

The Convict's Lament

Words and music: Nigel Harbron

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of four staves of music. The lyrics are written below the notes. Chord symbols are placed above the notes. The lyrics are: "When first un-to the town I came, I thought it would be dan-dy, But I could find no-where to live and no-one to be-friend me. I found a room I could af-ford in a house down by the ri-ver. It had no wa-ter, fire or light, and in it I did shi-ver."

When first unto the town I came, I thought it would be dandy,
But I could find nowhere to live and no-one to befriend me.
I found a room I could afford in a house down by the river.
It had no water, fire or light, and in it I did shiver.

It wasn't long before I found the streets weren't paved with gold.
With no fresh air, or logs to burn, I suffered smoke and cold.
There were no jobs for one like me, no land for me to work on.
I hung around the streets all day, my sense of purpose all gone.

I met a man who said he knew a way to wealth and riches,
But what I had to do for him was steal from other men's breeches.
It wasn't long before I found myself locked up behind bars,
To share a cell with men so foul and some less loathsome creatures.

The journey to Van Diemen's Land was Hell without the brimstone.
The lucky ones died on the way before the worst had hit them.
A convict's life is not his own, all rights he had are gone,
He takes each day just as it comes - it might well be his last one.

I wish I were back home again in woods and fields so green,
Where everybody knows your name and dangers can be seen.
I'd never think that life elsewhere was worth a second glance;
However tempted I might be, no more my luck would I chance.

My parents used to tell me that there's nowhere quite like home,
But I believed that I knew best when I set out to roam.
I heeded not their words so true and thought that I knew better,
But now they know not where I am, they can't even send a letter.

But home I'll never see again, I'll never leave this shore.
I might survive for fifteen years, but probably not more.
To all who might be tempted to follow my example,
Just think of me in foreign lands - a sight both sad and woeful.



Scotland or Australasia?

It's clearly late-Georgian, but the bit on the right doesn't look much like Scotland, does it? Then there's the colour of the sky....

This is one of many Georgian buildings on Norfolk Island, an Australian territory in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, a thousand miles east of Brisbane. It was an early British penal colony for those reprobates who weren't willing to put up with conditions in Australia. Van Diemen's Land is now Tasmania, and probably kept most of its convicts (it being an island), but no doubt some hard cases 'graduated' to Norfolk Island, from which there was no escape - or return.

Nowadays, the tiny island is a popular tourist destination, although the increasing cost of transporting freight to it has obliged the Australian Government to throw money at it to try to keep it solvent - a situation that might not last for ever.

The beauty of the island is in stark contrast to the dreadful treatment meted out to its early - unwilling - residents who probably had little time to appreciate two of the island's attractions: the Norfolk Island Pine and the elegant Fairy (White) Tern (which usually nests in the aforementioned tree).