

# The Banjo

Of all our early balladeers who wrote in days of yore,  
we venerate a learned man whose words are at the core  
of what our country means to us in places near and far  
and why we should remember just how fortunate we are.

His stories of the bush engender sense of place and pride,  
of *swaggies* and a *jumbuck*, how the *Geebung* boys could ride  
their stocky mountain ponies they had brought in from the scrub  
to play a game of polo with *The Cuff and Collar Club*.

He'd touch the hearts of many with the ballads that he wrote  
of characters and places that were rugged and remote,  
where Snowy River horsemen saw how one young bloke could ride  
to wheel a mob o' brumbies down a daunting mountainside.

We laugh at *Mulga Bill* and at that *Man from Ironbark*  
who had his beard and whiskers off, the target of a lark,  
and when he wrote of *Dacey* and the *mule* he tried to ride,  
his disregard for legislators could not be denied.

He wrote about the *Pioneers* and men who were away  
as drovers or gone shearing in the sheds at *Castlereagh*,  
where musterers and shearers and the classers joined the throng,  
to shear and bale the fleeces of a 'hundred thousand strong'.

The Bulletin and Archibald gave Banjo space to write about the outback characters he knew could ride and fight, just like that drover *Saltbush Bill* who fought the jackeroo to save his sheep from dying far beyond the big Barcoo.

That weekly rag gave eminence to Banjo and the bush, along with other poets who were members of ‘the push’ who said the stoush with Henry was a clever ploy no less, to get those extra pennies as reward for their success.

He said that he and Lawson were both searching for a ‘reef’, although there was a difference in background and belief. The Banjo rode a horse in search of literary gold but Lawson was on foot to find the stories that he told.

His love of horses reappeared in what he had to say of *Pardon, Reckless, Old Regret, Reprieve* and *Mongrel Grey*. He wrote of *Father Riley’s Horse, of Riders in the Stand* and verses of the *Steeplechase*, including *Rio Grande*.

Sartorial and gentrified were traits of Banjo’s style, in contrast to some places where he was for quite a while. The Boer War and The Great War were the battlefields he chose, to write of grief and gallantry in rhyming verse and prose.

He met and then befriended people most of us now know, have gone down in the history books from times so long ago. From Churchill, Haig and Kipling to a Sir, a Lord or Dame, The Banjo was not over-awed by title or by fame.

Beyond the Murrumbidgee he bought land a while ago,  
along the Goodradigbee where the giant she-oaks grow.  
His partner was Charles Lindeman whose background was in wines,  
but grazing sheep for wool the plan instead of planting vines.

*The Mountain Squatter* tells the tale of Riverina sheep,  
that Banjo ran on mountainsides so rugged and so steep,  
that blokes and dogs from way out west would shirk the hard terrain,  
and Banjo's collie pup could not convince him to remain.

He wrote *A Mountain Station* to bemoan his wasted zeal,  
of dingoes eating any sheep his neighbours didn't steal,  
and when the Murrumbidgee rose to cause a massive flood,  
his cattle were all swept away to graves beneath the mud.

He left the Murrumbidgee where his plans had run aground,  
to try his hand at growing grain and so was Grenfell bound,  
to 'where the quail and skylarks nest' before the summer heat,  
'when roaring strippers come and go' to harvest all the wheat.

And whilst we can acknowledge all the bush bards of his time,  
he has a special place beyond their prose and Aussie rhyme,  
for legend speaks of Winton where he took a girl along,  
to visit Dagworth Station where he wrote a nation's song.

The words of Edward Harrington, the last one to survive,  
are written as an epitaph to keep his name alive.

'So if they tell you Banjo's dead just say that it's a lie'.

'As long as there's a Southern Cross, 'The Banjo' will not die'.

