

# Oberon

I waited when the square-rigged ships sailed into Sydney Cove  
and longer still before those weary three explorers strove  
to find a path across the rugged cobalt-coloured hills,  
which brought surveyor Evans to my fish-filled stream, that spills  
towards O'Connell's rich and fertile flats. He stood in awe  
of park-like ground he called – 'the handsomest I ever saw'.

But those were only reconnoitres to my north and west,  
until Charles Throsby and his party, found me on their quest  
to locate Bathurst from Moss Vale. Then Oxley quickly planned  
to follow Throsby's route, south westerly from Bathurst, and  
traversed the Campbells River close to Lawson's Hut, along  
a pass to Swallows Nest, and camped by Campbells billabong.

Their exploration opened up my soul to grazing stocks  
of cattle, gifted by Macquarie's hand to William Cox  
and William Lawson. Later, Captain King was granted land  
around Bingbungil Creek. His bullocks roamed untethered and  
until the tag of 'village status' claimed the fairies' king,  
the name of Bullock Flat evoked a more familiar ring.

But time moved quickly and my rolling hills and rushing streams  
were opened up to squatters and free settlers with their dreams.  
They layed steel lines to Bathurst, bridged my rivers, carved out tracks  
across my length and breadth, with shovels, picks and aching backs.  
They faced the drought of thirty-eight, which ended with a flood –  
but nothing nature tried to do could poison bushman blood.

And there were some that chose to range on Abercrombie's side.  
My caves and deep ravines provided perfect ground to hide  
Fred Lowry and the Ribbon Gang and young Jack Foley too.  
They cattle-duffed and robbed the Mudgee Mail when it came through,  
retained the confidence of friends, although the papers said –  
the governor had put a tempting sum upon each head.

They claimed they were oppressed to justify the crimes they did  
but rendezvous with Cobb & Co. beat working for a quid.  
The rule of law meant nothing – there was nowhere safe to hide,  
until Macalister showed up with troopers at his side  
and skirmished up by Shooter's Hill against the Ribbon Gang –  
their bushranging was over; they were shot or doomed to hang.

I saw my rivers run with gold in eighteen-fifty-three,  
when miners rushed without a prayer, or any guarantee  
of finding their elusive reef and freedom's easy way –  
for riches won or lost are more romanticised today.  
But gold was never meant to be a lasting gift of mine,  
I had in store a greater plan for cattle, sheep and pine.

You sowed potatoes and persisted when their value fell,  
though dairying provided extra cash for you as well.  
And rabbits, while regarded as a menace, later proved  
to be a boon throughout the 'hungry years' and tons were moved  
by rail to Sydney. Full-time trappers came to earn their pay  
and traded skins but that's a story for another day.

My population swelled, which changed for good, my circumstance  
and so the need became acute for local governance.  
A public meeting was convened in nineteen-hundred-six,  
to lay the roots for council. And attending were a mix  
of parish residents, who organised elections for  
November and resolved the Court House be the council 'floor'.

One hundred years? I can't believe it's that long since you passed  
that first historic motion for a council seal and cast  
your votes for 'President'. Would Mister Brennan really know  
back then, how rich, how strong, how much his fledgling shire would grow?  
How much the newborn century would turn against old ways –  
how science and invention brought the hope for better days?

I saw the flags a-waving, heard the bugles call your sons  
and watched them proudly march away toward the 'brutal Huns'.  
Returning from that dreadful horror, no one understood  
their nightmares and anxieties, for only soldiers could.  
They battled on regardless, faced their work like country men,  
before another generation took up arms again.

I saw your pea-crops flourish and potatoes growing still  
and watched your wagons take my hardwood out to Broken Hill,  
which left my landscape barren with a chance to plant anew  
the radiata pine, which brought prosperity to you.  
You harvested, replenished, and your factories produced  
the pyneboard and the MDF, which gave my clime a boost.

And never many sheep across my slopes were seen to run,  
before the fight against the deadly liver fluke was won.  
Then paddocks lush and green, with so much phosphate spread around  
made sure your flocks increased, till fleeces fetched a 'pound a pound'.  
Your cattle herds spread wider as more grazing runs were cleared,  
and then my land was viable, or so it first appeared.

I'm too afraid to mention here the names of pioneers,  
who settled in my districts and provided down the years  
a legacy worth keeping and a life to talk about –  
I'm too afraid to mention them, in case I leave one out.  
But parks and buildings honour them and further you may find  
their names are posted anywhere my roads and byways wind.

I've watched all types of people and a trait that binds them all,  
is how they thumb their noses at authority and call  
their councils dumb, yet quietly concede that council's right.  
I'm sure one hundred years have given council cause to skite  
about success and progress and the hands that steered it by,  
and probably you're wondering just who, or what, am I.

I am your cold and frosty clime beyond the ocean waves;  
I am your stunning sandstone bluffs; I am your limestone caves.  
I am your long and winding roads to where you want to be;  
I am your peaceful hide-a-way; I am your sanity.  
I am your pleasant soft green hills, that nature smiles upon;  
I am your pine-clad forestry – I am your Oberon.

**Brian Beesley**

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