

The Wild Colonial Boy

Traditional



He was a wild colonial boy Jack Dowling was his name. Of poor but honest



parents he was born in Castlemaine. He was his father's only son his mother's pride and



joy and dearly did his parents love the wild colonial boy.

'Twas of a Wild Colonial Boy, Jack Dowling was his name,
Of poor but honest parents, was reared at Castlemaine,
He was his father's favorite, and mother's only joy
And a terror to Australia was the Wild Colonial Boy.

Eighteen hundred and sixty-one commenced his wild career,
A heart that knew no danger, no stranger for to fear
He stuck up Beechworth's mail coach and robbed judge Macoboy,
Who, trembling, gave up all his gold to the Wild Colonial Boy.

One morning, one morning, as Jack he rode along,
Listening to the mocking bird singing forth its song,
Three brave troopers they rode up, Davis, Kelly and Fitzroy,
Rode up and tried to capture the Wild Colonial Boy.

'Surrender, now Jack Dowling you see there's three to one,
Surrender in the Queen's name you outlawed plundering son.'
Jack drew a pistol from his belt and tossed the little toy,
'I'll die but ne'er surrender,' cried the Wild Colonial Boy.

He fired at trooper Kelly and brought him to the ground
When on return from Davis received an awful wound,
While thus in crimson gore he fell while firing at Fitzroy,
And that was how they captured the Wild Colonial Boy.

This is the earliest known printed version and is taken from a Colonial Songster published by A.T. Hodgson in Castlemaine, circa 1881. In 1905 Banjo Paterson collected two more verses from his Bulletin readers.

He was scarcely sixteen years of age when he left his father's home,
And through Australia's sunny clime a bushranger did roam.
He robbed those wealthy squatters, their stock he did destroy,
And a terror to Australia was the wild Colonial boy.

He bade the Judge 'Good morning,' and told him to beware,
That he'd never rob a hearty chap that acted on the square,
And never to rob a mother of her son and only joy,
Or else you may turn outlaw, like the wild Colonial boy.

From *The Wild Colonial Boy, Turning Legend into History*, by Allen Mawer, see source notes.

The Wild Colonial Boy

1. He was a wild colonial boy, Jack Doolan was his name.
Of poor but honest parents he was born in Castlemaine.
He was his father's only hope, his mother's pride and joy.
And dearly did his parents love the Wild Colonial Boy.
2. At scarcely sixteen years of age he left his father's side,
And bold and brave across the land, a bushranger did ride.
He robbed the rich to help the poor. He gave them hope and joy.
But a terror to the squatters was the Wild Colonial Boy.
3. In sixty-one this daring youth sped on his wild career,
With a heart that knew no danger, and in the law struck fear.
He held the Beechworth mail-coach up and robbed Judge MacEvoy,
Who trembled and gave up his gold to the Wild Colonial Boy.
4. He bade the judge: "*Good morning*" and warned him to beware.
For he'd never rob a decent judge that acted fair and square.
But a judge who robbed a mother of her son and only joy.
Would be nabbed and tried and sentenced by the Wild Colonial Boy.
5. Jack Doolan's daring actions made the police look slow and dim.
They spread their efforts far and wide to try and capture him.
Three mounted troopers, chanced one day, Kelly, Davis and Fitzroy,
To be in place to ambush him, the Wild Colonial Boy.
6. "*Surrender now Jack Doolan! We've got you three to one.
Surrender now Jack Doolan, your highway days are done!*"
Head on he faced his challengers, his pistols he deployed.
"*I'll fight but not surrender!*", cried the Wild Colonial Boy.
7. He fired at trooper Kelly and brought him to the ground.
And in return from Davis, he received a mortal wound.
All shattered through the jaws he lay, still firing at Fitzroy.
And that's the way they captured him, the Wild Colonial Boy.

When I was a small child in the 1950's, after the evening meal on family occasions, Pop, would fetch his button accordion and start playing. Soon into the evening, Dad would be called upon to sing "*The Wild Colonial Boy*". He sang with feeling, the memory of which, fifty years on, still aches in my heart. "*The Wild Colonial Boy*" was his signature song. Its performance was demanded at every family gathering. I wonder now if Dad and perhaps his father as well, felt some affinity with the Wild Colonial Boy. The family farm at Eddington was only a few miles from Castlemaine.

I began acquiring published collections of colonial songs in the late 1970s. Turning to "*The Wild Colonial Boy*" page of each new find, I was surprised to discover that there were many versions and that none were as my father used to sing. Many employed a jolly chorus. In some of the verses, the words were surprisingly trite. I wish I had a copy of the words Dad sang. I have edited verses from some published versions in an attempt to recapture the nobility, drama and tension I remember from his singing.

Sources

Verses:

J S Manifold, *The Penguin Australian Song Book*, Penguin Australia, 1964
Ron Edwards, *Great Australian Folk Songs*, Ure Smith Press, 1976
Michael Gallagher, stimulated by the singing of Brendan Gallagher.

Tune:

Edwards gives six tunes collected from singers across Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. Dad sang the tune given here which Edwards collected from Fred Ware on Thursday Island in 1960.

History:

Bill Wannon, in his book, *The Australian, Yarns, Ballads, Legends, Traditions*, Currey, O'Neil 1954, reprinted 1981, contends that the intention of the Land Acts was thwarted by wealthy squatters who used their considerable wealth and dummy selectors to procure the most productive land and squeeze poor selectors to unproductive margins. He claims the squatters enjoyed the support of the legislature and the police. The selectors were therefore opposed to the squatters and the police and they adopted bushrangers, real and legendary, as their "hero-symbols".

Variants of "*The Wild Colonial Boy*" are sung to various tunes in Ireland and America, Canada and Britain. In some, the hero is born in Castlemaine, Ireland from where he was transported. [Manifold and Edwards]

Allen Mawer has researched the history of the song. He notes that the first printed version of the song was printed in a Colonial Songster published by A.T. Hodgson in Castlemaine, circa 1881. He provides evidence to support his contention that the lyrics were written in Bendigo to lampoon a particularly harsh sentence handed down in 1872 to John Doolan, a Castlemaine youth and his accomplice for a relatively minor crime. Perhaps this is the explanation for the triteness in some of the verses. For details, see his article, *The Wild Colonial Boy, Turning Legend into History*, on the Australian Government Education Department's web site: <http://www.hyperhistory.org/index.php?option=displaypage&Itemid=674&op=page>

Bob Waltz, writing on his web site: *Remembering the Old Songs*, notes that many English speaking nations have famous outlaws, but "*while these outlaws are famous in song and story in their native lands, few ever have their stories told in other countries*". The Wild Colonial Boy is the exception. <http://www.lizlyle.lofgrens.org/RmOlSngs/RTOS-WildCol.html>

I would like to know more about the origin of this song, how it came to be sung in different parts of the world and how it captured the imagination of my father.

