

BACKGROUND NOTES

The Australian Popular Songbook

Down Under

The late 1970s, young Aussies in South East Asia.

Harry Lee: (Lee Kuan Yew) Prime Minister of Singapore.

Terry Clark: the leader of the New Zealand in origin Mr Asia drug syndicate, probably the most spectacular heroin importing combo in 1970s Australia. Others were doubtless as ruthless and more successful, but Clark and his gang captured more imagination. I've returned to Mr Asia many times, including under a slightly different guise, in my verse novel *The Lovemakers*.

It's Time

Motto and theme song of the Australian Labor Party's 1972 successful campaign after 23 years of Liberal-Country Party coalition rule.

Billy Bigears: Liberal Party Prime Minister 1971-72, William McMahon.

NB: Australia's major conservative political party is called the Liberal Party. This is something I love telling those from overseas. Once it might have seen itself as being some kind of heir to late 19th/early 20th progressive thought. No longer.

Saturday Girl

Show-stopper ballad from the 1950s musical *Lola Montez*. Here a more-than-camp performer recounts his pursuit by a rather ignorant young lady.

Have You Ever Been to See King's Cross

Sydney's red light/night club/good times precinct was really rocking 50 plus years ago, when the town started hosting American soldiers on R-and-R from the Viet Nam War. Some imported heroin.

Sheilas: Australian for dames, broads etc.

Walkin' the Night Alone

In a winter of the early 1960s a young singer visits her home town in rural Victoria.

Queen's Birthday: a public holiday, a leftover from the British Empire.

IMT/Gra-Gra: *In Melbourne Tonight*, a television variety show hosted by Graham 'Gra-Gra' Kennedy.

Woop-woop: an imaginary, very distant town, doubtless inhabited by hayseeds.

Ciao Baby

I trust self-explanatory.

Woman You're Breaking Me

Perhaps the most 'confessional' poem I've written, and believe me I don't do 'confessional'; nor was I broken. The references are too autobiographical for notes. They would require an essay.

Bourke Street on Saturday Night

An attempt at evoking early 20th Century Melbourne. It is propelled by references to Australian Rules Football teams via their nicknames.

Bourke Street: Melbourne's principal retail and business street.

Yakka: work, usually of a manual kind.

Billo: diminutive of Bill.

The Same Olds: original nickname for Essendon, my team, re-named The Bombers after World War 2.

On the Road to Gundagai

A family saga from the late 1950s to the time of writing. A great singalong number composed by Jack O'Hagan (a sort of Australian Irving Berlin). This piece is based around a family's Sunday drive to the Dandenongs, a mountain range east of Melbourne.

Gundagai: a town 4 or 5 hours southwest of Sydney, nowhere near the poem's action.

Lime Juice Tub

Commos: Communists.

Groupers: those associated with Right Wing Unions, usually Roman Catholic based, with their intellectual arm the National Civic Council and their political wing the Democratic Labor Party.

Poofters: Australian for faggots.

Jimmy Woodsers: men who drink by themselves.

Billy Hughes: Prime Minister 1916-22, who quit the Labor Party during World War 1 for the other side. Became extremely deaf, using his hearing aids to advantage.

Menzies: Robert Menzies, Liberal Party Prime Minister 1940-41, 1949-66.

Bound for South Australia

Upper middle class, flamboyant, bi-sexual, social democratic reformer, Don Dunstan was Premier (something like Governor) of South Australia 1967-68, 1970-79. He is a big Australian Labor Party hero.

Bless This House

Yes, the music for this dirge was written by an Australian, May Brahe.

Uniting Church: an all-purpose Australian combination of Methodists, Congregationalists and the bulk of Presbyterians. Some of its congregations might be able to accommodate Sapphic clergy and their consorts.

The Never Never

Brisbane in the 30s and early 40s as seen through the eyes of my mother's generation. This ballad by Letty Catts (something like a more austere *Don't Fence Me In*) became a big wartime hit.

The Never Never: that part of the country more outback than the outback, or indeed Woop-Woop.

A Brown Slouch Hat

My mother and her best friend join the army. The poem is dedicated to the best friend's elder daughter.

Brown slouch hat: this was part of the (male) soldier's uniform.

Deanna Durbin: yes my mother wrote a fan letter to Deanna and received a reply from the set of *Three Smart Girls*, Deanna's first movie...so figure that out!

Eleanor Dark: a popular Australian novelist

Cipher: the intelligence section of the Australian Army's Signals Corp.

Girls on the Avenue

A mid 70s 'underground' black comedy on heroin addiction *Pure Shit*, was once described by John Forbes as the best ever Australian movie. He may still be right.

My Old Man's a Groovy Old Man

A young woman confronts the idea that her father has run off with her best friend.

This being an early 70s Top 40 song, who wouldn't want to write a poem with this title?

Sunshine Coast: a few hours north of Brisbane, think suburban Florida, maybe.

Maroochydore: a town on that coast.

Come on Aussie

This was a song promoting *World Series Cricket*, a 70s version of that game.

‘Let’s palm this answer down like ruck to rover’: an Australian Rules Football reference. I’d probably require a whiteboard.

It’s Babyboomer Partytime in Oz, was the title of a cassette album by Nigel T and the Oz Party People, a Perth-based cover band.

‘Mere loose no-balls thumped past Extra Cover’: a cricket reference. I would require a whiteboard.

Who Listens to the Radio?

In the late 1970s I shared a big group house with, among the various comings, goings and residings, an idiotic couple, Law students who dumped their studies in order to make a fortune out of quiche. They didn’t and returned to Law. Like Mr Asia they keep returning to my poems.

Tim and Debbie: the originals with this name were a gormless ‘alternative’ comedy duo.

The Sports, who performed the song, deserved a better public.

The Argonauts’ Theme

From the early 40s to the late 60s the Argonauts’ Club was the intellectual heart of the Australian Broadcasting Commission’s radio *Children’s Hour*. Through entertainment and instruction, the arts, sciences and benign moral receipts for living were passed on to coming generations.

Recessional: a Kipling poem later set to music. Kipling could be a wonderful poet but this is him in his ‘Take up the White Man’s burden...’ mode.

Bound for Botany Bay

The television mini-series *Blue Murder* (which I recommend) centres on the ‘real life’ relationship between Sydney underworld identity Arthur ‘Neddy’ Smith and rogue cop Roger Rogerson.

The Breakers were a dodgy police squad.

Sallie-Anne Huckstepp (working girl) her boy-friend Warren Lanfranchi (drug dealer) and Christopher ‘Rentakill’ Flannery (hit man) were all victims in the cop and criminal mayhem of 70s and 80s Sydney.

Kingsford-Smith: Sydney’s major airport, on the shores of Botany Bay, is named after our most famous aviator Charles Kingsford-Smith.

In 1788 the British First Fleet, loaded with convicts landed in Australia, first in Botany Bay, then moving north to Sydney Harbour where they raised the flag and founded the eventual city.

Roger Rogerson saw a few years in prison due to his *Blue Murder* deeds (both mini-series and poem). Released, he later joined a pub/bar circuit show, reminiscing with former Melbourne gangster Mark 'Chopper' Read (the subject of a fine movie) and outlandish former Australian Rules footballer Mark 'Jacko' Jackson. Sometime after this Rogerson, in his 70s, got involved with another cop in a large methamphetamine racket, in the course of which they murdered someone and were caught. Oh dear. He's never to be released. A *Blue Murder* sequel has thus been made. I've not seen it but feel I should chronicle these event, one day.

Goodbye Melbourne Town

A pre-World War 1 music hall song, the poem charts going abroad 1948-2004.

The Battle of the Sounds: a competition in the late 60s/early 70s for aspiring rock and pop groups, the prize was a trip to Swinging London and a recording contract.

Old Man Emu

The early 70s. In a time of upheaval throughout the planet, a journey across Melbourne from one campus (this time without a demonstration) to one campus having one, all the while accompanied by this raucous Country/pop song from those times.

Latrobe: a Melbourne university centred on the suburb of Bundoora.

Ecops: the Monash University Faculty of Economics and Politics.

ASIO: the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation.

Tommy Travellers: embedded spies

A World of Our Own

1967, the Upper Middle Class of suburban Melbourne. I didn't come from that background but living down the road a bit had a spot to view this crowd

Pre-selection: the method whereby political parties chose their candidates.

Lorne: a well-healed coastal holiday town, 2 hours South West of Melbourne.

The PM drowned. Liberal PM (1966-67) Harold Holt disappeared whilst skin-diving in rough surf. True. His friend Lyndon Johnson attended the funeral. Among his memorials is the Harold Holt Swimming Pool. True #2.

Ever Lovin' Man

A female Scot's migrant tries to cope with 60s Australian suburbia.

Arvos: afternoons.

Brisbane to Beechworth

Beechworth: a town in North-Eastern Victoria.

TMG: 'Ted Mulray Gang': a 70s group aimed at teenyboppers.

LRB: 'Little River Band': a 70s group aimed at middle-of-the-roaders.

Countdown: a 70s and 80s television pop music show.

Ross Ryan: an Australian Neil Diamond though even worse.

Swatvac: preparation time for high school exams.

Famechon: Johnny Famechon was a world Lightweight Boxing Champion.

Matt Taylor: a local blues singer who wrote and sang *Brisbane to Beechworth*.

Fosters: an Australian beer, though now more for export.

Bradman: Don Bradman, iconic cricketer.

Golden Fleece: a petrol brand, long discontinued.

Just a Suburban Boy

David Pepperell the dedicatee is a Melbourne personality, all cities have one: fronting a rock group, 'Dr Pepper and the Interns', owning a record store, making a fortune then losing it, having an alternative newspaper column, having an alternative radio show, fathering quite a few kids, retiring into the suburbs in his 50s, whilst, in his case getting very out-of-it with Keith Moon when he came to town, and corresponding then eventually visiting Anias Nin in Los Angeles.

Dransfield: Michael Dransfield (1948-73) has the reputation as Australia's foremost hippy drug-poet. For me a little of his work is quite enough, though he has his partisans.

Wallace-Crabbe: Chris Wallace-Crabbe (1934-) is an Australian poet in the tradition of Messrs Howard, Hollander, Hecht and Hine.

I Go to Rio

The world of Peter Allen.

Fitzroy: suburb in inner-urban Melbourne.

Freo: Fremantle, Perth's port suburb on the other side of the continent.

Frank and Ethel Gumm: the grandparents of Liza Minelli Peter Allen's wife of a few years and parents of Judy Garland (Frances Gumm) his mother-in-law.

Carioca: pertaining to Rio de Janeiro.

Padre Pio: 20th Century Italian friar, priest, stigmatist, and mystic.

The Maracana: Rio's famed football stadium

PARE DE POR FAVOR MATAR NOSSOS CRIANCAS: from the Portuguese: 'Please stop murdering our children.'

Eagle Rock

The Australian song of its generation.

East Prahran/Armidale: fairly well-heeled Melbourne inner suburbs

The Real Thing: a rival to *Eagle Rock*, for me mere psychedelic pap.

17 Illawarra Couplets

The Illawarra is an area centred around the city of Wollongong, 80km South of Sydney. I was based there teaching at the University for 18½ years. The poem makes references to a number of Wollongong suburbs.

Vanessa Badham: playwright, activist and now media personality, thus 'the Antipodean, female Brecht'.

Damian Cahill: her then boyfriend, now a University of Sydney Political Economy academic.

Lawrence: D H Lawrence, who wrote his novel *Kangaroo* in the town, now suburb of Thirroul.

Whiteley: Brett Whiteley: Australian painter, often found in the Chelsea Hotel NYC during the 60s and 70s, died of a heroin overdose in a Thirroul motel.

Ockeress: an ocker is an Australian 'good ol' boy', though now the term is more likely to be bogan. Thus ockeress: Mrs Ocker.

'The former mayor to lose his head': Frank Arkell a paedophile and former mayor was murdered by decapitation, by one of his victims.

Rose Bay 1959

Rose Bay: a very well-heeled Sydney suburb.

Poofter: Australian for faggot.

Sarsaparilla: a Calypso

This makes many references to the life and work of Patrick White (1912-1990) winner of the 1973 Nobel Prize for Literature, and to his imaginary Sydney suburb, Sarsaparilla. To elaborate more would mean an essay.

Voss: White's 5th published novel.

Riders in the Chariot: White's 6th published novel.

Squattocracy: early settlers who squatted on the land, farmed it and became rich.

Man-oly: Manoly Lascaris, White's long-time lover.

A.D. Hope: Australian poet and academic. Wrote a review both scathing and stupid of White's *The Tree of Man*.

Himmelfarb: one of the 4 heroes/heroines of *Riders in the Chariot*. A survivor of the holocaust he is given a mock crucifixion on Maundy Thursday and dies sometime later.

'Menzies' days and Holt's...': Australia 1949-67

'Down at the dump...' refers to the great White short story *Down at the Dump*.

Johnny Jackboot: a reference to John Howard Australian Prime Minister(1996-2007).

Seven, Ten and Nine: the three major commercial television networks.

Chatswood: Ruth Nash Speaks

Given that the mode of death was never discovered the Bogle-Chandler case is one of the great Australian mysteries. Given that Bogle was a research physicist some folk believed he was murdered

by the KGB/CIA/take your pick. For others connections with wife-swapping Bohemia seems to indicate something. In more recent times the toxic atmosphere arising from pollution of the Lane Cove River has been floated. It would appear each generation has its theory. I'd love to have written a film script based upon it, but didn't know the first thing about that mode of writing. I saw the credits featuring Leroy Anderson's *Blue Tango*. The poem of course is the result.

Chatswood: a middle class, North Shore Sydney suburb.

CSIRO: the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Organisation, the nation's peak body in that area. Bogle worked there as a scientist, Geoffrey Chandler as a photographer.

Ridgey-didge: the truth, accurate.

Loomes SM: SM: stipendiary magistrate.

Neutral Bay

A North Shore Sydney suburb. Mr Asia again.

Hurstville

A lower-middle to middle class Sydney suburb. Brothels are legal in much of Australia, provided the owners obtain appropriate licences and obey the regulations.

Ascot Vale

A Melbourne suburb working class in the time this poem is set. Now far more gentrified. The early 1950s saw attempts to ban the Communist Party. When such legislation was ruled unconstitutional a subsequent referendum was defeated.

The Herald: a somewhat pompous, conservative evening broadsheet of the day.

'Santamaria's major crime...'

With Melbourne and Victoria as his base, B A Santamaria, a prominent Roman Catholic layman lead the very right-wing National Civic Council, a group designed to fight Communists, usually with similar tactics to their opponents. They were responsible for the Labor Party splitting with the right-wing Democratic Labor Party being formed, as well as for certain schisms in the Roman Catholic church.

World of Sport: a lunch time Sunday afternoon television show.

A High School Staff Room...

I based the technical side of things in this poem on the first part of Philip Larkin's sequence *Living's*.

Jim Cairns: Opposition to Australia's involvement in the invasion and occupation of Viet Nam was lead by Labor MP Jim Cairns, later Deputy PM (1974-5).

E.T: an emergency teacher, i.e. supply or relief.

Knox City: a Ballad

Knox City: a shopping centre (though now under a different name) in Melbourne's outer Eastern Suburbs.

Richmond: both an inner Melbourne suburb and an Australian Rules Football team (the Tigers).

Werribee: an outer Western Suburb.

Bob Hawke: Labor PM (1983-1992). A popular and emotional man he had the propensity of bursting into tears in public if ever things got too overwhelming. (A daughter's drug problems being an example.) Every time he cried his ratings rose.

The Daily Planet: a leading Melbourne brothel, Lois Lane does not work there.

Coles: a supermarket chain.

Poem for Cathy Colebourne

Centred around Melbourne's inner-urban bar life, 25-30 years ago, the poem's refrain was coined by its dedicatee.

Fitzroy: suburb where much of this occurred.

Commercial Rd: this thoroughfare elsewhere in Melbourne had a gay element around this time, though nothing like Sydney's famed Oxford St.

Mulga: scrub in the outback.

Builders Arms: bar where much of this was set.

Koories: a name for Victoria's indigenous people.

Breakfast with Darky

Viewed from the late 70s this portrays the life of Communists from the 50s onwards.

Sunnyside Up: a rather dreadful television variety show.

Hardy, Waten, Morrison: Frank Hardy, Judah Waten and John Morrison were Social Realist writers with a certain clout.

Quadrant: a right-wing intellectual magazine supported like Encounter by monies from the CIA. It had a certain clout and respect outside of the Right, though nowadays it's just a vehicle for pompous, reactionary ravings and whingeing.

from *The Australian Popular Songbook 2000*

The following are a selection from 28 poems inspired by Australian popular songs from the late 19th Century to circa 1980.

'Down Under': the late 70s, young Aussies in South East Asia. Harry Lee (Lee Kuan Yew) was Prime Minister of Singapore. Terry Clark was co-leader of the Mr. Asia Drug Syndicate.

'Walking the Night Alone': in a winter during the early 60s a young female singer visits her home town in country Victoria. She has been appearing on 'In Melbourne Tonight' (aka 'IMT') a television variety show hosted by Graham 'Gra Gra' Kennedy.

'Ciao Baby': certain memories from 1967

'On the Road to Gundagai': a family saga from the late 50s to the time of writing.

'The Never Never': Brisbane in the 30s and early 40s as seen through the eyes of my mother's generation. Letty Catts' ballad 'The Never Never' became a big war time hit. Jean Arthur was a substantial Hollywood star.

'A Brown Slouch Hat'. My mother Brenda, and Dot her best friend, join the army. Deanna Durbin was a young Hollywood star. Daphne Du Maurier wrote *Rebecca*. Eleanor Dark was a popular Australian novelist. Cipher was the intelligence section of the Signals Corps. The poem is dedicated to Dot's elder daughter Cheryl.

'Girls on the Avenue': a mid-70s 'underground' black comedy on heroin addiction 'Pure Shit' was once described by John Forbes as the best Australian film ever. He may still be right.

'My Old Man's a Groovy Old Man': a young woman confronts the idea that her father has run off with her best friend.

'Come on Aussie': 'It's Baby Boomer Party Time in Oz' is the title of a cassette album by Nigel T and the Oz Party People, a Perth based nostalgia cover band.

'Bound for Botany Bay': the 1995 television mini-series 'Blue Murder' centred on the 'real life' relationship between Sydney underworld identity Arthur 'Neddy' Smith and rogue cop Roger Rogerson. Christopher John Flannery was a hired killer from Melbourne.

'A World of Our Own': 1967, the upper middle class of Eastern Suburban Melbourne. This was not my milieu, though on occasions I had opportunities to observe it from a safe distance.

The following are from 'The Metropolitan Poems', a series of poems inspired by suburbs in Sydney and Melbourne with an initial foray into the Illawarra.

'Seventeen Illawarra Couplets' will probably be self-explanatory to the locals. The dedication is to Vanessa Badham before she became media personality Van.

'Neutral Bay' continues my obsession with Terry Clark and Mr Asia, this time through the 'innocent' eyes of a young female drug courier.

'Hurstville': a young legal secretary moonlights on weekends as a sex worker.

'A High School Staff Room, Melbourne's Northern Suburbs Winter 1977": is part memory and part imagination, though I'm not sure which is which. E.T. is a Victorian term for Emergency Teacher (i.e. Relief or Supply).

'Knox City: A Ballad': yet another big suburban shopping complex, this time in outer Eastern Suburban Melbourne, just before the Dandenongs, Knox City has had a name change since this poem was written.

The following poem in The Australian Popular Songbook is independent of the above two sequences.

'Breakfast With Darky': in the 1970s a Melbourne high school teacher looks back 20 years to a time when he was an up-and-coming Social Realist writer and a communist Party activist.

