

The Streets of Forbes

Traditional

Come all — you Lach-lan men and a sor row ful tale I'll tell con-
cern - ing of a hr - ro bold who through mis — fort - une fell. His
name it was Ben Hall, a man of high re - known, who was
hun - ten from his stat - ion — and — like a dog shot — down.

Text of verses three and four given in J.S. Manifold, *The Penguin Australian Song Book*, 1964.

3. Ben went to Goobang Creek, and that was his downfall;
For riddled like a sieve was valiant Ben Hall.
'Twas early in the morn upon the fifth of May
When the seven police surrounded him as fast asleep he lay.
4. Bill Dargin he was chosen to shoot the outlaw dead;
The troopers then fired madly, and filled him full of lead.
They rolled him in a blanket and strapped him to his prad,
And lead him through the streets of Forbes to show the prize they had.

The Streets of Forbes

1. Come all you Lachlan men and a sorrowful tale I'll tell
Concerning of a hero bold who through misfortune fell.
His name it was Ben Hall, a man of high renown
Who was hunted from his station and like a dog shot down.
2. Three years he roamed the roads and he gave the traps some fun.
A thousand pounds was on his head with Gilbert and John Dunn.
Ben parted from his comrades, the outlaws did agree
To give away bushranging and to cross the briny sea.
3. Ben went to Goobang creek, where on the fifth of May,
Early in the morning, while fast asleep he lay,
Seven police surrounded him to deliver his downfall.
And Bill Dargin was chosen to creep up and shoot Ben Hall.
4. All the troopers then fired madly and they filled him full of lead
Riddled like a sieve, valiant Ben Hall lay dead.
They rolled him in a blanket and strapped him to his prad,
And lead him through the streets of Forbes to show the prize they had.

The lyrics and tune of "*The Streets of Forbes*" constitute a creative masterpiece. This song enthralled me when I first heard it in the 1970s. I believe it will continue to captivate singers and audiences for generations to come. The origin of the evocative melody is not known. The lyrics are attributed to John McGuire, who witnessed the parade of his brother-in-law through the streets of Forbes and penned his verses soon afterwards.

Although there are no references to treachery, betrayal, police incompetence, cowardice or injustice in these verses, the ballad most powerfully portrays all such malfeasance. The author uses plain language to tell how a man, guilty of no crime, was harassed by the police and his livelihood destroyed. He responded by joining an outlaw gang, taunting the police with daring deeds and making a laughing stock of their authority. They surrounded him as he slept in the bush, shot him down and paraded his bullet-ridden body through the streets of Forbes. The injustice that this song commemorates can still raise tears in the eyes of singers and listeners.

I presume the ballad was transmitted orally for a time, and that the sequencing oddities in verses three and four crept in during that period. These defects diminish the ballad's power. I believe some careful shifting of phrases and some editorial stitching has "restored" the ballad to a seamless whole that tells the story as its author intended.

Source:

J S Manifold, *The Penguin Australian Song Book*, Penguin Australia, 1964

Verses three and four "restored" by Michael Gallagher.

I look forward to discovering much more about how this folk marvel has come down to us.