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Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

- poems -

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Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant(9 December 1864 – 27 February 1902)

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant was an Anglo-Australian drover, horseman, poet, soldier and convicted war criminal whose skill with horses earned him the nickname "The Breaker". The bulk of his published work appeared in The Bulletin magazine.

During service in the Second Boer War, Morant participated in the summary execution of several Boer (Afrikaner) prisoners and the killing of a German missionary, Daniel Heese, who had been a witness to the shootings. His actions led to his controversial court-martial and execution for murder.

In the century since his death, Morant has become a folk hero to some in Australia. His story has been the subject of several books, a stage play, and a major Australian feature film.

Early Life

Accounts of Morant's life before the Boer War vary considerably, and it appears that Morant fabricated a number of these romantic legends. Morant is often described as being 'well-educated' and claimed to have been born in 1865 at Bideford, Devon, England and to have been the illegitimate son of Admiral Sir George Digby Morant of the Royal Navy; a claim repeated as fact by later writers, although the admiral denied it. Morant entrusted his cigarette case and other personal belongings to Major Bolton, the prosecuting officer during the later courts martial with the words "see that my family gets them". Years later, when Bolton's daughter tried to hand them to the family of Sir George, she was sent away and told Morant was not related to them. It has been suggested that the young Morant came into the care of a wealthy Scottish author, soldier, hunt-master and golfer, George Whyte-Melville. Like other stories there is no evidence for this theory.

The results of enquiries made in 1902 by both The Northern Miner and The Bulletin newspapers identified him as Edwin Henry Murrant who had arrived at Townsville in Queensland on the SS Waroonga in 1883. Murrant was born at Bridgwater in Somerset, England in December 1864, the son of Edwin Murrant and Catherine (née Riely). Edwin and Catherine were Master and Matron of the Union Workhouse at Bridgewater and after Edwin died in August 1864, four months before the birth of his son, Catherine continued her employment as

Matron until her retirement in died in 1899 when Morant was in Adelaide, South Australia, preparing to leave for South Africa.

Morant settled in outback Queensland, and over the next 15 years, working in Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia, the charismatic roustabout made a name for himself as a hard-drinking, womanising bush poet and gained renown as a fearless and expert horseman. Harry Breaker Morant was one of the few horsemen who managed to ride the notorious buckjumper, Dargin's Grey, in a battle that became a roughriding legend

Morant worked in a variety of occupations; he reportedly traded in horses in Charters Towers, then worked for a time on a newspaper at Hughenden in 1884, but there are suggestions that he left both towns as a result of debts. He then drifted around for some time until he found work as a bookkeeper and storeman on the Esmaralda cattle station.

On 13 March 1884, Morant married Daisy May O'Dwyer, who later became famous in Australia as the anthropologist Daisy Bates, but the couple separated soon after and never formally divorced; Daisy reportedly threw him out after he failed to pay for the wedding and then stole some pigs and a saddle. He then worked for several years as an itinerant drover and horse-breaker, as well as writing his popular bush ballads, becoming friendly with famed Australian poets Henry Lawson, Banjo Paterson and William Ogilvie.

Military Career

At the time Morant volunteered for military service (in 1899), the formal federation of the Commonwealth of Australia was still two years away. Australia consisted of separate self-governing colonies, each of which was still subject to the British Crown. Because the population included many British immigrants, most Australians still had strong ties to "The Mother Country". Consequently, thousands of Australian men volunteered to fight for Britain in the Second Boer War, which pitted British colonial forces against the Boers in South Africa.

Evidently, seeing this as a chance to return to England and redeem himself in the eyes of the family he had left 16 years before, Morant enlisted with the Second Contingent of the South Australian Mounted Rifles. While in Adelaide, Morant was reportedly invited to visit the summer residence of the South Australian governor, Lord Tennyson. After completing his training, he was appointed lance corporal and his regiment embarked for the Transvaal on 27 February 1900.

In many respects, the terrain and climate of South Africa is remarkably similar to

that of outback Australia, so Morant was in his element. His superb horsemanship, expert bush skills, and educated manner soon attracted the attention of his superiors. South Australian Colonel Joseph Gordon recommended him as a dispatch rider to Bennet Burleigh, the war correspondent of the London Daily Telegraph; the job reportedly provided the debonair Morant with ample opportunity to visit the nearby hospital and dally with the nurses.

The statement of service Morant tendered at his trial is quoted, apparently verbatim, in the book written by his friend and colleague, George Witton. According to that account, Morant was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Bushveldt Carbineers (BVC) on 1 April 1901. Prior to that, he had served in the South Australian Second Contingent for nine months. During that duration, he was promoted to the rank of sergeant. Subsequently, he returned to Devon, England for a period of time.

In March 1900, Morant carried dispatches for the Flying Column to Prieska, under Colonel Lowe, 7th D.G., who was in the general advance to Bloemfontein and took part in the engagements of Karee Siding and Kroonstadt, and other engagements with Lord Roberts until the entry into Pretoria. Morant was at Diamond Hill and was then attached to General French's staff, Cavalry Brigade, as war correspondent with Bennet Burleigh of the London Daily Telegraph. He accompanied that column through Middelburg and Belfast to the occupation of Barberton. At this point, he took leave and returned to Devon, England for six months. Here he became close friends with Captain Hunt, and the two of them became engaged to a pair of sisters. Hunt, who was still 'signed on', returned to South Africa to take command of a regiment in the Bushveldt Carbineers, whereas Morant (who had intended that his military service come to an end) followed him shortly after not having found the forgiveness he sought in England. Originally returning to take up a commission in Baden Powell's Transvaal Constabulary, he was convinced by Hunt to instead accept a commission in the BVC.

Boer guerrilla campaign, 1901–1902

Following their defeats on the battlefield during 1899–1900, the Boer rebels embarked on a guerrilla campaign against the British. In response, Lord Kitchener, the British commander in South Africa assembled and deployed a number of irregular regiments to combat Boer commando units and protect British interests in the region.

On his return from leave, Morant joined one of these irregular units, the Bushveldt Carbineers, a 320-strong regiment that had been formed in February

1901 under the command of an Australian, Colonel R.W. Lenehan. Following his friend's lead, Captain Hunt joined the BVC soon after.

The regiment, based in Pietersburg, 180 miles (290 km) north of Pretoria, saw action in the Spelonken region of the Northern Transvaal during 1901–1902. The region was remote, wild and dangerous and was also in a particularly unhealthy malarial area. Because of this, the British had difficulty in finding troops and as a result, many colonial soldiers enlisted.

About forty percent of the men in the BVC were Australians, but the regiment also included about forty surrendered Boers ("joiners") who had been recruited from the internment camps, and according to Witton, their presence was greatly resented by the Australians. The garrison was soon divided into two columns; one, under the command of Lieutenant Morant, operated in the Strydpoort district, about 30 miles (48 km) south-east of Pietersburg.

Morant's unit was very successful in eliminating roving bands of enemy commandos from their area, forcing the Boers to transfer their activities to the Bandolier Kop area, on the northern fringe of the Spelonken. In response, the BVC moved north under the command of British Captain James Huntley Robertson and established a command post in a farmhouse about 90 miles (140 km) north of Pietersburg, which they renamed Fort Edward.

The other ranking officer at the fort was Captain Alfred Taylor, a special officer with the Army's Intelligence Department. He had been selected and sent to Spelonken by Kitchener himself because of his knowledge of "the natives". In his book, Witton wrote that as far as the Africans were concerned:

“"...(Taylor) had a free hand and the power of life and death; he was known and feared by them from the Zambesi to the Spelonken, and was called by them 'Bulala', which means to kill, to slay.”

Taylor had the power to order out patrols and, according to Witton, it was generally understood that Taylor was the commander at Spelonken, and that Taylor admitted as much in evidence at the court-martial. Taylor was, as Bleszynski notes, implicated in some of the killings in the case, yet was acquitted of all charges. His role is one of the most problematic aspects of the case.

By all accounts, Captain Robertson had great difficulty in maintaining discipline, and some of his troops ran wild — they looted a rum convoy, kept seized Boer livestock for themselves, and appropriated liquor and stills from the Boer farms they raided. According to George Witton's account, the situation was bordering

on mutiny by mid-year.

On 2 July 1901, Captain Taylor received word of a disturbing incident; a few days earlier, a group of six Boers had approached the fort, apparently intending to surrender, but they were intercepted by a British patrol led by Sergeant Major Morrison, and on his orders they were all disarmed, taken prisoner, and subsequently shot dead.

When this news reached Pietersburg, the Fort Edward detachment was recalled; after an enquiry, Robertson and Morrison were allowed to resign unconditionally. His squadron was replaced by a new one under the command of Captain Hunt and it included Lieutenants Morant, Handcock and Witton.

Events leading to Morant's arrest

This section relies on references to primary sources or sources affiliated with the subject, rather than references from independent authors and third-party publications. Please add citations from reliable sources. (October 2011)
The exact sequence and nature of the events leading up to Morant's arrest and trial are still disputed, and accounts vary considerably. While it seems clear that some members of the BVC were responsible for shooting Boer prisoners-of-war and others, the precise circumstances of these killings and the identities of those responsible will probably never be known for certain. The following account is drawn mainly from the only surviving eyewitness source, and the 1907 book Scapegoats of the Empire by Lieutenant George Witton, one of the three Australians sentenced to death for the alleged murders and the only one to escape execution.

With Hunt now commanding the detachment at Fort Edwards, discipline was immediately re-imposed by Lieutenant Morant and Lieutenant Handcock, but this was resisted by some. In one incident, several members of a supply convoy led by Lieutenant Picton looted the rum it was carrying, resulting in their arrest for insubordination and for threatening to shoot Picton. They escaped to Pietersburg, but Captain Hunt sent a report to Colonel Lenehan, who had them detained. When the matter was brought before Colonel Hall, the commandant of Pietersburg, he ordered the offenders to be discharged from the regiment and released. In his book, Witton explicitly accused these disaffected troopers of being responsible for "the monstrous and extravagant reports about the BVC which appeared later in the English and colonial press."

Back at Fort Edward, the seized livestock was collected and handed over to the proper authorities and the stills were broken up, but according to Witton, these

actions were resented by the perpetrators, and as a result Morant and Handcock were "detested"by certain members of the detachment.

Witton arrived at Fort Edwards on 3 August with Sergeant Major Hammett and 30 men, and it was at this point that he met Morant and Handcock for the first time.

Death of Captain Hunt

The pivotal event of the Morant affair took place two days later, on the night of 5 August 1901. Captain Hunt led a 17-man patrol to a Boer farmhouse called Duivelskloof (Devil's Gorge), about 80 miles (130 km) south of the fort, hoping to capture its owner, the Boer commando leader Veldtcornet Barend Viljoen. Hunt also had some 200 armed native African irregulars with him, and Witton claimed that although "those in authority" denied the use of African auxiliaries, they were in fact widely used and were responsible for "the most hideous atrocities".

Hunt had been told that Viljoen had only 20 men with him. The Boers surprised the British as they approached. During the ensuing skirmish, both Barend Viljoen and his brother Jacob Viljoen were killed. Witnesses later testified that Captain Hunt was wounded in the chest while firing through the windows and Sergeant Frank Eland was killed while trying to recover his body. Witnesses later testified that Hunt was still alive when the British retreated.

When news of Hunt's death reached the fort, it had a profound effect on Morant; Witton said he became "like a man demented". Morant immediately ordered every available man out on patrol, broke down while addressing the men, and ordered them to avenge the death of their captain and "give no quarter".

Significantly, Morant did not see Hunt's body himself; according to Witton, Morant arrived about an hour after the burial. He questioned the men about Hunt's death and, convinced that his friend had been murdered in cold blood, he again vowed to give no quarter and take no prisoners. Witton recounted that Morant then declared that he had, on occasion, ignored Hunt's order to this effect in the past, but that he would carry it out in the future.

Reprisals in Hunt's name

The following day, after leaving a few men to guard the mission (which the Boers threatened to burn in reprisal for harbouring the British), Morant led his unit back to the Viljoen farm. It had been abandoned, so they tracked the retreating Boers

all day, sighting them just on dusk. As the Australians closed in, the hot-headed Morant opened fire too early and they lost the element of surprise, so most of the Boers escaped. They did, however, capture one commando called Visser, wounded in the ankles so that he could not walk.

The next morning, as Morant and his men continued their pursuit, a native runner brought a message that the lightly manned Fort Edward was in danger of being attacked by the Boers, so Morant decided to abandon the chase.

At this point, he searched and questioned Visser and found items of British uniform, including a pair of trousers which he believed was that of Hunt's, but was later proved to be of much older origin; he then told Witton and others that he would have Visser shot at the first opportunity. When they stopped to eat around 11 a.m. Morant again told Witton that he intended to have Visser shot, quoting orders "direct from headquarters" and citing Kitchener's recent alleged 'no prisoners' proclamation. He called for a firing party, and although some of the men initially objected, Visser was made to sit down on an embankment (he could not stand), and was shot. After being shot, Visser was still alive, and Morant ordered Picton to administer a coup-de-grace with pistol shots to the head.

On the return journey to the fort, Morant's unit stopped for the night at the store of a British trader, a Mr Hays, who was well known for his hospitality. After they left, Hays was raided by a party of Boers who looted everything he owned. When Morant and his men arrived back at Fort Edward, they learned that a convoy under Lieutenant Neel had arrived from Pietersburg the previous day, just in time to reinforce Captain Taylor against a strong Boer force that attacked the fort. During the encounter, one Carbineer was wounded and several horses were shot and it was at this time that Taylor had a native shot for refusing to give him information about the Boers' movements. Neel and Picton then returned to Pietersburg.

Other killings followed; on 23 August, Morant led a small patrol to intercept a group of eight prisoners from Viljoen's commando who were being brought in under guard; Morant ordered them to be taken to the side of the road and summarily shot. The South African born German missionary, Reverend Predikant C.H.D. Heese, spoke to the prisoners prior to the shooting.

About a week later, reports began to circulate that Reverend Heese had been found shot along the Pietersburg road about 15 miles (24 km) from the fort on his way to Pietersburg to report the activities of Morant and his group to the British authorities. At his later court-martial, it was proved that Morant himself had shot Heese in an effort to prevent him from disclosing the murder of the

Boer prisoners-of-war, which would be alarming considering he was acquitted of this crime at that court-martial. Shortly afterwards, acting on a report that three armed Boer commandos were heading for the fort, Morant took Handcock and several other men to intercept them and after the Boers surrendered with a white flag, they were taken prisoner, disarmed and shot.

Later the same day, Major Lenehan arrived at Fort Edwards for a rare visit. Morant persuaded Lenehan to let him lead a strong patrol out to search for a small Boer unit led by Field-cornet Kelly, an Irish-Boer commando whose farm was in the district. Kelly had fought against the British in the main actions of the war, and after returning to his home he had become a commando rather than surrender.

Morant's patrol left Fort Edward on 16 September 1901 with orders from Lenehan that Kelly and his men were to be captured and brought back alive if possible. Covering 130 miles (210 km) in a week of hard riding, they left their horses 2 miles (3.2 km) from Kelly's laager and went the rest of the way on foot. In the early hours of the next morning, Morant's patrol charged the laager, this time taking the Boers completely by surprise; Morant himself arrested Kelly at gunpoint at the door of his tent. A week later, they returned to Fort Edward with the Kelly party and then escorted them safely to Pietersburg. The British commandant, Colonel Hall, personally sent Morant a message congratulating him on the success of his mission, after which Morant took two weeks leave.

Arrests

Then, in mid-October, the Spelonken detachment was suddenly recalled to Pietersburg and Fort Edward was abandoned until March 1902. On 24 October 1901, Colonel Hall ordered the arrest of six members of the Carbineers. Four were Australians: Major Lenehan and Lieutenants Handcock, Witton and Hannam; the other two, Captain Taylor and Lieutenant Picton, were English. When Morant returned from leave in Pietersburg, he too was arrested, although no charges were laid at the time. A Court of Enquiry into the affairs of the Bushveldt Carbineers followed. The War Office subsequently stated that on 8 October 1901, some members of the BVC who had been discharged at Pietersburg on the expiration of their service had reported the irregular actions of the officers at Fort Edward over the preceding months.

The men were held in solitary confinement within the garrison, in spite of vigorous protests by Lenehan; he even wrote directly to Kitchener to ask that he be allowed to inform the Australian government of his position, but Kitchener ignored the request. Meanwhile, the Court of Enquiry held daily hearings, taking

evidence from witnesses about the conduct of the BVC. Two weeks later, the prisoners were finally informed of the charges against them; in December, they were again brought before the panel and told that they were to be tried by court-martial. The panel found that there were no charges to answer in the cases of Hannam and Sergeant Major Hammett.

On hearing of the arrests, Kitchener's Chief of Police, Provost Marshall Robert Poore remarked in his diary, "... if they had wanted to shoot Boers they should not have taken them prisoner first" — a view later ruefully echoed in his book by George Witton. While it is certain that Morant and others did kill some prisoners, their real "mistake" in terms of their court-martial was that they killed the Boers after capturing and disarming them after they surrendered with a white flag. As Poore noted in his diary, had they shot them before they surrendered, the repercussions might well have been considerably less serious, since they could have claimed (truthfully or otherwise) that they had been killed in battle, rather than murdered after being taken prisoner.

Just before the court-martial, Colonel Hall was removed from his post at Pietersburg and transferred to India. The BVC were disbanded and replaced by a new regiment called the Pietersburg Light Horse. On 15 January 1902, the accused were finally given copies of the charges against them and informed that they would be defended by Major James Francis Thomas (1861–1942), who in civilian life had been a solicitor in Tenterfield, New South Wales. The court-martial began the following day.

<B>Court-martial

The court-martial of Morant and his co-accused began on 16 January 1902 and was conducted in several stages. Two main hearings were conducted at Pietersburg in relatively relaxed conditions; one concerned the shooting of Visser, the other the 'Eight Boers' case. A large number of depositions by members of the BVC were made, giving damning evidence against the accused. For example, a Trooper Thompson stated that, on the morning of the 23rd (1901), he saw a party of soldiers with eight Boers: "Morant gave orders, and the prisoners were taken off the road and shot, Handcock killing two with his revolver. Morant later told me that we had to play into his hands, or else they would know what to expect." A Corporal Sharp said that he "would walk 100 miles barefoot to serve in a firing squad to shoot Morant and Handcock."

Soon after the second hearing, the prisoners were suddenly thrown in irons, taken to Pretoria under heavy guard and tried on the third main count, the killing of Reverend Heese. Although acquitted of killing Reverend Heese, Morant and his

co-accused were quickly sentenced to death on the other two charges. Morant and Handcock were shot within days of sentencing, while Witton's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment by Lord Kitchener. Kitchener personally signed Morant and Handcock's death warrants. The Field Marshal was absent on tour when the executions took place.

Execution

During the day of 26 February, Morant and Handcock were visited by a distraught Major Thomas; Witton says that news of the impending execution had "almost driven him crazy".Thomas then rushed off to find Kitchener and plead with him, but was informed by Colonel Kelly that the Commander-in-Chief was away and was not expected back for several days. Thomas pleaded with Kelly to have the executions stayed for a few days until he could appeal to the King, but was told that the sentences had already been referred to England — and confirmed — and that there was "not the slightest hope" of a reprieve; Morant and Handcock "must pay for what he did".

When asked if he wanted to see a clergyman, Morant replied indignantly, "No! I'm a Pagan!" On hearing this, the unfortunate Handcock asked, "What's a Pagan?" and after hearing the explanation, declared "I'm a Pagan too!" As the afternoon wore on, all the prisoners could clearly hear the sound of coffins being built in the nearby workshop. At 16:00 hours, Witton was told he would be leaving for England at five the following morning.

That night, Morant, Picton, Handcock and Witton had a "last supper" together; at Morant's request, he and Handcock were allowed to spend their last night in the same cell. Morant spent most of the night writing and then penned a final sardonic verse, which Witton quotes in its entirety.

26 February 1902 The 'Confession'

The 'Confession' written on the back of photograph A05828 addressed to the Reverend Canon Fisher was written by Lieutenant (Lt) Harry Harbord Morant and signed by Morant and Lt Peter Joseph Handcock, it reads:

<i>To the Rev. Canon Fisher
Pretoria
The night before we're shot
We shot the Boers who killed and mutilated
our friend (the best mate I had on Earth)
Harry Harbord Morant

Peter Joseph Handcock</i>

At 05:00 hours on 27 February, Witton was taken away and was allowed to say a brief farewell to Morant and Handcock, but was only allowed to see them through the small gate in the cell door and clasped hands.

Shortly before 06:00 hours, Morant and Handcock were led out of the fort at Pretoria to be executed by a firing squad from the Cameron Highlanders. Both men refused to be blindfolded; Morant gave his cigarette case to the squad leader, and his famous last words were: "Shoot straight, you bastards! Don't make a mess of it!". A contemporary report (from The Argus 3 April 1902) however has his last words as "Take this thing (the blindfold) off", and on its removal, "Be sure and make a good job of it!". Witton wrote that he was by then at Pretoria railway station and heard the volley of shots that killed his comrades. However Poore, who attended the execution, wrote in his diary that he put Witton and Lieutenant Picton on the train that left at 17:30 hours. Thus Witton would have been several miles on the way to Cape Town when the execution occurred.

Aftermath of the execution

Due to British military censorship, reports of the trial and execution did not begin to appear in Australia until the end of March 1902. The Australian government and Lieutenant Handcock's wife, who lived in Bathurst with their three children, only learned of Handcock and Morant's death from the Australian newspapers weeks after their executions. After learning of his sentence, Lieutenant Witton arranged to send two telegrams, one to the Australian government representative in Pretoria and the other to a relative in Victoria, but despite assurances from the British, neither telegram was ever received. The Australian government demanded an explanation from Kitchener who, on 5 April 1902, sent a telegram to the Australian Governor-General, and which was published completely in the Australian press. It reads as follows:

"In reply to your telegram, Morant, Handcock and Witton were charged with twenty separate murders, including one of a German missionary who had witnessed other murders. Twelve of these murders were proved. From the evidence it appears that Morant was the originator of these crimes which Handcock carried out in cold-blooded manner. The murders were committed in the wildest parts of the Transvaal, known as Spelonken, about eighty miles north of Pretoria, on four separate dates namely 2 July, 11 August, and 7 September. In one case, where eight Boer prisoners were murdered, it was alleged to have been done in a spirit of revenge for the ill treatment of one of their officers -

Captain Hunt - who was killed in action. No such ill-treatment was proved. The prisoners were convicted after a most exhaustive trial, and were defended by counsel. There were, in my opinion, no extenuating circumstances. Lieutenant Witton was also convicted but I commuted the sentence to penal servitude for life, in consideration of his having been under the influence of Morant and Handcock. The proceedings have been sent home."

News of the executions excited considerable public interest in the UK and a summary of the trial was published in The Times on 18 April 1902, but the British government announced in the House of Commons that, in keeping with normal practice, the court-martial proceedings would not be made public. The official transcripts of the court-martial reportedly disappeared soon afterwards.

The Treaty of Vereeniging was signed on 31 May 1902.

George Witton was transported to naval detention quarters England and then to Lewes prison in Sussex. Some time later he was transferred to the prison at Portland, Dorset and was released after serving twenty-eight months. His release was notified to the British House of Commons on 10 August 1904. On his release he returned to Australia and for a while lived in Lancefield, Victoria, where he wrote his controversial book about the Morant case. He published it in 1907 under the provocative title Scapegoats of the Empire. The book was reprinted in 1982 following the success of the 1980 film Breaker Morant. Witton died in Australia in 1942.

Alfred Taylor became a Native Commissioner in Rhodesia and a Member of Parliament and died in 1941.

Literature on Morant: conflicting theories about the case: Facts and fiction

The story of Morant's life, exploits, trial and execution have been examined in several books and numerous press and internet articles, but as noted above, each account varies very considerably from the other in both the facts presented and their interpretation. There are facts intermingled with fiction.

The most important primary source, the official records of the court-martial, vanished following the trial and their location remains a mystery. A report on the case from Kitchener to the Australian Governor-General (published in the Australian press on 7 April 1902) quotes Kitchener as saying that "the proceedings have been sent home" . Whatever their actual fate, the transcripts have not been seen since the trial and evidently not even the Australian

government was granted access to them.

In the 'Afterword' to the 1982 reprint of Witton's book, G.A. Embleton states that:

" .. the British authorities have been approached by many researchers eager to examine the transcripts thought to be held by the War Office. Invariably these requests have been met with denials that the documents exist or pronouncements to the effect that they cannot be released until the year 2002 ... It now appears that the papers never reached England ... (it was) recently announced that the court-martial papers had been discovered in South Africa..."

A comprehensive record of the trial of Morant and Handcock, complete with a large number of depositions by members of the BVC and other witnesses of the deeds of Morant and Handcock, appears in Arthur Davey's "Breaker Morant and the Bushveldt Carbineers" (Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town 1987).

Charles Leach, a well-known South African historian, published his book "The Legend of Breaker Morant is DEAD and BURIED" in March 2012, with the subtitle "A South African version of the Bushveldt Carbineers in the Zoutpansberg, May 1901 - April 1902" after extensive research, including access to unpublished South African sources and documents of the Viljoen and Heese families.

Primary Sources

In the absence of the original trial records, three primary sources remain. The first is the report of the trial printed in The Times in April 1902; the second is George Witton's account of the events of 1901–02, contained in his book Scapegoats of the Empire. The third and most recent is a letter about the case, written by Witton to Major Thomas in 1929, which was kept secret at Witton's request until 1970. In it, Witton suggests that although Handcock broke down and confessed to the crimes, he did so under duress.

Other Accounts

Wilcox states the next important book in creating the Morant myth was Cutlack's Breaker Morant (1962), a short book as much a cartoon version of reality as The Bulletin once presented. (Wilcox, p. 363.) Cutlack's story, said Wilcox, was based on Witton's Scapegoats and Frank Fox's Breaker Morant.

The 1976 book The Australians At The Boer War by Australian writer R.L. Wallace gives a concise, and reasonably detailed account of Morant's military career, trial

and execution although it contains almost no information about Morant's earlier life and omits a number of significant details contained in Witton's account of the events leading up to Morant's trial. However, Wallace was writing an overall account of the Australians role in South Africa, not the life of Morant, Handcock or Witton.

The most widely known book is the best-selling Australian novel The Breaker by Kit Denton, first published in 1973 and inspired by Denton's meeting and conversation with a Boer War veteran who had known Morant. Wilcox suggested this book is a follow-on from Cutlack's book and helped establish the myth. (Wilcox, p. 363.) However, Denton claimed that Morant and Handcock were executed in Pietersburg and buried near that spot. This mistake appeared in his book as late as 1981 (7th edition, p. 268), and is a possible reason as to why there is confusion around the location of the execution, i.e. Pretoria or Pietersburg.

Kenneth Ross's 1978 highly successful and widely acclaimed play Breaker Morant: A Play in Two Acts (ISBN 0-7267-0997-2), was adapted by Ross and Bruce Beresford into Beresford's 1980 film Breaker Morant. The film was nominated for the 1980 Academy Award for the screenplay adapted from another source.

Legacy

Although it is generally accepted that Morant and/or others in his regiment were responsible for the deaths of a number of Boer commandos, historical opinion is still divided over the central questions of the case — how many Boers were killed, by whom were they killed, and on whose orders? In his book, Born to Fight, Speed has photos of a number of Canadian Scouts wearing black feathers (pp. 105 & 119.), a symbol that they would shoot any Boer captured under arms. In South Africa, Morant is regarded as having been a murderer, marauder, womaniser, and a man generally without morals or remorse. The BVC are generally regarded as war criminals, rogue soldiers and cold-blooded murderers.

Morant's supporters, on the other hand, argue that he and Handcock were unfairly singled out for punishment even though many other British soldiers were known to have carried out summary executions of Boer prisoners. In their view, the two Australians were made scapegoats by the British, who were intent on concealing the existence of the "take no prisoners" policy against Boer insurgents — a policy which, they claim, had been promulgated by Kitchener himself.

However, Hamish Paterson, a South African military historian and a member of

the Military History Society, has pointed out that the Bushveldt Carbineers were a British Imperial unit, not an Australian one: technically, the two "Aussies" were British officers.

Australian author Nick Bleszynski is a leading proponent of the 'scapegoat' argument. He argues that while Morant and the others probably committed some crimes and may well have deserved disciplinary action, there is now persuasive evidence from several sources to show that the Kitchener 'no prisoners' order did indeed exist, that it was widely known among both the British and Australian troops and was carried out by many disparate units. He also argues that the court-martial was fundamentally flawed in its procedures.

The graves of Morant and Handcock were left unattended for many years, but after the release of Beresford's film it became a popular place of pilgrimage for Australian tourists. In June 1998 the Australian Government spent $1,500 refurbishing the grave site with a new concrete slab. The marble cross which stood over the grave had been vandalised, as had many other gravestones nearby.

Petition

In 2002, a group of Australians travelled to South Africa and held a service at the Pretoria graveside to commemorate the execution on the morning of the 100th anniversary. The service was also attended by the Australian High Commissioner to South Africa. The group left a new marker on the grave.

A petition to pardon Morant and Handcock was sent to Queen Elizabeth II in February 2010. The petition has been severely criticised in South Africa, specifically by descendants of the Viljoen brothers who were killed in the skirmish with Hunt and Eland, and the descendants of the family of Rev. Heese.

Hamish Paterson states: "I don’t think they [the Australian supporters of a Morant pardon] have actually considered what Morant was convicted of. Let’s start off with the laws of war. If for example, we have a surrender. You want to surrender and I don’t accept your surrender, so I choose not to accept it, that I’m entitled to do. [...] However, the situation changes dramatically once I accept your surrender, then I must remove you from the battlefield to a POW camp and keep you safe. If, for example, Kitchener said, “take no prisoners,” that was very different from “shoot prisoners!” So Morant and Handcock made two very basic errors: Once you’ve accepted the surrender, you take them to the railway line and get them shipped off to Bermuda, or wherever. At that point, the sensible thing to do was to ship them off to a POW camp. The next error was to shoot

these guys in front of a neutral witness, and then you kill the witness. These are a series of terrible errors of judgement. Because they killed a German missionary, the Kaiser (became) involved. [...] Technically, the two “Aussies” were British officers. The problem was you were dealing with an unstable set-up in the BVC . It had just been formed. I don’t see a regular Australian unit behaving that way. I rather suspect why no British guys were shot was that they were either regular army or militia, or yeomanry, all of which are very unlikely to actually shoot prisoners. I think no British were shot because they hadn’t made the mistake of shooting prisoners who’d already surrendered."

Jim Unkles, an Australian lawyer, submitted two petitions, one to Queen Elizabeth II, and the other to the House of Representatives Petitions Committee in October 2009 to review the convictions and sentences of Morant, Handcock and Witton. The petitions were referred to the British Crown by the Australian Attorney General. A public hearing conducted by the Petitions Committee on 15 March 2010, described in part as the case for pardons as "strong and compelling".
In November 2010 a statement from the Ministry of Defence in the UK said that the appeal had been rejected.
"After detailed historical and legal consideration, the Secretary of State has concluded that no new primary evidence has come to light which supports the petition to overturn the original courts-martial verdicts and sentences," the statement said. The decision was supported by Australian military historian Craig Wilcox and by South African local historian Charles Leach, while Jim Unkles continues to campaign for a judicial inquiry

A Departing Dirge

Girls in town and boys out back,
I've rolled up my little pack,
And on june's chill wintry gales
Sail from pleasant New South Wales.
Ere I go - a doggerel song
To bid the whole caboose 'So-long!'

Saddle-gear and horses sold -
Fetched but scanty stock of gold -
Scanty!! yet the whole lot
Publicans and Flossies got.
Since I in this country landed
Ne'er before was I so 'stranded'.

Now I'm leaving Sydney's shore
Harder up than e'er before;
A keen appetite I feel
To taste a bit o' British veal;
And let's trust, across the foam
They have a fatted calf at home.

From duns and debts (once safe on board)
Pray deliver me, oh Lord!
Here's the burden of my song:
'Good-bye, old girl! Old chap, So-long!'
Hardest loss of all I find
To leave the good old horse behind.
So-long, 'Cavalier!'

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

A Song

The sun may shine, the rain may fall,
 And the world roll round about, -
The king's men and king's horses all
 Can never rub one thing out.

Skies may darken - clouds will flit -
 Troubles may gather and go:
For my sweetheart loves me "just a bit!
 And, oh! I love her so.

The vapour vanishes in the sun!
 So pass cures, doubts, and pains -
For I'm "loved a bit" by the dearest one,
 And the best the world contains.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

An Enthusiastic Sportsman Enthuses

So now the Brands
  Seek other lands;
Alack! long ere they reach 'em
  A fickle crowd
  Will cheer as loud
For godly Governor Beauchamp.

  'Twill be Hampden's lot
  To be soon forgot,
Now an Earl is his successor;
  But the new-chum Earl
  Will bring no girl
Like Dorothy Brand - God bless her!

  Then let it be known
  That all of us own
Since her dad to Australia brought her.
  That there has not been,
  Nor will there be seen
Another such Governor's daughter.

  Yes! we all concur
  (In respect to her
Ideas are not dividing)
  There's no 'seat,' nor 'hands'
  Like Dorothy Brand's
When she goes out a-riding!

  And each Australian,
  And every alien
Who rides as straight as he 'oughter,'
  Has been fain to yield
  In the hunting-field
To the prowess of Hampden's daughter.

So, doff your 'cady'
To this young lady!
Hooray-with your hat in your hand; -
Australia's pride
Was the girl who could ride
Like the Honorable Dorothy Brand!

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

A-Shelling Peas

Now, all the world is green and bright
 Outside the latticed pane;
The fields are decked with gold and white,
 And Spring has come again.
But though the world be fair without,
 With flow'rs and waving trees,
'Tis pleasanter to be about
 Where Nell's a-shelling peas.

Her eyes are blue as cloudless skies,
 And dimples deck her cheeks;
Whilst soft lights loiter in her eyes
 Whene'er she smiles or speaks.
So all the sunlit morning-tide
 I dally at mine ease,
To loaf at slender Nelly's side
 When Nell's a-shelling peas.

This bard, who sits a-watching Nell,
 With fingers white and slim,
Owns up that, as she breaks each shell,
 She also "breaks up" him;
And could devoutly drop upon
 Submissive, bended knees
To worship Nell with apron on -
 A saint a-shelling peas.

The tucked-up muslin sleeves disclose
 Her round arms white and bare -
'Tis only "shelling peas" that shows
 Those dainty dimples there.
Old earth owns many sights to see
 That captivate and please; -
The most bewitching sight for me
 Is Nell a-shelling peas.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

At Last

When I am tired, and old and worn,
  And harass'd by regret;
When blame, reproach, and worldlings' scorn
  On every side are met;
When I have lived long years in vain
  And found Life's garlands rue,
Maybe I'll come back again -
  At last - at last - to you!

When all the joys and all the zest
  Of youthful years have fled,
Maybe that I shall leave the rest
  And turn to you instead;
For you, Dear Heart, would never spurn
  (With condemnation due!)
If, at the close of all, I turn
  Homeward - at last - to you!

When other faces turn away,
  And lighter loves have passed;
When life is weary, cold, and gray -
  I may come back - at last!
When cares, remorse, regrets are rife -
  Too late to live anew -
In the sad twilight of my life
  I will come back - to you!

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

At The River-Crossing

Oh! the quiet river-crossing
  Where we twain were wont to ride,
Where the wanton winds were to sing
  Willow branches o'er the tide.

There the golden noon would find us
  Dallying through the summer day,
All the waery world behind us -
  All it's tumult far away.

Oh! thoe rides across the crossing
  Where the shallow stream runs wide,
When the sunset's beams were glossing
  Strips of sand on either side.

We would cross the sparkling river
  On the brown horse and the bay;
Watch the willows sway and shiver
  And their trembling shadows play.

When the opal tints waxed duller
  And a gray crept o'er the skies
Yet there stayed the blue sky's color
  In your dreamy dark-blue eyes.

How the sun-god's bright caresses,
  When we rode at sunet there,
Plaited among your braided tresses,
  Gleaming on your silky hair.

When the last sunlight's glory
  Faded off the sandy bars,
There we learnt the old, old story,

Riding homeward 'neat the stars.

'Tis a memory to be hoarded -
Oh, the follish tale and fond!
Till another stream be forded -
And we reach the Great Beyond.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Behind The Bar - A Desecration Of Tennyson

Gray eyes and gamboge hair!
  One barmaid of 'The Crown'!
Ah, will that beaming siren still be there
  When I go next to town? -
When over-night much spirit I had quaffed,
  How I was wont to bless
That nymph who, smiling, mixed my morning draught
  Of B. and S.!

That holiday has gone!
  Now wintry breezes blow
In fitful gusts about my hut upon
  The Warrego.
Hard times foretell that for a 'down-South' spree
  The day is distant far;
And I no more, in Sydney town, may see
  That girl behind the bar.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Brigalow Mick

A dandy old horsernan is Brigalow Mick-
  Which his name, sir, is Michael O'Dowd -
Whatever he's riding, when timber is thick,
  He is always in front of the crowd.

A few tangled locks that are fast turning white
  Crown a physog. the colour of brick,
But as keen as a kestrel's-as bold and as bright -
  Is the blue eye of Brigalow Mick.

He is Martin's head-stockman, on Black-Cattle Creek -
  All the boys there are rare ones to ride -
But Mick is the 'daddy'; and far you may seek
  Ere you find such an artist in hide.

He'll turn out a halter, or stockwhip can make,
  As you've seldom cast eyes on before;
And never the 'nugget' was calved that could break
  Michael's whips, which he plaits by the score.

All the lads on the station are handy enough,
  Nor are frightened of grafting too hard,
But Mick, if the cattle are rowdy and rough,
  Is the pick of 'em all in a yard.

A bad colt to tackle - a mad one to steer
  Through thick timber - you'll hear Martin boast -
Mick yet is unrivalled, there isn't his peer
  Right from Camooweal in to the coast.

Ay! long may it be ere the scrubs are bereft
  Of the clearskins that give us the sport,
And long may the station have stock-riders left,

Of the build of old Brigalow's sort.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Butchered To Make A Dutchman's Holiday

In prison cell I sadly sit,
  A d__d crest-fallen chappie!
And own to you I feel a bit-
  A little bit - unhappy!

It really ain't the place nor time
  To reel off rhyming diction -
But yet we'll write a final rhyme
  Whilst waiting cru-ci-fixion!

No matter what 'end' they decide -
  Quick-lime or 'b'iling ile,' sir?
We'll do our best when crucified
  To finish off in style, sir!

But we bequeath a parting tip
  For sound advice of such men,
Who come across in transport ship
  To polish off the Dutchmen!

If you encounter any Boers
  You really must not loot 'em!
And if you wish to leave these shores,
  For pity's sake, DON'T SHOOT 'EM!!

And if you'd earn a D.S.O.,
  Why every British sinner
Should know the proper way to go
  Is: 'ASK THE BOER TO DINNER!'

Let's toss a bumper down our throat, -
  Before we pass to Heaven,
And toast: 'The trim-set petticoat

We leave behind in Devon.'

At its end the manuscript is described -
The Last Rhyme and Testament of Tony Lumpkin -

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Corn Medicine

'A well-bred horse! but he won't get fat,
  Though I've done the best 1 can;
He keeps as poor as a blessed rat!'
   Said the sorrowful stable-man.

'I've bled and I've blistered him-and to-day
  I bought him a monster ball;
But, blow the horse! let me do what 1 may,
  He won't get fat at all.

'I've given him medicines galore,
  And linseed oil and bran,
And yet the brute looks awfully poor,'
  Said the woebegone stable-man.

One glance the intelligent stranger threw
  At the ribs of the hollow weed,
Then asked, with an innocent air, 'Did you
  Forget to give him a feed?'

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Envoi

When the last rousing gallop is ended,
  And the last post-and-rall has been jumped,
And a cracked neck that cannot be mended
 Shall have under the yew-tree been 'dumped',
Just you leave him alone-in God's acre -
  And drink, in wine, whisky or beer:
'May the saints tip above send 'The Breaker'
  A horse like good old Cavalier!

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

His Masterpiece

Never before was daughter of Eve endow'd with a face so fair,
There be none of God's holy angels with a beauty half so rare
As thine, nor dreamer has ever dreamed the loveliness you wear.
There's a gleam in your golden tress, Lieb! a light in your melting eye!
There is witchery in your smile, Lieb! and a magic in your sigh
That may lure the strong ones to your shrine to worship and - to die.
And I - when you whispered softly, Lleb - perchance would have worshipped, too,
Had bowed to the spell of your beauty-an' it were not that I knew
The Devil had wrought his masterpiece what time he fashioned you.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Love Outlasteth All

Could I borrow the laverock's lifting note,
Or the silvery song from the blackbird's throat,
Then would I warble the whole day long,
Telling, in floods of passionate song,
How worlds might tremble, or skies might fall.
But Love, true Love, outlasteth all.

Or, with picturesque words, in phrases neat,
With ringing rhymes, and in sonnets sweet,
Had I the skill of the schoolman's craft
My song the murmurous breeze should waft,
And tell to her whom my heart loves best,
How Love outlasteth all the rest.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Much A Little While

'Love me little, love me long' -
Laggard lover penn'd such song.
Rather, Neil! - In other style -
Love me much, a little while.

If that minstrel ever knew
Maid so kissable as you -
(Like you? - There wa snever such)
He'd have written, 'Love me much.'

Other loves have pass'd away!
Sprintimes never last alway!
'Twill be better - will it not
To think that once we lov'd 'a lot.'

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Night Thought

The world around is sleeping,
 The stars are bright o'erhead,
The shades of myalls weeping
 Upon the sward are spread;
Among the gloomy pinetops
 The fitful breezes blow,
And their murmurs seem the music
 Of a song of long ago;
Soft, passionate, and wailing
 Is the tender old refrain -
With a yearning unavailing -
 "Will he no come back again?"

The camp-fire sparks are flying
 Up from the pine-log's glow,
The wandering wind is sighing
 That ballad sweet and low;
The drooping branches gleaming
 In the firelight, sway and stir;
And the bushman's brain is dreaming
 Of the song she sang, and her.
And the murmurs of the forest
 Ring home to heart and brain,
As in the pine is chorused
 "Wi11 he no come back again?"

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Paddy Magee

What are you doing now, Paddy Magee?
Grafting, or spelling now, Paddy Magee?
Breaking, or branding?
Or overlanding,
Out on the sand ridges, Paddy Magee?
Is your mouth parched, from an all-night spree?
Taking a pick-me-up, Paddy Magee?
Cocktail - or simple soda and b.? -
Which is the 'antidote,' Paddy Magee?

Still 'shook' on some beautiful, blushing she?
Girl in the Bogan side, Paddy Magee?
A hack providing
For moonlight riding,
Side-saddle foolery, Paddy Magee?

Up on the station - or in the town -
Or on the Warrego, droving down,
Whatever you're doing - wherever you be!
'There's lashin's o' luck to ye!' Paddy Magee!

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Short Shrift

I can mind him at the start -
Easy seat and merry heart!
Said he, as he threw a glance
At the crawling ambulance:

'Some day I'll be on the ground
And the van will hurry round!
Doc. will gravely wag his head:
'No use now! the poor chap's dead!'

'Every man must, soon or late,
Turn up at the Golden Gate:
When we weigh in - you and I -
How can horsemen better die!'

On that sunlit steeple course
He lay prone beneath his horse,
Never more his pal may ride
By that gallant hlorseman's side.

'Reckless fool?' What matter, mate?
All his time he'd ridden straight -
Went (smashed 'gainst that wall of sod!)
Spurred and booted to his God.

Carve in stone above his head
Words that some old Christian said:
'Grace he sought, and grace he found,
'Twixt the saddle and the ground!'

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Since The Country Carried Sheep

We trucked the cows to Homebush, saw the girls, and started back,
Went West through Cunnamulla, and got to the Eulo track.
Camped a while at Gonybibil - but, Lord! you wouldn't know
It for the place where you and Mick were stockmen long ago.

Young Merino bought the station, fenced the run and built a 'shed',
Sacked the stockmen, sold the cattle, and put on sheep instead,
But he wasn't built for Queensland. and every blessed year
One hears of 'labour troubles' when Merino starts to shear.

There are ructions with the rouseabouts, and shearers' strikes galore!
The likes were never thought of in the cattle days of yore.
And slowly, round small paddocks now, the 'sleeping lizards' creep,
And Gonybibil's beggared since the country carried sheep.

Time was we had the horses up ere starlight waned away,
The billy would be boiling by the breaking of the day;
And our horses - by Protection - were aye in decent nick,
When we rode up the 'Bidgee where the clearskins mustered thick.
They've built brush-yards on Wild Horse Creek, where in the morning's hush
We've sat silent in the saddle, and listened for the rush
Of the scrubbers - when we heard 'em, 'twas wheel 'em if you can,
While gidgee, pine and mulga tried the nerve of horse and man.

The mickies that we've branded there! the colts we had to ride!
In Gonybibil's palmy days - before the old boss died.
Could Yorkie Hawkins see his run, I guess his ghost would weep,
For Gonybibil's beggared since the country carried sheep.

From sunrise until sunset through the summer days we'd ride,
But stockyard rails were up and pegged, with cattle safe inside,
When 'twixt the gloamin' and the murk, we heard the well-known note -
The peal of boisterous laughter from the kookaburra's throat.

Camped out beneath the starlit skies, the tree-tops overhead,
A saddle for a pillow, and a blanket for a bed,
'Twas pleasant, mate, to listen to the soughing of the breeze,
And learn the lilting lullabies which stirred the mulga-trees.

Our sleep was sound in those times, for the mustering days were hard,
The morrows might be harder, with the branding in the yard.
But did yu see the station now! the men - and mokes - they keep!
You'd own the place was beggared - since the country carred sheep.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Sir Walter (Revised)

0 woman, in man's hour of ease
And plenty, how you strive to please!
To win his heart - and purse - you try
With ogle, whisper, smile, and sigh.

But when he's short of cash, you find,
You change your tactics and your mind;
And from a fellow lacking 'oof'
You deem it well to hold aloof -

Tip-tilt your nose and curve your lip,
And let the impecunious R.I.P.,
To find some other, wealthier, new man:
All this you do because - you're Woman.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Some Other Somebody

Somebody's horse has finished his feed,
  Somebody's saddle is on;
But never a nigger the tracks can read,
  Or know where Somebody's gone.

Over the rails and up the creek,
  As soon as the sun goes down:
How is it every night this week
  That Somebody's off to town?

Grass is dewy, and overhead
  Evening stars are bright;
And startled wallabies hear the tread
  Of galloping hoofs at night.

Through the scrub and over the plain
  Somebody's galloping fast;
Never a pull on the bridle rein
  Till the town lights show at last.

Somebody's horse has whips o' work -
  Whips o' work of late -
Since Somebody's brown was seen in town
  Tied to Somebody's gate.

But the wherefore why Somebody rides,
  And the track that the brown horse goes,
Only his rider (and one besides:
  Some other Somebody) knows!

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Summer Midnight

Athwart the star-lit midnight sky
Luminous fleecy clouds drift by,
As the mysterious, pallid moon
Sinks in the waveless still lagoon.
Now that the queen of night is dead,
The starry commonwealth o'erhead
(Softer and fairer than gaudy day)
Sheds lustrous light from the Milky Way;
While the Dog-star gleams, and the Sisters Seven,
Float tremulously in the misty heaven.
Faintly, afar the horse-bells ring;
Myriads of wakened crickets sing;
And the spirit voices of the night
Sing snatches of fairy music bright,
Old-world melodies - lang syne sung -
Recalling days when the heart was young,
Whose wonderful cadences fall and rise,
As the wind in the casuarina sighs;
And the world seems 'gulfed, this summer night,
In a flood of delicious, dreamy light.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

The Day That Is Dead

Ah, Jack! Time finds us feeble men,
  And all too swift our years have flown.
The days are different now to then -
  In that time when we rode ten stone.

The minstrel when his mem'ry goes
  To old times, tunes a doleful lay -
Comparing modern nags with those
  Which Lee once bred down Bathurst way.

The type to-day's a woeful weed,
  Which lacks the stoutness, strength and bone
Of horses they were wont to breed
  In those days - when we rode ten stone.

But all of us remorseless Fate
  O'ertakes, and as the years roll on
Our saddles carry extra weight,
  And old age mourns the keenness gone.

The young ones, too - 'mong men, I mean -
  Watch not the sires from whom they've sprung,
They nowadays are not so keen
  As when we - and the world - were young.

They've neither nerve nor seat to suit
  The back of Paddy Ryan's roar -
That wall-eyed, vicious, bucking brute
  You rode - when you could ride ten stone.

But, Johnny, ere we 'go to grass' -
  Ere angel wings are fledged to fly -
With wine we'll fill a bumper glass,

And drink to those good times gone by.

We've had our day - 'twill not come back!
But, comrade mine, this much you'll own,
'Tis something to have had it, Jack-
That time when we could ride ten stone!

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

The Devoutly Thankful Lover

So Nell was married yesterday! -
  Let's fill a bumper mellow,
And drain it to old Hymen's sway -
  And to the lucky fellow.

Time was when 1 was 'gone' on her:
  When each day I'd discover
Fresh charms to make my pulses stir,
  And-fool-like-act the lover.

Her eyes were bright as stars at night,
  Her lips were like to coral,
And Nell was, in her lover's sight,
  As beautiful as moral.

But now with joy we drink his health,
  Whom Nell did most prefer,
And wish him lots of luck and wealth
  Who's lately married her.

I loved - for Nell was fair and tall,
  And sweet as fragrant clover -
But now I love her most of all
  Because - she threw me over.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

The Nights At Rocky Bar

Trapping brumbies in the moonlight! those were nights of reckless fun,
'Way back on Campbell's country - on the Goory-bibil run,
When saddled up and ready qur impatient nags would stand
While we squatted in the gunyah with their bridle-reins in hand.

And presently the hoof-beats of the brumbies' trot would sound
As they rattled o'er the ridges of the mulga-timbered ground;
They'd be thirsty, for that stretching trot had brought them from afar,
And the only water for them was the hole at Rocky Bar.

We would hear the stallions whinny, and then the water splash -
That latter was our signal-through the deadwood with a crash
We were at them-you on joker, I on Harlequin, and Mick
Would be with us, just as eager as his jumper, Elsternwick.

Our stockwhips in the stilly night like rifle-shots would ring
When we beat them on the Bilbee Flat and slewed 'em to the wing;
And when we had 'em yarded, oh, the clatter and the din!
How they kicked and squealed and snorted when they found themselves barr'd in!

The nights the brumbies tried to break straight back the way they came
Proved Harlequin as nimble as we knew him to he game;
In those rushing, frantic scrambles 'twas his cleverness I thank
That I didn't get a smasher down that rotten basalt bank.

One old 'Merino' came out, and some boundary rider's moke
He was riding - it was his fault that the chestnut stallion broke -
He sung out: 'Never mind him; let the beggar go away!'
But you didn't stop to listen, jack, to what he had to say.

And ere you brought the big horse back you had a roughish ride,
The Lord knows how you,rnanaged, mate, that night to save your hide!

Though bar a stake of sandalwood you weren't a great deal hurt,
Though the gidya ripped your moleskins, and the mulga rent your shirt.

That big timber took some dodging, but our hacks were tried and true,
And while their heads were left alone would mostly get us through;
But never a horse, save Harlequin', at night, 'twas my belief
Could race among those Bilbee holes and yet not come to grief.

And then we'd jog away to camp two miles below the Bar,
Where we'd find a pipe of Nailrod and a nobbler in the jar.
Ah! though our lines of life since then have lain in diverse ways,
We don't forget those gallops of the brumby-running days.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

The Reprobate's Reply

Three droving men, some three weeks sync,
  Sat drinking the Queensland rum;
'Twas four a.m. when twa o' them
  Saw jock M'Phee succumb.

Hech! they were giddy songs he'd sung,
  And the yarns which he'd spun were 'free'! -
For the liquor that nicht had loosed the tongue
  O' gudeman Jock M'Phee.

They taul,t the meenister what befell,
  So he tuk braw Jock to task:-
'Jock, gie me noo an answer true
  To one question I wull ask.

'An' it happened the Laird had stricken ye,
  A reprobate, graceless mon,
Whan ye war a bletherin' yestere'en -
  D'ye ken whare ye wad hae gone?'

'Whare wad I hae gone?' - and Jockie wunk -
  'Dinna ye fash yersel' mair -
For I wad ha' bin too terrible drunk
  To ha' gone anywhere.'

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

The Wooing O' T

He was a bachelor, gallant and gay
  She was a spinster prim -
Pretty and prim, with a wonderful way
  Which had captivated him.

Oh! well knew she what he wished to say,
  So - never frigid nor freezy -
Molly Maginnis managed that day
  To make his saying o' 't easy.

'Bob, I shall get you a wife,' said she,
  'Find some nice, dear girl for you;
Bob! please tell me the sort she must be,
  Shall her eyes be brown or blue?

'Must she be of the 'plump and the pleasing' sort?
  Will the 'slender and willowy' do?'
Here Robert the Bachelor, cutting her short,
  Said: 'She must be just like you!

'And to me, sweetheart, 'tis distinctly clear,
  There is none in the world like you.'

This fell in the fall of the finished year,
  They are married now in the New.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

To A Silent Girl

When the sklll'd fashioner of female faces
 Designed your mask, he wrought with cunning fist,
 And made a mouth expressly to be kiss'd -
Not for shrill utterance nor pert grimaces.

The curved, ripe lips-above the rounded chin -
 He dyed the hue of summer's reddest rose,
 Then placed a smile upon them to disclose
A glimpse of white and even pearls within.

Those lips are silent, sweetheart! - but your eyes
 Are eloquent, and they love's lesson teach
 Better than other woman's aptest speech -
In their soft light the tend'rest language lies.

In womankind - the world has long confess'd -
A silent mouth and speaking eyes are best.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

To The Rev. Canon Fisher

To the Rev. Canon Fisher
Pretoria
The night before we're shot
We shot the Boers who killed and mutilated
our friend (the best mate I had on Earth)
Harry Harbord Morant
Peter Joseph Handcock

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Too Much Light

It was a mighty snug resort, that Sydney-side hotel:
A snug resort where fellows dined 'not wisely, but too well';
The boarders all had gone to bed, and other men departed,
When Pat suggested to his pal 'twas nearly time they started.

They drifted to the closing bar, and asked the sleepy waiter
For two cigars,to light 'em home before the hour grew later;
Pat lit his; while his chum exclaimed, 'Ole chappie, gimme light!
I don't know how you're feeling, but I'm very, very tight!'

... Tis very hard to get a light'-he lurched against the bar,
And most appealingly remarked 'Which is the right cigar?
'Tis difficult to fix it; you guess, p'r'aps, what I mean;
I know you're only smoking one, but I can see fifteen!'

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Two Gossips

One fox-faced virgin, word for word,
Repeats each sland'rous thing she's heard,
And sourly smiles as scandal slips
With gusto from her thin white lips.

She's bad enough! but list a minute.
Beside her mate she isn't in it.
This latter lady, 'pon my word,
Repeats things . . . . she has never heard.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

West By North Again

We've drunk our wine, we've kissed our girls, and funds are sinking low,
The horses must be thinking it's a fair thing now to go;
Sling the swags on Condamine and strap the billies fast,
And stuff a bottle in the bags and let's be off at last.
What matter if the creeks are up - the cash, alas, runs down!
A very sure and certain sign we're long enough in town.
The black fella rides the boko, and you'd better take the bay,
Quart Pot will do to carry me the stage we go today.

No grass this side the Border fence! and all the mulga's dead!
The horses for a day or two will have to spiel ahead;
Man never yet from Queensland brought a bullock or a back
But lost condition on that God-abandoned Border track.

When once we're through the rabbit-proof - it's certain since the rain -
There's whips o' grass and water, so, it's West by North again!
There's feed on Tyson's country - we can "spell" the mokes a week
Where Billy Stevens last year trapped his brumbies on Bough Creek.

The Paroo may be quickly crossed - the Eulo Common's bare;
And, anyhow, it isn't wise, old man! to dally there.
Alack-a-day! far wiser men than you and I succumb
To woman's wiles, and potency of Queensland wayside rum.

Then over sand and spinifex and on, o'er ridge and plain!
The nags are fresh - besides, they know they're westward-bound again.
The brand upon old Darkie's thigh is that upon the hide
Of bullocks we must muster on the Diamantina side.

We'll light our camp-fires where we may, and yarn beside their blaze;
The jingling hobble-chains shall make a music through the days.
And while the tucker-bags are right, and we've a stick of weed,
A swagman shall be welcome to a pipe-full and a feed.

So, fill your pipe! and, ere we mount, we'll drink another nip -
Here's how that West by North again may prove a lucky trip;
Then back again - I trust you'll find your best girl's merry face,
Or, if she jilts you, may you get a better in her place.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Westward Ho!

There's a damper in the ashes, tea and sugar in the bags,
There's whips of feed and shelter on the sandridge for the nags,
There's gidya wood about us and water close at hand,
And just one bottle left yet of the good Glenlivet brand.

There are chops upon the embers, which same are close-up done,
From as fine a four-tooth wether as there is on Crossbred's run;
'Twas a proverb on the Darling, the truth of which I hold:
"That mutton's aye the sweetest which was never bought nor sold."

Out of fifty thousand wethers surely Crossbred shouldn't miss
A sheep or so to travellers-faith, 'tis dainty mutton, this -
Let's drink a nip to Crossbred; ah, you drain it with a grin,
Then shove along the billy, mate, and, squatted, let's wade in.

The night's a trifle chilly, and the stars are very bright,
A heavy dew is falling, but the fly is rigged aright;
You may rest your bones till morning, then if you chance to wake,
Give me a call about the time that daylight starts to break.

We may not camp to-morrow, for we've many a mile to go,
Ere we turn our horses' heads round to make tracks for down below.
There's many a water-course to cross, and many a black-soil plain,
And many a mile of mulga ridge ere we get back again.

That time five moons shall wax and wane we'll finish up the work,
Have the bullocks o'er the border and truck 'em down from Bourke,
And when they're sold at Homebush, and the agents settle up,
Sing hey! a spell in Sydney town and Melbourne for the "Cup".

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

When The Light Is As Darkness

The morning-tide is fair and bright,
  With golden sun up-springing;
The cedars glowed in the new-born light,
  And the bell-bird's note was ringing;
While diamonds dropped by dusky Night,
  Were yet to the gidyas clinging.

The morning waned - the sun rose high
  O'erhead, until 'twas seeming
But a dazzling disc, and the fiery sky
  Like an opal sea was gleaming;
And languorous flowers - of morn gone by,
  And coming eve - fell dreaming.

And now the moon above does creep
  To laugh at red Sol sinking;
While wakening from their sunlit sleep,
  A few wan stars are blinking,
And thirsty, drooping flowers deep
  Of evening dews are drinking.

The birds will soon their carols cease,
  And crows are homeward hieing;
The gloaming deepens, stars increase,
  The weary day is dying -
Its requiem, murmurous of peace,
  The vesper winds are, sighing.

This night is near! Are you waiting friend,
  That Night? - we're drawing nigh it -
When we to the Restful Land shall wend,
  And leave life's feverish riot -
When the gods to each tired soul shall send
  Eternal, dreamless quiet.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

While Yet We May

Ancient, wrinkled dames and jealous -
  They whom joyless Age downcasts -
And the sere, gray-bearded fellows
  Who would fain re-live their pasts -
These, the ancients, grimly tell us:
  'Vows are vain, and no love lasts.'

Fleeting years fulfil Fate's sentence,
  Eyes must dim, and hair turn gray,
Age bring wrinkles, p'rhaps repentance;
  Youth shall quickly hie away,
And that time when youth has went hence,
  We - and love - have had our day.

Let the world, and fuming, fretting,
  Busy worldlings pass us by,
Bent on piles of lucre getting -
  They shall lose it when they die;
Past and future, sweet! forgetting -
  Seize the present ere it fly.

Your bright eyes are soft and smiling,
  Pouting lips are moist and red,
And your whispers wondrous wiling -
  Surely they would quick the dead -
And these hours they're now beguiling,
  All too hasty will have fled.

Years may bring a dole of sorrow,
  Time enough to fast and pray,
From the present pleasures borrow,
  Let the distant future pay;
Leave the penance for the morrow,
  Sweetheart! love and laugh to-day.

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant

Who's Riding Old Harlequin Now?

They are mustering cattle on Brigalow Vale
 Where the stock-horses whinny and stamp,
And where long Andy Ferguson, you may go bail,
 Is yet boss on a cutting-out camp.
Half the duffers I met would not know a fat steer
 From a blessed old Alderney cow.
Whilst they're mustering there I am wondering here -
 Who is riding brown Harlequin now?

Are the pikers as wild and the scrubs just as dense
 In the brigalow country as when
There was never a homestead and never a fence
 Between Brigalow Vale and The Glen?
Do they yard the big micks 'neath the light of the moon?
 Do the yard-wings re-echo the row
Of stockwhips and hoof-beats? And what sort of coon
 Is there riding old Harlequin now?

There was buckjumping blood in the brown gelding's veins,
 But, lean-headed, with iron-like pins,
Of Pyrrhus and Panic he'd plentiful strains,
 All their virtues, and some of their sins.
'Twas the pity, some said, that so shapely a colt
 Fate should with such temper endow;
He would kick and would strike, he would buck and would bolt -
 Ah! who's riding brown Harlequin now?

A demon to handle! a devil to ride!
 Small wonder the surcingle burst;
You'd have thought that he'd buck himself out of his hide
 On the morning we saddled him first.
I can mind how he cow-kicked the spur on my boot,
 And though that's long ago, still I vow
If they're wheeling a piker no new-chum galoot
 Is a-riding old Harlequin now!

I remember the boss - how he chuckled and laughed
 When they yarded the brown colt for me:
"He'll be steady enough when we finish the graft

And have cleaned up the scrubs of Glen Leigh!'
I am wondering today if the brown horse yet live,
For the fellow who broke him, I trow,
A long lease of soul-ease would willingly give
To be riding brown Harlequin now!

'Do you think you can hold him?' old Ferguson said -
He was mounted on Homet, the grey;
I think Harlequin heard him - he shook his lean head,
And he needed no holding that day.
Not a prick from a spur, nor a sting from a whip
As he raced among deadwood and bough
While I sat fairly quiet and just let him rip -
But who's riding old Harlequin now?

I could hear 'em a-crashing the gidgee in front
As the Bryan colt streaked to the lead
Whilst the boss and the niggers were out of the hunt.
For their horses lacked Harlequin's speed;
The pikers were yarded and skies growing dim
When old Fergie was fain to allow:
'The colt's track through the scrub was a knocker' to him -
But who's riding brown Harlequin now?

From starlight to starlight - all day in between
The foam-flakes might fly from his bit,
But whatever the pace of the day's work had been,
The brown gelding was eager and fit.
On the packhorse's back they are fixing a load
Where the path climbs the hill's gloomy brow;
They are mustering bullocks to send on the road,
But - who's riding old Harlequin now?

Harry 'Breaker' Harbord Morant