

Fakelore to Folklore, Part 5, Our Irish Heritage

Peter Ellis

I've covered the 'Irish Equation' to a fair extent in the series 'Calling the Tune and Leading a Merry Dance' part 10 to 13 November 2011to February 2012 in Trad & Now.

However the belief persists within the folk clubs and the social dance music arena that things like Siege of Ennis, Waves of Tory, Walls of Limerick and tunes such as those in Begged Borrowed and Stolen (BBS) are representative of the Irish component of the social tradition of Australia's pioneering era. It is an absolute Furphy. Begged Borrowed and Stolen was never portrayed by the authors as representing Australian Tradition, it was simply a compilation of favoured tunes in the repertoire of the Celtic Club in Adelaide. Helen O'Shea believes it is likely many of the tunes were taken from printed sources from other books as the title suggests; but some may have also come from Tim Whelan, Irish whistle player of renown who made regular trips by ferry from Kangaroo Island to play at the Celtic Club, as well as hosting many sessions at home. Any movement of tunes from Tim by the aural folk process certainly would be considered a component of Australian folk. Tim can be seen as conducting sessions of 'Eire on Kangaroo Is.' Tim's son John made the following comment: -

> *"My Dad loved playing the tin whistle and his range of favourite tunes to everyone and anyone who would listen. He had endless patience with 'students' of the music who wished to learn.*
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> *He did have sessions on Kangaroo Island as he did here in Adelaide. The sessions in Kangaroo Island were almost always with beginners either singly or in smallish numbers as there were few, if any, experienced musicians there. Angela Marsh, Banjo, from Kangaroo Island was one who learned from my dad and became quite competent on the banjo. He also got a musical festival going there which became an annual event for a few years.*
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> *He was also involved in the very early stages of the Port Fairy Music festival and a regular, when he lived in Adelaide, at sessions at the Governor Hindmarsh on Friday nights. There is a large framed picture of him still on the wall there above the music corner. He is holding his beloved wooden flute.*

My Dad loved the old tunes, the Sally Gardens, Tim Moloney, the Sailors Bonnet, Come West along the Road and the like. His had a simple way of playing, which followed his many years as a Band player in Dublin where he mostly played the saxophone. He was one of the very few who could play jigs and reels on the saxophone, inevitably frowned upon by traditionalists, amazing as it was to see and hear. He didn't have the 'Neah' of truly traditional players who learn to 'lean' on the note but he knew all of the old tunes and played them perfectly.

The tin whistle, the wooden flute and the saxophone were his only instruments and he loved all of them.

Something you might not know is that a Japanese Traditional Irish Band in Tokyo plays a tune composed by my Dad, The Road to Port Fairy on YouTube. Sho Iwaasa plays the flute solo on this recording and of course it's my Dad's tune. Here it is: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3tA208dVAA ."

Returning to publications such as Begged Borrowed and Stolen a great number of musicians have not learnt the tunes by aural transmission, but by playing directly from the music. It seems that with modern technology the natural folk process of transmission of folk music has largely gone out the door, which in itself could be regarded as the contemporary folk process. Certainly in the folk clubs much of any tune learning is 'by the dots' and I would have to accept that is now the way with any genuine collected Australian tunes exposed within an arena of growing interest in some folk arenas such as Bush Traditions and the Settlers Session and use of Folk Songs of Australia by Meredith and Anderson, or my own publications for that matter.

In contrast it is interesting with respect to the profiling of Celtic and particularly Irish tunes that even some decades back John Meredith in Vol. 2 of "Folk Songs of Australia" made the following claim: -

"Sadly, these, for the most part, very talented young musicians have turned their backs upon the very tradition they imagine they are keeping alive. Almost without exception their music has been learned from Irish fiddle-tune books, and their repertoires are exclusively jigs and reels. Most of the dances they perform have come from the same source or have been recently made up. Yet they call themselves "Bush Bands" and identify themselves by names having a strong Australian flavour...

"The programmes of these 'bush dances' bear no resemblance to those of a real bush dance or country ball. Completely ignored are the dances enjoyed by our forebears: the Varsoviana, Mazurka, Schottische, the Waltz and the various

Polkas, not to mention the sets such as the Lancers, First Set of Quadrilles, Waltz Cotillions or the Alberts. Excluded also are the many 'new vogue' dances so popular early in this century, most of which are based on the waltz-step."

Pondering about these issues I thought well let's move away from Begged Borrowed and Stolen and have a look at what the Irish might have played out here and select some of the tunes that never made it into BBS.

The Irish were a major component of settlement in Australia and their contribution to social life from our pioneering days stands shoulder to shoulder with the other major settlers, the English, Welsh and Scottish. By the time of the gold-rushes mid-nineteenth century we had a veritable 'United Nations' of races 100 Years before the Snowy Mountain Hydroelectric Scheme which the then Prime Minister of Australia said introduced multiculturalism to Australia.

It is also said that the English concentrated mainly in the development of settlement in the towns and cities and that the Celtic peoples pioneered the bush and became the major component of rural districts. The highlands of central Victoria around Daylesford, Maryborough, Kyneton and Kilmore are good examples as well as in some coastal areas such Port Fairy. At Maldon the population of Welsh was high and the native tongue flourishing above English from the 1850s to well into the 1890s. There was also a high proportion of Protestant Irish in the overall mass immigration of Irish during the potato famine of the 1840s. As early as the First Fleet there were many Irish on board, those of English birth of Irish parents and grandparents. These likely crossed the Irish Sea for employment during the upheavals of the Industrial Revolution.

The division between the British Isles and Irish regions were not as 'defined' as they became in contemporary times and there was much overlap of repertoire of tunes and dances. The Irish were playing as much popular music as anybody else as evidenced in James Goulding's manuscripts of 1817 (County Cork) brought out by his immigrating son to Melbourne in the 1840s. There is much Scottish material as well as selections of tunes from Europe including a Portuguese, Russian and German Waltz, Copenhagen Waltz, many Spanish waltzes and Polonaises and "Rule Britannia". All contemporary interchange of material in the period.

In this very early period it is reported that the 'Irish Trot' was danced at a wedding at the Rocks in Sydney. This turns out not to be Thady You Gander as first thought, although that tune is in Irish music of the period and even in later music for the Irish quadrilles in the 19th and 20th centuries. However the Irish Trot was a triple longways in the typical country dance form of the era and the tune perhaps dating

back to Playford; well there is such a tune in Playford and several more over the next century or so. The tune below courtesy of Heather Clarke is that believed to have been in vogue at the time of the Wedding on the Rocks in Sydney 1803 when the Irish Trot was danced.



The Irish were generally involved in playing as much popular dance music during our settlement as their own airs. This is confirmed in the following quotation: St Patrick's Night at Beechworth Tuesday 24th March 1857, as reported in the "Ovens Constitution", and reprinted in the Age" six hundred dancers present.

> *"Country dances, quadrilles, waltzes, etc were rapidly shuffled, whirled and figured when, as by a genuine Irish gush, the band burst forth the 'stick enlivening strains' of Donnybrook Fair. Twelve stalwart 'boys' were in an instant up and at it . . . "The band was constantly asserting their ignorance of the existence of "The Goose in the Bog", "Boys from the West", "Gone to Carlow" and "The Priest in his Boots" in the repertoire of Strauss, Mussard, or Jullien, also an elderly gent complaining because the band couldn't play "Yellow Wattle".*

It was held in the great hall of Beechworth 'and belies the popular fallacy that a fierce row is a necessary adjunct to the feast of St. Patrick'. The account mentions dancers from the Woolshed, Yackandandah, and even Nine Mile.

With reference to the selection of dance music favoured (already evidenced above) one book that was particularly popular was Allan's Music Book No. 37 (now No. 23 and still available) collection of Reels, Jigs, Hornpipes and other Country Dances". Of the 108 tunes listed only 15 are Irish. Similarly Boosey's Musical Cabinet No. 65 of 1886 "100 Reels, Country Dances, Jigs, Highland Flings, Strathspeys, etc" only 11 tunes out of the one hundred are Irish.

There is no suggestion that it was any different in the aural tradition - our dances and music were of ballroom origin and in turn based on European rather than British

and Irish folk dance: “Walls of Limerick”, “Siege of Ennis” and “Waves of Tory” were all unheard of - these came to us very recently and after the revival in Ireland following independence.

Quite curiously in Australia the Royal Irish Quadrille which was sometimes repeated on a programme showed support for the Irish tunes - yet it seems unknown in Britain. Obviously if it were known in Ireland the royal tag would have been dropped and possibly the Irish Quadrilles is a similar thing. But it was extremely popular in Australia and was only displaced later by the Pride of Erin when sequence couple dances became more popular. Both the Royal Irish Quadrille and the Pride of Erin maintained tunes of Irish sentiment, even if of a different nature or of American origin in the case of the latter. Looking back at the Royal Irish it was not the complex tunes in minor keys but those such as “Sprig of Shillelah”, “Paddy Whack”, “Rollicking Irishman”, “Nora Creina”, “St Patrick’s Day”, the ubiquitous “Irish Washerwoman”, “The Girl I Left Behind Me”, “Finnigan’s Wake”, “Paddy Will You Now”, “Rakes of Mallow”, “Garry Owen”, “Humours of Donnybrook” and of course the favourite “Wearing of the Green”.

Although Allan’s Music No 37 includes “Lannigan’s Ball” there is only one isolated instance of this tune being collected in the aural tradition - from an Irishman and even then it had been obscurely converted into polka time. Of all the tunes listed above, only a few players (native born Australians) might know more than two or three. Thus a few Scottish jigs such as “Cock o’ the North” or “100 Pipers” might also be played for the Royal Irish.

By the 20th century song tunes such as the “Wild Colonial Boy”, “McNamara’s Band” or “Phil the Fluter’s Ball” would be adapted. Even non-Irish marches such as “Repasz” (The Irish Guard) might be used.

This then was the Australian scene with Irish involvement, but at home in Eire, the Gaelic League by the turn of the 19th/20th century was flexing its muscle and ultimately caused a ban of dances and tunes perceived as non-Irish; that is the shared material actually much loved by the Irish as well as between Scotland and England including the fashionable material from the Continent. The idea was to create an ‘Irish Ireland’ and therefore a concentrated effort on reviving the old Irish tunes in particular and therefore promoted a very high profile on the type of material from O’Neill’s and BBS.

But this didn’t happen out here despite radio playing in the 1920s and 30s from 78 recordings of the above repertoire of material as well as the popular ‘Ireland over Here’, Danny Boy, Eileen Alannah, Killarney and so on. A much more accurate picture is given by Helen O’Shea in her interview notes of John McKinnon of Irish and Scottish parentage and are noted as follows:

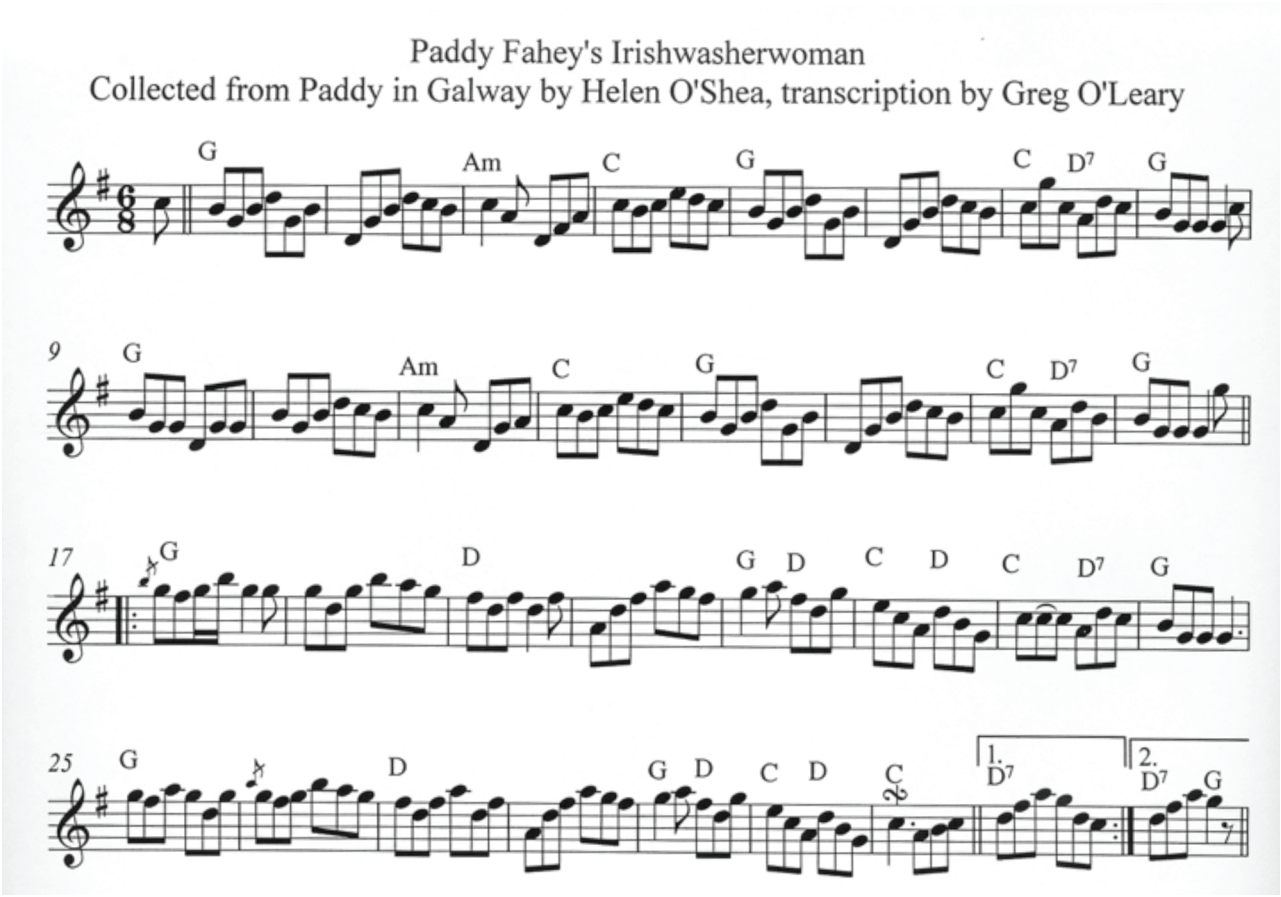
"My experience in Western Victoria in 1989–90 brought me into contact with a number of people who sang or played Irish music. I played often with John McKinnon and his repertoire included many Scottish and Irish tunes, but as a true dance musician, he got them from everywhere, including the collectors who visited him. He did get a few tunes from a Scottish piper when he was learning. I've pasted below the music that was played at what John called an 'Irish evening', and 'at home' north of Terang, in November 1989. They are in the National Library collection. The Irish and Scottish tunes John played that night, on his band recordings and at dances I attended were almost all derived from songs (Irish Washerwoman is a song too) or were pipe marches.

John was born in 1923 and started playing accordion in bands at age 12. Most of, possibly all of, the dance tunes he recorded on commercial tapes in the 1980s were song tunes and they would have been popular from the early 20C to the 1960s and a few more recent ones. He always had an ear out for a good tune. In a tune list for Old Time dance numbers dated 1981; John simply divides the tunes according to time signature: fox trot, waltz time, barn dance time.

I'm aware that there were many publications available in the 19th and early 20th century from which musicians could have sourced Irish and Scottish tunes, either directly (if they could read music) or indirectly through other musicians. These included the many miscellanies for piano. So a musician of John McKinnon's age might have sourced a tune from an older musician, who got it from a still older one, but then they might have got it from their sister's piano playing, if you see what I mean!



I don't know whether the Irish Washerwoman is an English tune, but thought you might like the [transcription below](early 1970s) from an East Galway fiddler, Paddy Fahey.



As for myself, I've been focused on music in Ireland for some time now and have published The Making of Irish Traditional Music with Cork University Press. I wrote my doctoral thesis (Victoria University) on foreigners playing Irish traditional music but decided to excise the part about Australia from the ms for publication, as Irish people have no interest at all in outsiders playing Irish music, apart, I suspect, from wishing that they wouldn't! At present I'm exploring the question of whether or not you can trace a musical style historically through the playing of older musicians. It's a tricky one!"

Recording at Bill and Margaret Heffernan's, November 1989 Bib ID2869748.

Music 1: Moon River, Danny Boy. Singing: A Mother's Love is a Blessing, The Town I Love so Well, The Irish Jaunting Car, Phil the Fluter's Ball, Paddy McGinty's Goat.

Music 2; Irish Jigs, Long Way to Tipperary, Wearing of the Green, 100 Pipers, Hot Punch, The Old Bark Hut (In the Garden Where the Praties Grow), Waves of Tory, Where the River Shannon Flows, Maggie. Singing: The Rose. Music, La Cucaracha, La Paloma, She Wears My Ring, Brahms Lullaby. Singing: Shenandoah, I Gave My Love a Cherry, The Rose of Tralee, How

Could you Buy Killarney, These Are My Mountains, The Farmer's Boy. Music: Black and White Rag, Music Box Dancer, Linger Awhile, Harvest Home Hornpipe, Father O'Flynn, Rickett's Hornpipe, Copenhagen Waltz, Irish Washerwoman, Song of the Clyde, Highland Schottische, Rakes of Mallow, Planxty Irwin, Doonaree, The Old Bullock Dray, Drover's Dream, When Irish Eyes Are Smiling, That's an Irish Lullaby.

Singing: The Generous Lover Courtin' in the Kitchen, the Moonshiner.

My (P.E.'s) comment: Whilst many of the tunes are modern, the balance or distribution of repertoire is really little different to James Goulding's time or most likely up until the emergence of the Gaelic League and its influence particularly by the 1920s.

The ubiquitous Irish Washerwoman so popular in both Irish descended communities and mainstream traditional Australian dance musicians is seldom heard in Irish sessions, although I have heard Billy Moran play it. 'Monte' (Bill Montgomery) pointed out to me the tune is originally English and that's why you don't hear the Irish session players using it. I was quite stunned by this, but on checking the web, can find no definite information. But even if it did have English origin, should it matter? The reel was not in the Irish tradition till it crossed from Scotland around 1810 (Mrs McLeod's Reel) and from which a whole graft of very Irish reels developed and a most important part of Irish traditional music today. Helen O'Shea collected a most beautiful version of the Irish Washerwoman from County Cork fiddler Paddy Fahey.

With some suggestions of origin from the web I found the following:-

1. Although the tune has popularly been known as an old, and perhaps quintessential Irish jig, it has been proposed by some writers to have been an English country dance tune that was published in the 17th century and probably known in the late 16th century. Samuel Bayard (1981), for example, concludes it probably was English in origin rather than Irish, being derived from the air called "Dargason," or "Sedany" as it is sometimes called. Fuld (1966) disagrees, believing "Dargason" (which he gives under the title "Scotch Bagpipe Melody") and "The Irish Washerwoman" developed independently. "Dargason" was first printed in Ravenscroft's Pammelia (1609) and appears in the Playford's Dancing Master editions from 1651 to 1690, but subsequently the "folk process" melded the strain to other parts, thus making other tunes (see "The Green Garters" for example) including the precursors to the Washerwoman tune.

2. One of these precursors was the English tune “Country Courtship” which dates from at least 1715 and probably to 1688, in which latter mentioned year it was first entered at Stationers’ Hall. “The Irish Washerwoman” appears to have developed from “The Country Courtship,” which was extremely popular in the 19th century, as the tune under the “Washerwoman” title was to become a little later.

3 A variant of the modern version of the tune appears as air 13 in Samuel Arnold’s stage piece The Surrender of Calais, report Van Cleef and Keller (1980), which was first performed in London in 1791. It was sung by the character O’Carrol, an Irish soldier, and the song became known as “Corporal Casey: “As “Corporal Casey,” the tune appears in Instructions for the Fife (London, 1795). The melody also found its way into various broadsides and similar ‘low’ publications, such as the latter 18th century “Irishman’s Epistle to the Officer’s and Troups at Boston” (sic). Later the song “Paddy McGinty’s Goat” was set to the tune of “Irish Washerwoman.”
4 American versions with the “Washerwoman” title appear toward the end of the 18th century. It was contained in A Collection of Contra Dances (Stockbridge, Massachusetts, 1792) under the title “Irish Wash Woman,” and several American dance copybooks contain various dances to the melody, including Nancy Shepley’s Manuscript (Pepperell, Massachusetts, c. 1795) and different figures in Asa Wilcox’s MS (Hartford County, Connecticut, 1793).

At any rate over two to three hundred years by the folk process as well as by the fashionable presentation of the Irish Jig as a stage dance not only in Ireland, but in Scotland, England and the Colonies, rightly or wrongly the Irish Washerwoman is perceived as the national Irish Jig. Nevertheless it’s probably seen as overdone or overplayed and is seldom heard in sessions by Irish players.

Quite the opposite ocurred in the Australian tradition where the Irish Washerwoman would, along with the Scottish Cock o’ the North, be a pair of very well-known jigs, both in the handed down aural tradition as well by those that used printed music. (It was also one of the most popular of concert fiddle pieces along with Londonderry Air also known by the name of the song, ‘Danny Boy’.)

The Australian versions are quite varied. A rudimentary single jig form such as played at Nariel for the Stockyards in figure 6 of the First Set of Quadrilles is shown on page 10 below, followed by and version below from the late Elma Ross, pianist of the Wedderburn Oldtimers Orchestra.

It would be left to the fiddlers or violinist to play all the ‘diddles’ in double jig form.

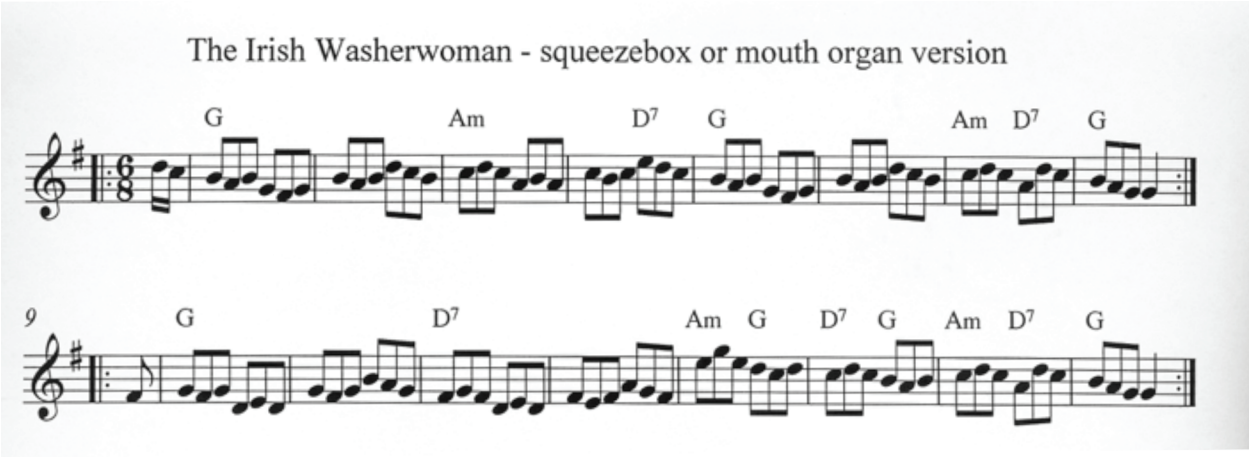
Irish Washerwoman as played in the First Set, Figure 6 (Stockyards), at Nariel



Irish Washerwoman as played by Elma Ross of the Wedderburn Oldtimers Orchestra



Then the button accordion players and mouth organ players with use of the bellows or ‘blow suck’ rhythm could belt it out as a double jig in a new form. The version below is from my own playing which I had developed by about 10 years of age on a mouth organ, and Rob Willis collected a very similar version from the mouth organ playing of Dermie Stewart of Colbinabbin Victoria



In example from Julienne’s 4th figure of the Royal Irish of 1849 (see page 12 below) are variations and the fiddlers could easy adapt some of these from listening to the violinists in the dance bands.


TRENIS.
5
4
ff
8va
pp
8va
ff
VAR. I.
legato.
pp

With the Irish and most traditional players in pioneering days in Colonial Australia and well into the twentieth century there was no concept of adhering to what should and shouldn't be used. For entertainment the popular songs, both from home as well as the latest would be played and for dancing as long as it was suitable, pretty well anything might be played and this included the occasional hymn converted to dance time. There was not the cleansing and banning of material such as occurred in Ireland in the 1920s by the Gaelic League.

A more modern example is Doonaree which I noticed listed by Helen O'Shea in the repertoire of John McKinnon. I also came across this when interviewing Tom Bartlett of Port Fairy, a concertina player of Irish descent who could call the First Set while playing the instrument at the same time. He mentioned with great reverence Morrissey's Tin Whistle Band at Yambuk that excelled at playing Irish Jigs and Reels, but unfortunately too far back to have been collected. One of Tom's favourite tunes was also Doonaree. Many don't remember this but it was on the wireless in the middle 50s as I recall. Doonaree is a place name in Ireland and I remember the song by Vera Lyn, so presumed it was English origin. However a search of the web found the answer.

A local woman Eilis (Farrelly) Boland penned the song 'Doonaree' which went on to be sung by international stars such as Ruby Murray and Vera Lynn. Mrs Boland was a member of the Farrelly family who resided in what is now the Dun A Ri House Hotel, before she moved to live in Dublin and married into the Boland family. Matt Donagh, from Lower Main Street, Kingscourt was the first person to sing 'Doonaree' in public, at a Christmas pantomime, either in late 1951 or early 1952 He didn't know at that stage it would be as big a hit as it was. It found a home in Western Victoria very quickly.

Doonaree


D A7 D G
9 D Em A7 D A7
17 D A7 D G/E
25 D Em D A7 D
33 A7 D A7
41 D E7 A7
49 D A7 D G
57 D Em A7 D Em A7
65 D A7 D Em
73 D Em D A7 D