

The Ballad of John Gavin

Oh, beside the grey wall
On Freo's fair shore
I'll tell you a tale full of woe,
Of a poor common thief
Suff'ring hardship and grief
John Gavin's his name, it is so.

He arrived on this shore
From the *Shepherd* that bore
The convicts to our foreign soil,
This remote western land
Filled with sun, flies and sand
Here to sweat and to labour and toil.

*He was only a lad
Gave it all that he had
In a land where he was so alone.
He was serving his time
For some small petty crime
The details which now are unknown.*

They sent him to stay
Out Dandalup way
To the Pollard's farm he was assigned,
There he chopped and he sawed
Filled up barrows with straw
And they say that they treated him kind.

Till on Ash Wednesday
The mistress did say
That the convict had been slamming doors,
Now the slam of that door
Will sound evermore
O'er the hills on old Fremantle's shore.

They supped, the two boys
Convict John and son George
For 'twas said that they got along fine,
But as George later lay
Softly singing away
A darkness crept over John's mind.

As later George lay
Softly singing away
His mother a-hearing him sighs,

Till his voice faded fast
And young John stumbled past
With a wild crazy look in his eyes

*He was only a lad
Gave it all that he had
In this land of the blistering sun.
Here but half a year
'Til the work and the fear
Made John Gavin's wits come undone.*

With a trembl-ing tread
And a heart filled with dread
She entered her son George's room,
Saw the adze on the floor
Smeared with blood and with gore
And the air thick and heavy with doom.

And the Murray flows free
On its way to the sea
Mixing sadness and secrets and tears,
As he washes his hands
Does the boy understand
That he's squandered the rest of his years?

And they took him away
To the roundhouse that day
And a trial very quickly ensued,
Though his virtue he sang
He was sentenced to hang
With his birthdays but fifteen accrued.

*He was only a lad
T'was a short life he had
In a land oh so hostile and cruel,
With the sun scorching down
And the earth baked and brown
One where chains and the whip-rod did rule.*

Now the toll of a bell
Does announce his death knell
All are still as he stumbles and reels,
Then they weight his slight frame
As a mercy they claim
While the life from John Gavin they steal.
Oh, the life from John Gavin they steal.

Now...

The sand whispers still

Over hollow and hill

Telling all who would listen and hear,

How the land did destroy

That poor Caulkhead boy

With its heat and its flies and its fear.

Oh, its heat and its flies and its fear.