

Hard Tack

Text and melody collected from Jack Davies by John Lahey and published in his 'Great Australian Folk Songs' (1965)

The musical score is written in 4/4 time on a single treble clef staff. The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes. Chords are indicated above the staff: C, F, C, G7, C, F, G7, C, F, G7, C. The lyrics are: I'm a shear-er, yes I am, and I've shorn 'em sheep and lamb, From the Wim-me-ra to the Darl-ing Downs and back. And I've rung a shed or two where the fleece was tough as glue, But I'll tell you where I struck the 'ard-est tack.

I was down round Yenda way, killin' time from day to day,
Till the big sheds started movin' further out;
When I struck a bloke by chance that I summed up in a glance
As a cocky from a vineyard round about.

Now it seems he picked me, too; well, it wasn't 'ard to do,
I'd a pair o' tongs, a-hangin' at me hip.
"I've got a mob," he said, "of about two hundred head,
And I'd give a ten pound note to have the clip."

I said "Right. I'll take the stand"; it meant gettin' in me hand;
And by nine o'clock we'd rounded up the mob
In a shed in the ground- with them wine casks all around,
That was where I started on me job.

I takes it easy for a bit while me hand was gettin' fit,
And by dinner time I'd done some half a score,
With the cocky pickin' up, and handing me a cup,
Of pinkie after every sheep I shore.

The cocky had to go away about the seventh day,
After showin' me the kind of casks to use;
Then I'd do the pickin' up, and I'd manipulate the cup,
Strollin' round them wine casks, just to pick and choose.

Then I'd stagger to the pen, grab a sheep and start again,
With a noise between a hiccup and a sob,
And sometimes I'd fall asleep with me arms around the sheep,
Worn and weary from me over-arduous job.

Well, six long weeks went by, until one day with a sigh,
I pushed the dear old cobbler through the door,
Gathered in the cocky's pay, then staggered on me way,
From the hardest bloody shed I ever shore.