (accordion).*

## NAME INDEX

(Date photographed is shown in parentheses.)

Abbott, Cyril (Bunny) (1956) .....	70	Kurtz family (1986) .....	54
Adams, Frank (1958) .....	13	Lately, Stan (1987) .....	41
Archer, Herb (1984) .....	5	Large, Fred (1956) .....	18
Argus, John (Jack) (1991) .....	63	Lassich, Alby and Eddy (1989) .....	22
Artery, Ossie (1983) .....	1	Lee, Vera (1984) .....	19
Baker, Rita (1981) .....	16	Luscombe, Jack (1956) .....	29
Baulch, Arthur, Les (Digger) and Lloyd (1990) .....	53	McQueen, Harry (1986) .....	45
Beazley, Dick (1983) .....	8	Mathias, Dave (1985) .....	45
Bishop, Ethel (Doll) (1986) .....	7	Mills, Dud (1957) .....	49
Blackert, Dolphy (1983) .....	6	Moore, Ollie (1987) .....	69
Blackman, George (1984) .....	21	Mumbulla, Percy (1990) .....	55
Bormann, Ben (1987) .....	9	Murphy, Doddy (1983) .....	54
Bormann, Harry (1989) .....	64	Murray, Bob and Bert (1990) .....	59
Brennan, Don (1956) .....	70	O'Brien, Tom (1983) .....	30
Briggs, Sid (1985) .....	68	O'Byrne, Justin (1986) .....	31
Burgess, Charlie (1983) .....	50	Painter, Bill (1983) .....	17
Burgess, Norman (1985) .....	10	Painter, Peter (1983) .....	14
Busch, Olly (1991) .....	3	Pfeiffer, Ottie (1985) .....	46
Carter, Dudley (1984) .....	40	Pilley, Mick (1958) .....	36
Cartner, Billy (1989) .....	57	Povah, Frank (1990) .....	56
Cashmere, Joe (1955) .....	2	Power, Steve (1984) .....	vii
Cawthorne, Jack (1988) .....	67	Regan, Vera (1991) .....	42
Chun, Bill (1990) .....	42	Richards, Fred (1985) .....	34
Connelly, Margaret (1988) .....	4	Robinson, Roland (1991) .....	67
Cook, Lennie (1991) .....	65	Rodda, Errol (1983) .....	32
Cooper, Bill (1986) .....	24	Schiller, Arnie and Garrie (1987) .....	34
Cotton, Olive (1992) .....	32	Scott, Alan (1986) .....	51
Coughlin, Billy (1956) .....	15	Seal, Kate (Ma) (1985) .....	20
Crawford, Evelyn (1994) .....	68	Shoobridge, John (1986) .....	35
Davis, Arthur (1956) .....	18, 70	Simpson, Neville (1986) .....	52
Davis, Len (1985) .....	17	Sloane, Sally (1958) .....	37
Davis, Les (1956) .....	70	Stuchliffe, Howard and Ethel (1986) .....	12
Dawson family (1985) .....	21	Sutton, Daisy (1987) .....	26
Dicks, Harry (1984) .....	23	Thompson, Frank (1987) .....	41
Donovan, Bill (1983) .....	38	Tompkinson, Sally (1984) .....	39
Dwyer, Nell (1988) .....	4	Tranter, Walter (1982) .....	28
Endacott, Violet (1982) .....	25	Treacy, Stan (1983) .....	43
Foster, Charlie (1983) .....	33	Triton, Duke (1956) .....	11
Gallagher, Arthur (1984) .....	62	Vincent, Babs (1990) .....	60
Gibbons, Jim (1956) .....	58	Ward, Dorothy (1984) .....	44
Gibbons, Tom (1956) .....	28	Warn, John (1983) .....	14
Gilbert, Bill (1983) .....	6	Watling, Pearly (1983) .....	47
Goodridge, Jean (1985) .....	17	Whelan, Tim (1988) .....	51
Graetz, Keith (1992) .....	52	Wilde, Oscar (1987) .....	41
Harding, Chip (1985) .....	27	Wilesmith, Wally (1984) .....	48
Harrison, Jim (1986) .....	57	Woodland, Chris (1957) .....	48
Holland, Fred (1957) .....	61	Wren, Eb (1985) .....	47
Jameson, Bert (1988) .....	4	Yarnold, Percy (1985) .....	19
Jantke, Eddie (1987) .....	66	Yates, Joe (1983) .....	64

## LOCALITY INDEX

### New South Wales

Aberdeen.....	Tom O'Brien
Balmoral Village.....	Alan Scott
Bathurst.....	Doddy Murphy
Belmont.....	Roland Robinson
Black Springs.....	Ossie Artery
Braidwood.....	Jack Cawthorne
Brewarrina.....	Evelyn Crawford
Burrell Creek.....	Bob and Bert Murray
Cootamundra.....	Bert Jamieson
Cooyal.....	Dorothy Ward
Crooked Corner.....	Bill Painter Peter Painter John Warn
Crookwell.....	Stan Treacy
Cullenbone.....	Arthur Davis Duke Tritton
Forbes.....	Margaret Connelly Nell Dwyer Dave Mathias Eb Wren
Goulburn.....	Pearly Watling
Gulgong.....	Rita Baker Billy Coughlin Jim Gibbons Tom Gibbons Sally Tompkinson
Hillston.....	Olly Busch
Khancoban.....	Jim Harrison
Koorawatha.....	Olive Cotton
Lithgow.....	Sally Sloane
Mount Hope.....	Babs Vincent
Mudgee.....	Cyril (Bunny) Abbott Dolphy Blackert George Blackman Don Brennan Les Davis Violet Endacott Fred Holland Kurtz family Dud Mills Mick Pilley Steve Power Walter Tranter
Narromine.....	Dudley Carter
Parkes.....	Bill Chun Bill Cooper
Purlewaugh.....	Errol Rodda
Ryde.....	Jack Luscombe
Singleton.....	Bill Gilbert
Sofala.....	Joe Yates
Sylvania.....	Joe Cashmere
Trungley Hall.....	Ottie Pleiffer
Tumbarumba.....	Charlie Burgess Lennie Cook Charlie Foster Wally Wilesmith
Turill.....	Dick Beazley
Ulan.....	Herb Archer Fred Large

72

Wallaga Lake.....	Percy Mumbulla
Wellington.....	Bill Donovan
Windeyer.....	Frank Adams
Wingham.....	Fred Richards Percy Yarnold
Wisemans Creek.....	Arthur Gallagher
Wollar.....	Frank Povah
Young.....	Sid Briggs Len Davis Jean Goodridge

### Australian Capital Territory

Canberra.....	Chris Woodland
---------------	----------------

### Queensland

Gracemere.....	Howard and Ethel Sutcliffe
----------------	----------------------------

### South Australia

Claypans.....	Harry Bormann
Kangaroo Island.....	Tim Whelan
Kimba.....	Kate (Ma) Seal
Murray Bridge.....	Eddie Jantke Arnie and Garrie Schiller
Parilla.....	Chip Harding
Woodside.....	Ben Bormann

### Tasmania

Bruny Island.....	John Shoobridge
Fingal.....	Ethel (Doll) Bishop
Franklin.....	Dawson family
Geeveston.....	Norman Burgess
Newstead.....	Justin O'Byrne

### Victoria

Castlemaine.....	Harry McQueen
Dargo.....	Billy Cartner Alby and Eddy Lassich
Manangatang.....	Stan Laiety Frank Thompson Oscar Wilde
Nariel.....	Neville Simpson
Stuart Mill.....	Keith Graetz
Swan Hill.....	Arthur, Les (Digger) and Lloyd Baulch Ollie Moore
Terang.....	Vera Lee
Timboon.....	Harry Dicks
Wedderburn.....	Daisy Sutton

### Western Australia

Capel.....	Vera Regan
Ora Banda.....	John Argus





# R E A L F O L K

by

J O H N M E R E D I T H

Poignant. Colourful. Nostalgic. Whimsical.

*Real Folk* introduces some of the everyday heroes of Australia's folk culture—individuals whose families and communities have preserved and passed on the oral tradition of their ancestors in music, song and story.

John Meredith has spent over half of his lifetime doggedly tracking down and recording Australian traditional music and verse. The folk tunes he has recorded often originated in the 'Old Country' (England, Ireland, Scotland, sometimes Germany) and were usually played to the accompaniment of traditional instruments—the fiddle, button accordion, mouth organ, even the gumleaf. Armed with his camera, tape recorder and notebook, Meredith has photographed and recorded over 700 performers throughout Australia.

*Real Folk* presents the photographs and stories of over 100 of Meredith's colourful subjects—their images captured by his camera, their character enlivened by his entertaining captions.

