

Click Go the Shears: The Making of an Australian Icon

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ABSTRACT: *Click Go the Shears* has become an iconic musical item. Yet its evolution is still associated with various persons/ contexts—all still exerting pressure, making the tune one of the most loved, as well as one of the most teasing copyright issues, in the history of Australian music.

Waltzing Matilda aside, *Click Go the Shears* is probably the best known Australian folksong. But where did it come from? It is time now to draw back the curtain and reveal the song's chequered history, one of intrigue and skulduggery amongst a small interconnected community of folksong collectors, performers and publishers.

The song is a parody of *Ring the Bell Watchman*, a Civil War era song by American composer Henry Clay Work (1832-84). Work's first verse and chorus

High in the belfry the old sexton stands,
Grasping the rope in his thin bony hands
Fix'd is his gaze as by some magic spell
Till he hears the distant murmur, ring, ring the bell.

Ring the bell, watchman! ring! ring! ring!
Yes, yes! the good news is now on the wing.
Yes, yes! they come and with tidings to tell.
Glorious and blessed tidings. Ring, ring the bell!

provided splendid raw material, and in Australian hands became

Out on the board the old shearer stands
Grasping his shears in his thin, boney hands,
Fixed is his gaze on a bare-bellied Joe,
Glory is he gets her won't he make the ringer go

Click go the shears, boys, click, click, click!
Wide is his blow and his hands move quick,
The ringer looks around and is beaten by a blow,
And curses that old snagger with the bare-bellied yoe.

After that the Australian songmaker(s) continued on, adding verses celebrating tar boys, the boss of the board, colonial experience men and of course shearers' competitiveness, camaraderie and love of drink. But was it a song *of* the shearers, or merely a latter-day song composed *about* them?

The song first came to public notice in June 1952, when a version collected by Dr Percy Jones was introduced to Australian audiences, and later the record-buying public, by visiting American singer Burl Ives. A year later the Australian musical *Reedy River* opened in Sydney and the singing of *Click Go the Shears* on stage by the *Bushwhackers Band*, in a ‘composite version’ attributed to song collector John Meredith, was one of the show’s highlights.¹ Then, in 1955, English singer A.L. Lloyd released the song in an album *Australian Bush Songs* on the American Riverside label.² Lloyd later noted the song was one of a number he recalled from his youth when, in the 1920s and early 1930s, he worked as a farm labourer in the shearing sheds of western New South Wales.³

Given this background, it would seem a safe conclusion that in the 1950s *Click Go the Shears* was propagated through three distinct and independent channels. Such a conclusion would however be wrong. All three channels spring primarily from a single 1940s source—bush poet Jack Moses. Further, some of the implied and/or explicit claims by others to have learnt or collected the song in the field are at best disingenuous, and at worst plainly dishonest.

Machine shears had taken over from blades on most large stations by 1915, so if the song began life as a contemporary description of life in the sheds—with the shears going ‘click’ rather than ‘whurr’—it must date from before this. And if Lloyd’s recollection is correct and the song was still widely heard in shearing sheds in the 1930s, it must have been sung around the place for decades. Given this prospect, it seems odd that seemingly no mention of the song appears in print until 1946.⁴ How is it that no version was submitted to Banjo Paterson for inclusion in any of the eight editions of *Old Bush Songs* published between 1905 and 1932?⁵ Why wasn’t it among the many hundreds of items in readers’ submissions published by Alex Vennard (‘Bill Bowyang’) in his *On the Track* column in the *North Queensland Register* between 1922 and 1946, or included in any of the nine booklets of Bill Bowyang’s *Bush Recitations* published between 1933 and 1940?⁶ How is it that no version was among the seventy-one songs quoted in the Melbourne *Sun News-Pictorial* after it put out a call for old bush songs in 1940?⁷ Why was it missed by Will Lawson when he compiled *Australian Bush Songs and*

¹ *Reedy River Songbook*, ed. by D.E. Milliss and J. Meredith (Sydney: New Theatre, 1954).

² A. L. Lloyd, *Australian Bush Songs* (Riverside LP RLP 12-606, [1955]).

³ A.L. Lloyd interviewed by Mark Gregory, *Overland* 45 (Autumn 1970), 17-26.

⁴ The song’s first documented appearance is in Percy Jones’ article ‘Australia’s Folk-Songs’ in *Twentieth Century: An Australian Quarterly Review*, 1.1 (Sept 1946), 37-43.

⁵ Anderson, H., ‘Some Literary Sources for Old Bush Songs’, *Australian Folklore*, 12 (August 1997), 1-39.

⁶ Anderson, H., *On the Track with Bill Bowyang*, 6 Vols. (Melbourne: Red Rooster Press, 1991-92).

⁷ McKenry, K., ‘Percy Jones: Australia’s Reluctant Folklorist’, *Overland*, 186 (Autumn 2007), 25-33.

Ballads in 1944?⁸ Lastly, why has it not been found among the bush songs in Lloyd's private papers now held in Goldsmiths College Library, London?⁹ Could it be that the song wasn't found or mentioned because it didn't yet exist?

Australian field collectors have been ever on the lookout for informants who recall the song from earlier times. Few have found any. In 1963 however Maryjean Officer and Norm O'Connor collected a fragment in East Gippsland from Mr W. Miles of Swifts Creek.¹⁰ He stated he knew the song from sixty years previously, that is around 1903. The publication of Miles' version prompted a John White to write supporting Miles' claim regarding the song's antiquity.¹¹ He stated he first heard it in an Army camp in 1914, sung by an ex-Queensland drover who claimed he had heard it as a boy on his first droving trip. If accurate, this would date the song back to the nineteenth century.

Seductive as these recollections are, there is reason to regard them with caution. There is nothing to suggest Officer and O'Connor did anything other than accept Mr Miles' account at face value, nor is there any suggestion Mr White was quizzed on his recollection of the facts. Might it not be that their recollections, though honestly recounted, were mistaken?

Australia's most prolific folksong collector, Ron Edwards, noting the difficulty of finding informants who recalled the song from before the 1950s, recounted an experience of his own:

[I]n June 1989 I interviewed an old lady in Mareeba, Queensland, who could recall all of *Click Go the Shears* and dated it with certainty to her childhood. Elated but cautious I questioned her closely about the circumstances surrounding her learning the song, because the version she sang was the same as that performed by Burl Ives... It was only because of my curiosity about her singing this particular version that she delved deeper into her memory and finally recalled that she had in fact learned the song from her own daughter, who in turn had learned it during music lessons at school during the 1960s! It is memory lapses and leap frogs such as this that has always caused me to be cautious about dates given by informants...¹²

It is necessary here to confront directly the issue of Lloyd's credibility, as his repeated claim that *Click Go the Shears* was frequently heard in shearing sheds in the early 1930s is perhaps the major evidence of the

⁸ Lawson, W., *Australian Bush Songs and Ballads* (Sydney: Frank Johnson, 1944).

⁹ Seal, G., 'A.L. Lloyd in Australia: Some Conclusions', *Folk Song Journal*, 9.1, 56-71.

¹⁰ *Gumsuckers' Gazette*, (February, 1963), 6.

¹¹ *Gumsuckers' Gazette*, (May, 1963), 12.

¹² Edwards, R., *Click Go the Shears: Some Notes on One of our Best Known Songs* (Kuranda, Qld: Rams Skull Press, 1993), p. 4.

song's longevity. As Edwards' informant found, memories can play tricks over the passage of decades. Perhaps, given the success of Burl Ives' 1952 recording of the song and/or its popularity through the play *Reedy River*, Lloyd too imagined in error that he recalled the song from his youth; less charitably, perhaps he found it convenient to suppose he did so.

A number of scholars have examined Lloyd's editorial practices in other contexts and their conclusions cast doubt on his credibility. Stephen Winick states, for example, that

there is a fairly general consensus that Lloyd's desire to claim the authenticity of tradition for folksongs overcame his memory (or his honesty) on some occasions.¹³

Dave Arthur, writing about Lloyd's papers relating to Australia, comments:

Doubt is also cast on the true source of some of the songs when one finds in his manuscripts informants' names crossed out and changed, unverifiable dates and places credited, and in the case of *One of the Has Beens* a very specific note. 'I heard this from a vaudeville actor in hospital in Cowra, NSW, on New Year's Day', was changed on publication to 'a teamster from Grenfell sang the song'.¹⁴

Graham Seal, examining the same papers, noted progressive drafts of a song, *The Maryborough Miner*. Lloyd once wrote to Australian folklorist Brad Tate, stating unequivocally 'I heard *The Maryborough Miner* from Bob Bell, of Condoblin, NSW in 1934.'¹⁵ Seal states however

we must conclude... that Lloyd did not collect *The Maryborough Miner* from the singing of Bob Bell, or from anyone else... The passing of time may have played tricks with his recollection, but it seems that there was never an Australian bush song called *The Maryborough Miner*, and the song now known by that name was the creation of A.L. Lloyd during the 1950s.¹⁶

Given this history, it is not possible to place confidence in Lloyd's statements regarding *Click Go the Shears* and therefore to determine with certainty whether the song dates from before the 1940s. The

¹³ Winick, S.D., 'A.L. Lloyd and Reynardine: Authenticity and Authorship in the Afterlife of a British Broadside Ballad', *Folklore*, 115 (2004), 286-308.

¹⁴ Arthur, D., 'A.L. Lloyd in Australia', *Root & Branch*, 1 (London: English Folk Dance and Song Society, 1999), pp. 10-12.

¹⁵ Letter by Lloyd to Brad Tate, 12 November 1972, quoted in full in a letter to the editor by Tate, *Stringybark & Greenhide*, 4.4 (1983), 1-2.

¹⁶ Seal, G., 'A.L. Lloyd in Australia: Some Conclusions', *Folk Music Journal*, 9.1, 56-71.

absence of any earlier record of its existence suggests strongly it does not;¹⁷ on the other hand, the several later recollections of old-timers (including Lloyd) dating the song from earlier times, while untested as to their accuracy, cannot be dismissed out-of-hand. On balance—the noted recollections notwithstanding—it seems probable the song was of fairly recent composition when, sometime between late 1940 and early 1945, Percy Jones collected it from Jack Moses.

Jones' encounter with Moses came about by serendipity. As Jones describes it, he visited bookseller and publisher James Tyrell in Sydney, hoping he might be able to help him with folksongs. Tyrell couldn't do so but told him there was a fellow in the next room who wrote poetry and perhaps he could help. Jones went next door and the man in there was the well-known bush poet Jack Moses. Moses, then in his eighties but still writing and reciting verse, gave Jones the words of *Click Go the Shears*.¹⁸ Seemingly, it was just pure good luck that Moses had the words at hand



Jack Moses

¹⁷ Ron Edwards considers the song fragment

Click, click, that's how the shears go,
Click, click, so awfully quick,
You draw out a sheep, and he gives you a kick,
And the shears bolt off with a click, click, click.

collected by William Astley c.1890, which John Meredith found among Astley's papers in the Mitchell Library, to be an early version of the song. (R. Edwards, *Australian Folk Song Index 1788-1992*, Part 3 (Kuranda, Qld: Rams Skull Press, 1993), 508-310). *Click Go the Shears* undisputedly is as a parody of *Ring the Bell, Watchman*, so any early version of the song would be expected to follow the word structure of the parent song, at least to as great a degree as do later versions. The Astley text is far less like the *Watchman* text than are the Moses and subsequent texts, and so I prefer to regard it as a distinct piece, albeit one with some similarities of subject matter and, to a much lesser degree, phrasing.

¹⁸ Jones recounts this anecdote, without naming either Tyrell or Moses, both in D. Cave, *Percy Jones* (Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press, 1988), p. 31, and in his interview on 18 February 1991 with Gwenda Beed Davey (National Library of Australia Oral History tape TRC-2668). Jones however confided the names of Tyrell and Moses to folklore collector Chris Sullivan in an untaped interview in 1985. That interview is cited in Sullivan's book *Castles in the Air: Ideology, Myth & the Australian Folk Revival* (Lismore NSW: Baalgammon Music & Folklore, 2006), p. 50.

and was prepared to give them to Jones, an unannounced stranger at his door. We don't know if Moses, who had made his living in rural NSW as a travelling wine salesman, learned the song on the road, or if he wrote some or all of the words himself. Moses died in Sydney in July 1945, possibly shortly after giving the song to Jones, and this may explain why he never published it himself. Perhaps cannily, when Jones published the song text in 1946 he omitted to name Moses as his source or state how the bush poet came to be in possession of the words. Sadly, that knowledge is lost.

There also is no record of the text given by Moses to Jones: what survives is the text Jones published. Jones, a Catholic priest, was also a musical scholar and composer, and all his published folksongs appeared in polished versions, texts complete and in perfect metre. Almost certainly, he employed a firm editorial hand in shaping songs for publication. We don't know however whether he did so in the case of *Click Go the Shears*. Jack Moses was a competent wordsmith and there is no reason to suppose the text he gave Jones was either incomplete or needing reworking.

Jones was active as a folksong collector for only a few years, in the early 1940s. Finding there was little interest in his collected material, he wrote an article on Australian folksong and then filed his songs away.¹⁹ There they might have stayed had not Burl Ives come to Australia in 1952 for a concert tour and expressed interest in learning some *Australian* folksongs to include in his concert program. Jones was contacted—the priest and singer met, and Ives, delighted by Jones' songs, immediately set about learning some. These songs were immensely popular with Australian audiences, and Ives' record company arranged for the singer to record them before he left the country. The recorded songs—one of which was *Click Go the Shears*—were in the



Cover of Burl Ives' Folio of Australian Folk Songs, 1953.

¹⁹ Jones, P., 'Australia's Folk-Songs', *Twentieth Century: An Australian Quarterly Review*, 1.1 (Sept, 1946), 37-43.

stores soon after and were very popular, gaining much airplay on the wireless.

The success of Burl Ives' 78 rpm recordings of Australian folksongs led to their release on a 10 inch microgroove album—the first LP of Australian folksongs²⁰—and, in 1953, of the *Burl Ives' Folio of Australian Folk Songs*,²¹ containing ten songs 'collected and arranged by Dr. Percy Jones'. The *Folio's* version of *Click Go the Shears* restores the colonial experience man verse from Jones' 1946 paper that Ives had omitted from his recording, and adds a final verse absent from that paper but sung by Ives on his recording, ie the verse commencing 'There we leave him standing, shouting for all hands.' Perhaps this verse had been omitted in 1946 for space reasons, or perhaps someone balked at a Catholic journal printing a verse that celebrated a shearer drinking hard and going to hell at last. We'll never know. Apart from the addition of this verse, the only change from the earlier text was the substitution of 'thin boney hands' as sung by Ives (and in the original American song) for the 1946 text's 'long boney hands'.

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In 1952 John Meredith was living on a bush block at Heathcote, south of Sydney. An 'Australian night' was coming up at neighbour Jack Barrie's house and, needing to make a contribution, Meredith decided to present a novelty performance of 'bush songs'. He roped in Jack and another mate, Brian Loughlin, and together—laden with false whiskers, bowyangs, accordion, lagerphone and bush bass—they burst forth as the *Heathcote Bushwhackers*. Thus was the bush band *genre* born. At this first performance, sometime in late winter or early spring 1952, they had a repertoire of three songs, one of which was *Click Go the Shears*.

Meredith was later to become Australia's greatest folksong collector, but in 1952 his life as a field collector had not yet begun. How then did he obtain *Click Go the Shears*? It was not a song he remembered from childhood. In all probability, he discovered it the same way most other Australians did—through Burl Ives. Ives performed the song in Sydney in June 1952, and his 78 rpm record of it was rushed into the stores soon thereafter. Meredith easily could have learned it via Ives in time to perform it at Heathcote in the spring of 1952.

²⁰ Burl Ives and the Four Guardsmen, *Nine Australian Folk Songs* (Columbia 10" LP 330S 7555).

²¹ *Burl Ives' Folio of Australian Folk Songs* (Sydney: Southern Music Publishing Co., 1953).



The Bushwhackers Band performing at the Sydney Showgrounds, mid 1950s, John Meredith playing accordion.

An analysis of an early tape recording of a *Heathcote Bushwhackers* performance provides compelling textual evidence in support of this theory.²² The taped rendition is virtually a word-perfect copy of the words on Ives' record. The only significant departure is the omission of Ives' final verse. Otherwise, not only do they render the same words as Ives but also they maintain the same verse order and leave out—as Ives did on his 78 rpm recording—the verse about the colonial experience man. Further, they repeat Ives' substitution in the second line of 'thin' boney hands for the 'long' boney hands in Jones' text. For all these reasons, it seems safe to conclude Meredith picked up the song from Burl Ives.

In December 1952, Meredith took a break for Christmas and went up to visit friends at Gulargambone in Northern NSW. While there, he played his accordion in Mousey Walker's pub and sang *Click Go the Shears*. One of those present was Bill 'Longtack' Reddington, and in response he sang to Meredith his own fragmentary version of the song,

²² The taped performance is on Tape 4B, John Meredith Collection, Oral History and Folklore Section, National Library of Australia.

consisting of a slightly variant first verse and chorus. Meredith later wrote that he ‘borrowed a pencil from the barmaid and scrawled down Reddington’s words on the inner surface of the outside slide of a *Turf* cigarette 20s pack.’²³

Early in 1953, Meredith acquired a tape recorder and started recording bush songs around the Sydney region. One of the first singers he recorded was Mrs Mary Brynes.²⁴ Among the items he recorded from her was a variant first verse of *Click Go the Shears*. The possibility exists that Mary sang more of the song to Meredith, but that Meredith recorded only the first verse because it had a variant text while the remainder was, say, the ‘standard’ text sung by Ives. (Recording tape was at that time very expensive, and Meredith was determined never to waste an inch.)²⁵ This is speculation but if correct it would provide some albeit limited justification for Meredith later claiming Mary Byrnes as the major source for his published version of the song.

Meredith did not document when either Reddington or Byrnes learned the song—it might have been something they recalled from the long ago; alternatively it might have been their imperfect recollection of the version sung in 1952 at concerts or on the wireless by Burl Ives.

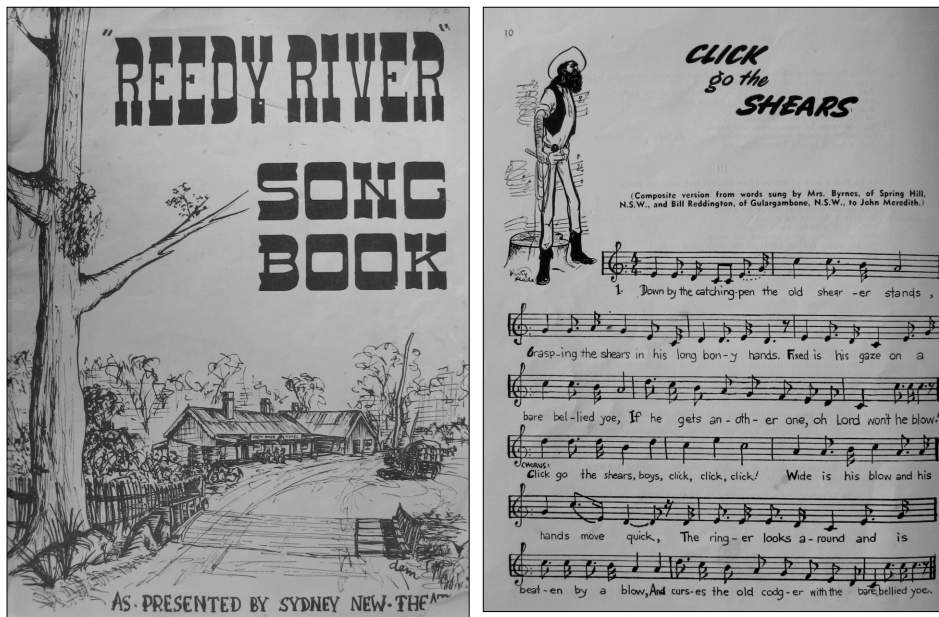
In mid-1953, Sydney *New Theatre* decided to mount a production of the new Australian musical play *Reedy River*, and Meredith’s band, now known simply as the *Bushwhackers*, was invited to be part of the cast. The *Bushwhackers*’ repertoire by this time included a number of songs newly collected by Meredith, and the decision was taken to include one of these, *Widgeegeoera Joe*, in the play. But the *Bushwhackers*’ party piece, the song for which they were best known, was *Click Go the Shears*—couldn’t this be included as well?

There was a problem with using *Click Go the Shears*—copyright had been claimed in the published version collected by Percy Jones. Jones was a protégé of the staunchly anti-communist Archbishop of Melbourne, Daniel Mannix, and *New Theatre* was left-wing, with many communists and communist sympathisers associated with it. Perhaps for this reason none of Jones’ songs had been used by author Dick Diamond in the play’s earlier Melbourne production. It may be the priest was

²³ John Meredith, ‘Click Go the Shears: A Correction’, *Australian Folklore Society Journal*, 36 (June 1997), p. 809. N.B. In the article, while Meredith says the time was Christmas 1955, this is clearly an error, because in the 1954 *Reedy River Song Book*, Reddington is credited as one of Meredith’s sources for ‘Click Go the Shears’. Most probably, the time was Christmas 1952, after Meredith learned the song but before he started collecting with a tape recorder.

²⁴ Meredith never published Byrnes’ version but the original tape recording is contained in the Meredith Collection, Oral History and Folklore Section, National Library of Australia, Tape 7A.

²⁵ Transcript of interview of John Meredith by Keith McKenry, 5 February 1995. Copy held in Oral History and Folklore Section, National Library of Australia.



Reedy River Song Book, *cover and words and music for 'Click Go the Shears'.*

approached and declined permission for his songs to be used; alternatively, it may be that Diamond, knowing Jones was a Catholic priest, didn't even ask.

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Whatever the facts of the matter, the decision was taken for the *Bushwhackers* to sing *Click Go the Shears* in the Sydney production. But how to get around Jones' copyright? At this point Meredith may have volunteered the information, or someone may have noted, that Meredith had himself collected several fragments of the song. Might not these be used as a basis for including the song in the play, citing a source independent of Jones? Whether this is what happened or not, it is a matter of record that when the *Reedy River Song Book* appeared in 1954, *Click Go the Shears* was included, in a version stated to be a 'composite version from words sung by Mrs Byrnes of Spring Hill, NSW and Bill Reddington of Gulargambone, NSW, to John Meredith'. This claim was disingenuous at best, for between them Reddington and Byrnes had provided only the chorus and two variant versions of the first verse—the other four verses came from Burl Ives.

Meredith never published the fragments of *Click Go the Shears* he collected from Byrnes and Reddington, and this may explain why his claim in the *Reedy River Song Book* to have collected the whole song was never challenged during his lifetime.

The major difference between the text in the *Reedy River Song Book* and that sung by Burl Ives was in the first line, which the *Song Book* had as 'Down by the catching pen the old shearer stands', instead of Ives' 'Out on the board the old shearer stands', and the fourth line, which the *Song Book* had as 'If he gets another one, oh Lord won't he blow', while Ives had 'Glory if he gets her, won't he make the ringer go.' Both these changes pick up the variant text in Mary Byrnes' version. Significantly however, on the cast recording²⁶ as on the prior *Heathcote Bushwhackers* version and a subsequent *Bushwhackers* version on Wattle records,²⁷ with only minor changes (notably the use of 'bare-bellied yoe' instead of 'bare-bellied Joe') the original Ives text is used. It seems therefore that while the *Song Book's* version gave credibility to the claim the song was collected by Meredith, the version actually performed in the play, and before and after it by the *Bushwhackers*, was virtually a straight lift from Burl Ives.

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Leaving Australia in the 1930s, A.L. Lloyd returned to Britain after spending time at sea on a whaler. His interest in folksongs, spawned during his years in Australia, blossomed and by the early 1950s he had become both a folksong scholar and a leading singer in the emerging British folksong revival. As a singer he was quite open about the fact he often changed songs to suit his taste. In 1972 he commented in a letter to Ron Edwards:²⁸

You ask which of my Australian songs I sing have been 'restored'. I suppose all of them. When I was a young chap working in the bush, I was a station hand not a folk song collector. Indeed, I'd never heard of such blokes. If I came across a song I liked, I'd try to learn it. I would encourage the singer to dictate the words to me, and I would try to memorize the tune (in those days, I couldn't write music). I didn't feel obliged to sing the songs as I received them. First of all, I often noticed that the slowly dictated texts came out a bit differently from the sung ones anyway. Secondly, if I didn't like the run of words, I'd alter them

²⁶ *Excerpts from Reedy River*, Diaphon 10" LP DPR-8.

²⁷ The Bushwhackers, *Click Go the Shears/ Botany Bay* 78rpm single Wattle Recording A-4, nd (c. 1956).

²⁸ Letter from A.L. Lloyd to Ron Edwards, dated 30 May 1972, quoted in full in Edwards, R., *Brisbane Ladies* (Kuranda, Qld: Rams Skull Press, 1982), pp.45-46.

round to suit myself. Thirdly, my memory of the tunes was often only approximate, and again I'd feel free to make what changes I fancied. So in a sense, my versions aren't specimens of scientific folklore collecting.

...If I'm writing as a folklorist, I do my best to report as I find. If I'm operating as a singer, to this day I seldom sing as I receive. And with the Australian stuff, apart from conscious changes, I'm sure I've made any number of involuntary changes such as are inevitable in the course of singing songs over several decades, during which time some items have for a time lain dormant in my repertory and then come back into use again. At best all I could claim for my bush-ballad stock is that they are 'Australian songs as sung by me'. Even when I made my first clean copies of the texts, I made changes from what was dictated, and more changes still in the course of singing.

A close listening to the unedited tapes of bush songs Lloyd recorded in London in 1957 for Australia's *Wattle Records*, reveals Lloyd rarely recorded a song the same way twice: in successive takes there would be substitution of words, changes of phrasing, and even entirely new expressions introduced, seemingly as the mood of the moment took him.²⁹

Upon first listening, the version of *Click Go the Shears* A.L. Lloyd sings on his 1955 *Riverside* album sounds markedly different to the earlier recordings of Burl Ives and the *Reedy River* cast. Not only does Lloyd have a distinctive singing style but also his version contains a number of new turns of phrase: 'Fixed is his gaze on a bare-bellied Joe' becomes 'And his bleary eyes are fixed on a blue-bellied yeo', while 'Paying strict attention if it's taken off clean' becomes 'Saying, "By the livin' Jesus can't you take 'em off clean?"'

These textual changes do not, however, change the fact that for the most part Lloyd's version tracks closely the Burl Ives version. Not only is most of the text identical but also the first four verses appear in the same order and Lloyd repeats Ives' omission of the colonial experience man verse. Lloyd omits however Ives' last two verses and substitutes an entirely new verse and chorus—and this is what makes his version truly distinctive.

Lloyd's new verse and chorus are as follows:³⁰

You take out the belly wool and finnickle out the crutch,
Then go up the neck for the rules they are such;

²⁹ These unedited tape recordings now form part of the Wattle Collection in the Oral History and Folklore Collection of the National Library of Australia. See for example tape TRC 2213/9/1.

³⁰ A. L. Lloyd, *Australian Bush Songs* (Riverside LP RLP 12-606, nd [1955]).

Clean around the horns and the first shoulder down,
A long blow up the back and then turn around.

Click, click, click that's how the shears go,
Click, clicketty-click, oh my boys it isn't slow.
You pull out a sheep and he lands you a kick
And still you hear the shears a-going, click, click, click.

Lloyd never commented publicly on the source(s) of his version, his silence on the matter carrying the inference his version was one he recalled from the shearing sheds in the 1930s. The new text in Lloyd's version is however remarkably similar to that of a song fragment collected by John Meredith in Sydney in late 1953, from retired shearer Jack Luscombe:³¹

You take off the belly wool, clean out the crutch,
Go up the neck—for the rules they are such;
You clean round the horns, first shoulder down,
One blow up the back and you then turn around.

Click, click, that's how the shears go,
Click, click, so awfully slow.
You pull out a sheep, he'll give you a kick
And still hear your shears going, click, click-click.

When John Meredith heard the Lloyd recording he was livid. He believed not only that Lloyd had used without acknowledgement the text he had collected from Luscombe but also that Lloyd was wrong in presenting this text as part of *Click Go the Shears*. Meredith was adamant it was an entirely separate song.³²

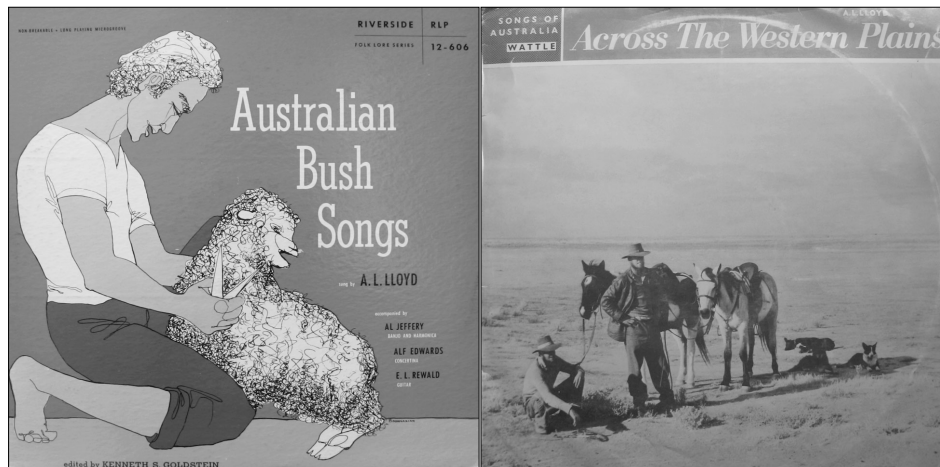
Meredith's suspicion that Lloyd had gained access to the Luscombe text, as yet unpublished, and used it without acknowledgement may well be correct. The song transcript easily could have been one of those sent in 1954 from Sydney to Dr Edgar Waters in London, and shown by him to Lloyd.

Edgar Waters was a central figure in the emerging Australian folklore movement in the early 1950s. He left Australia for England shortly before the establishment in January 1954 of the Australian Folklore Society, but was sent much of the material newly-collected by its members, the most active of whom was John Meredith. And as the Society stated in its journal *Speewa* that its collected material 'is all freely available to those who wish to study it'³³ there was no problem with Waters passing material on to anyone in England, including Lloyd,

³¹ Meredith, J., and H. Anderson, *Folk Songs of Australia* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1967), p. 24.

³² Meredith, J., 'A Depreciation of A.L. Lloyd', *Stringybark & Greenhide*, 4.3 (1983), 14.

³³ Editorial, *Speewa* 1.1, 2.



Covers from two of A.L. Lloyd's several Australian albums.

who expressed interest in it. While in later years Waters could not remember precisely what material he showed to whom, he did recall being visited by Lloyd and showing him material sent to him from Australia.³⁴

As for *Click Go the Shears* itself, while the possibility cannot be discounted that Lloyd did indeed recall the song from his youth it seems fair to conclude he drew heavily—if not solely—on the Burl Ives recording in developing his own version for singing. He may also have had access to the *Reedy River Song Book* for *Unity Theatre*—the British equivalent of Australia's *New Theatre*—staged *Reedy River* in London in 1954, and it is reasonable to suppose the songs in the production would have been of interest to Lloyd. The Lloyd version of *Click Go the Shears* is however far closer to the Burl Ives version than it is to that in the *Reedy River Song Book*.

Further support for the contention Lloyd had only recently encountered *Click Go the Shears* when he recorded it for *Riverside* can be drawn from Lloyd's own sleeve notes, for he states the song's tune is 'that of a much parodied revival hymn *Pull For the Shore*, also known to temperance enthusiasts as *Sign the Pledge, Brothers*'.³⁵ Seemingly, he was not then aware *Click Go the Shears* is a parody *Ring the Bell, Watchman*, and uses that song's tune intact. *Pull For the Shore* is an

³⁴ Record of conversation between Edgar Waters and Keith McKenry, 2 September 2003, unpublished. Copy held in the Oral History and Folklore Collection, National Library of Australia.

³⁵ Sleeve notes to A.L. Lloyd, *Australian Bush Songs* (Riverside LP RLP 12-606, nd [1955]).

entirely different song, composed by Philip P. Bliss and published in 1873.³⁶ In any event, while Lloyd says the tune is *Pull For the Shore*, he actually sings the song to the tune of *Ring the Bell, Watchman*.

Lloyd re-recorded the song three years later, for the Australian *Wattle* label. His second recorded version shows the variations of phrase characteristic of Lloyd. On this occasion he sings the colonial experience man verse (which he may now have found in the *Burl Ives Folio of Australian Folk Songs*) but dispenses with Jones' awkward final line 'Whistling the old-time tune, *I'm the Perfect Lure*', instead substituting 'Brilliantine and scented soap and smelling like a—*who said that?*' This variant has since been adopted by many revival singers. Lloyd also presents a variant final verse, consisting of two lines of each of the final two verses of the Burl Ives version.

In his sleeve notes Lloyd also gives a new account of the tune:

The tune is that of the American Civil War song, *Ring the Bell, Watchman*. The opening verse is a parody of that song....The tune was also used for the revival hymn: *Pull For the Shore*, and for a temperance anthem...

While thus Lloyd reconciles his earlier sleeve notes with a belated recognition of *Ring the Bell, Watchman*, his assertion the tune is also used for *Pull For the Shore* and a temperance anthem [*Sign the Pledge, Brothers*] can be correct only if singers of these songs sometimes abandoned Bliss's original tune in favour of that of Henry Clay Work. It is not known if they did so.

John Meredith took umbrage at Lloyd's failure, in his cover notes and elsewhere, ever to acknowledge him or other Australian collectors when he recorded an item from their collections, his suspected use of Luscombe's song being just one case in point. Lloyd's practice of remaining silent on his Australian sources when he did not collect an item itself, combined with his penning of seemingly authoritative notes thereon, led many to infer mistakenly that Lloyd was the collector. Largely as a result of such misconceptions Lloyd developed a reputation as a major collector and authority on Australian folksong, which he was not. (The American folklorist John Greenway even went so far as to describe Lloyd in the *American Folklore Society Journal* as 'the J.F. Child of Australian folksong'.)³⁷

³⁶ Bliss, P.P., 'Pull for the Shore', in his book *Sunshine for Sunday Schools*, 1873; not seen but cited on Cyberhymnal website, www.cyberhymnal.org

³⁷ Greenway, J., in the *Journal of American Folklore*, 286; cited in Ron Edwards, 'The Cult of Lloyd', *Northern Folk*, 6 (September, 1966), 7-8.



John Meredith and Sally Sloane

Meredith resented the acclamation bestowed on Lloyd and responded by attacking Lloyd mercilessly in print at every opportunity. Lloyd, to his credit, refused to respond in kind, and was unfailingly polite and forthcoming in responding to Meredith and other Australian critics. For example, when Meredith attacked Lloyd over an ill-informed statement he made to the effect few Australian songs concerned themselves with miscegenation, Lloyd graciously wrote back³⁸

Dear Mr Meredith

Miss Jackson, the E.F.D.S.S [English Folk Dance and Song Society] librarian, has sent me a copy of your letter referring to my note on The Maid of Australia. Clearly, I wrote from insufficient knowledge. I was glad to have my attention drawn to so many pieces I didn't know.

Your suspicion that most of my acquaintance with Australian folk lore comes from printed sources is quite correct. In my years in the bush I wasn't looking for folk lore. I doubt if I knew there was such an animal. Such songs as I picked up were not 'collected' but merely learned

³⁸ Lloyd's letter is quoted in full by Meredith in a letter by him to *Australian Tradition* 1.3 (July, 1964), inside cover.

because I fancied singing them. Some I wrote down at the time (the texts, that is) others I memorised. Most of them have got so much added to and altered about, consciously or involuntarily, in the course of time, that I imagine their scientific value to be small.

I hear of your work occasionally from Edgar Waters, and I make you my admiring bows.

Sincerely,
A.L. Lloyd.

Lloyd's refusal to take offence, and his ready preparedness to defer to Meredith's greater knowledge of Australian folk music did nothing to curb Meredith's vehemence; if anything, it may have fanned it.³⁹

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In 1955, John Meredith recorded from Mrs Sally Sloane in Lithgow the following verse and chorus for *Click Go the Shears*:

Now Mister new chum, for to begin,
From number seven paddock bring all the sheep in,
Don't leave none behind, whatever you do,
And then you'll be fit to be a jackeroo.

Click go the shears, click, click, click,
Wide are the blows and his hand moves quick,
The ringer looks around, sees he's beaten by a blow,
And he curses that old shearer with that bare bellied yowe.

According to Meredith, Sally learned the song from her grandfather, William Clegg.⁴⁰ Sally's version adds a compelling piece to the jigsaw. Up until now, all the collected fragments had been confined to the first verse and chorus, and their vintage was uncertain—by introducing an entirely new verse supposedly collected from her grandfather Sally probably tipped the balance of argument in favour of a likelihood the song existed, in some form, prior to the 1940s.

In 1957 John Meredith collaborated with musical arranger Alfred Hill in the production of a folio *Songs From the Bush*. This contains a revised version of *Click Go the Shears*, 'collected by John Meredith'. This

³⁹ For a full account of the 'Lloyd controversy', including Meredith's criticisms of Lloyd, see the *Australian Folklore Society Journal*, 32 (June, 1996).

⁴⁰ Meredith, J., and H. Anderson, *Folk Songs of Australia* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1967), pp. 193-194.

version incorporates the new verse collected from Sally Sloane, and drops the one about the old shearer standing at the bar grasping his glass. It also contains the line ‘Saying, by living Harry can’t you take them off clean’. This seemingly is pinched directly from Lloyd, who on his *Riverside* album introduced the line ‘Saying, by the livin’ Jesus can’t you take ’em off clean?’

Meredith also makes several other textual changes to his *Reedy River Song Book* version, in each instance adopting words introduced by Lloyd:

- instead of the tar boy having ‘his blackened tar-pot in his tarry hand’ he now has ‘his tarry jam-tin and a stick in hand’ (Lloyd had ‘his tarry jam pot and his stick in hand’)
- the tar boy now sees not ‘an old sheep’ but ‘an old merino’ (Lloyd sings ‘an old merino’)
- when the shearing is over it’s no longer ‘roll up your swag for we’re all off on the tracks’ but rather it’s precisely Lloyd’s ‘We’ll roll up our blueys, we’re off on the track’.

There is no suggestion Meredith had collected these new phrases from new informants, for his own copy of *Songs From the Bush* contains his handwritten annotation, ‘Composite version from verses sung by Mary Byrnes, Sally Sloane & Bill (Longtack) Reddington’.⁴¹ Rather, the conclusion is inescapable that Meredith incorporated into his revised version of *Click Go the Shears* phrases lifted from Lloyd, and kept silent about the fact he had done so.

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Over the last half century *Click Go the Shears* has been recorded by innumerable artists, appeared in countless folksong anthologies, been taught in schools and used in films, on television and in other commercial contexts—an icon of musical Australiana. Most recording artists have been content simply to label the song ‘traditional’ (ignoring composer Henry Clay Work). Publishers of song books and musical folios, film-makers and other commercial operators have however generally been more circumspect and largely have respected claims of several publishers to copyright in versions of the song. As a result, these copyrighted versions have been attracting royalties since the 1950s, and continue to do so.

⁴¹ Meredith’s annotated copy of *Songs from the Bush* is in possession of the author.

When Southern Music Publishing Company published the *Burl Ives' Folio of Australian Folk Songs*, Ives and Jones shared the royalties. Some thirty-four years later Jones was to comment that 'the royalties that still come in are extraordinary'.⁴² When Allan & Co. published *Songs from the Bush*, Meredith and Hill shared the royalties. In the year 2000, over forty years after their version of *Click Go the Shears* was first published, Meredith's share of the song's copyright brought in royalties of over \$400.⁴³ In both instances, the collectors' informants got nothing.

The copyright claims rest on shaky ground. The tune is simply that of Work's song, *Ring the Bell, Watchman*. Work died in 1884; his published tunes are out of copyright. While therefore copyright may be claimed for new musical arrangements of *Click Go the Shears*, its melody line is in the public domain.

The words of *Click Go the Shears* were provided by Jack Moses to Percy Jones. There is no record of the terms, if any, under which he did so, and it is reasonable to suppose the matter of rights was not even raised. There is scant evidence of Australian folksong collectors discussing rights with informants at that time, or for decades thereafter—seemingly, few gave the matter of rights a thought—and it was generally assumed the material was being given unconditionally, ie with no restriction on access or use. This being the case, it could hardly be appropriate for a publisher subsequently to claim copyright in informants' material.

In any event, copyright in the version of *Click Go the Shears* published by Allan & Co. rests heavily on Meredith's claim to be the collector and this claim is largely unfounded. His five verse 'composite' version contains three verses seemingly never collected by him, for which the only feasible source is Percy Jones' version, adjusted to incorporate lines and phrases introduced by A.L. Lloyd.

Over the decades the accrued royalties from *Click Go the Shears* will have amounted to a handsome sum, and this fact extends the issue from one of ethics to one also of economics.

Perhaps we should finish by acknowledging Jack Moses. After all, it was Jack who gave us the song. Unlike Percy Jones, Burl Ives, John Meredith, A.L. Lloyd and Alfred Hill he got no recognition, and made no money, from it. Nor, I suspect, would he have wished to: he published two books in his lifetime and gave the proceeds of both to the Australian Red Cross.⁴⁴

⁴² Cave, D., *Percy Jones: Priest, Musician, Teacher* (Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press, 1988), pp. 31-32.

⁴³ Box 18 Folder 11, John Meredith Manuscript collection MS 1007, National Library of Australia.

⁴⁴ 'Jack Moses', *Australian Dictionary of Biography: Online Ed.*, www.adb.online.anu.edu

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Photographs

Except where noted below, all photographs were taken by the author, of items in his collection.

- Percy Jones with pipe: *People* magazine, 3 December 1952.
- Jack Moses: title page of Moses' book *Beyond the City Gates* (Austral Publishing Co., Sydney, 1923).
- The Bushwhackers Band performing at the Sydney showgrounds: from John Meredith manuscript collection MS 1007, National Library of Australia.
- John Meredith with Sally Sloane, *People* magazine, 11 January 1956.

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The Author

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Indian Folklife: A Quarterly Newsletter, the issue for November 2009, and one which features Mizo Folklore, and which has been compiled by Margaret Ch. Zama, who provides there an introduction on pp. 3-4, entitled 'Whither Folklore? The Mizo Context', considering this small state of the Northeast region of India, and exploring the place of folklore in such a tiny spot in the age of globalization. From it we may quote:

The state of folklore in Mizoram today is that our folk artifacts are seen as mere show pieces or museums or the archive. Our folk stories are unable to compete with TV cartoons ... But all is not lost. Folklorists are not only asking questions like, 'Who are the folk', but also changing from the texts to the study of contexts, and folklore as performance and enactment. For extending the study of myths and folktales beyond the written texts can lead to a fuller understanding of their nature and role in human life. [Thus] innovative ways of depicting and fusing folklore into the modern context through the performing arts like modern dance and drama must now be seriously explored by the Mizo.

Other issues are the role of Christianity in the furtherance of lore, and the conclusions may now be quoted:

...culture and folklore are [both] a means of maintaining the value and self-respect of a people. It serves the need for a national identity and pride. If we are keen to preserve and cherish our folklore, let it be the genuine stuff, and not just as Dundes said a 'fabrication of fakelore. [*loc. cit.* p. 4]

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