

14 FIDDLERS OF HOBART TOWN

The Fourteen Fiddlers Petition 1848

Thos Bucknell (fiddler) to His Excellency Sir W.T. Denison¹

The Humble petition of the undernamed musicians residing in the district of Hobart Town

Respectfully Showeth,

That petitioners have been earning an honest livelihood by their profession although repeated attempts have been made to deprive them of their only means of subsistence by the interference of the police under the plea that their merely exercising their profession in the houses of Licensed Victuallers, for a couple of hours in the evening renders such houses as Disorderly! Yet there is nothing in the Licensing Act prohibiting the playing of a violin in said houses.

That petitioners beg to draw to his attention to the fact, that the mechanic and labourer has not the means, nor is he qualified to enter the ballroom and the only recreation he has after his daily toil is the innocent one of music and dance. Petitioners beg to add that in the neighbouring colonies the playing of musical instruments in a public house is not deemed 'disorderly', but by a stretch of Police construction it is here prosecuted as such; and Publican havoc been fined under such far-fetched interpretation of an act of Council; the penalty inflicted does not Authorise an Appeal otherwise the question would be set at rest by the Justices at the Quarter Sessions: Petitioners are therefore deprived of the means of an honest livelihood. Many of them are cripples, and almost all are suffering from diseases which prevents them from having a recourse to hard labour; and in all instances, the nature of their profession Your Excellency must be aware unfit(s) them for such a task.

They therefor humbly but earnestly appeal to Your Excellency, praying that you will be pleased to adopt such measures as will give the Licensed Victuallers permission to employ petitioners for a few hours in the evening, and that there is no actual disorder that the inference of the Police should be deemed unnecessary.

Hobart Town 11 November 1848

Thos Bucknell [plus 13 others]

Please direct the answer to Geo Perry, Post Office

ref to Bicheno 13/11/48

¹ CSO 24/78/2476, 11.11.48

14/11/48, Fr Burgess, PM.

Out of the fourteen persons who sign this petition - 8 are free, with no fixed abode, and 6 are T O F L Holders, three of whom, Fletcher, Bucknell and Lloyd have taken out passes for Oatlands - another - Hunter has taken out a pass for Hamilton - another has not been yet to the Pass office since he received his indulgence (Cross) and another (Pear) had been recommended to take out a Pass into the Interior. An application of such a nature hardly deserves a remark, but it may as well to state, that I have with much pain and opposition succeeded in putting a stop to fiddling in conduct and character in consequence and dancing in Public Houses, which have been much improved. . The practice of fiddling in Public Houses was the means of congregating together vicious and dishonest characters of both sexes and was the source of much evil to the community - against this a few individuals - however respectable - is not for one moment to be weighed.

The information was laid under the 40th section of the 4th Will IV No 8 for a Breach of Recognisance in permitting a disorder in a Public House - and the lowest penalty inflicted allows an appeal to Justices in Quarter Sessions.

A Eardley Wilmot.

Supporting letter from musician George Perry to Lieut. Gov. Denison

Hobarton 16th November 1848

May it Please Your Excellency

Having forwarded a Petition to Your Excellency praying that the playing of a violin should not be deemed disorderly in Public Houses, and as the interference of the Police has thrown us out of bread, and as I have a wife and family to support, and no other means of learning a livelihood, I humbly hope YE will grant a favourable answer as soon as convenient.

I remain

Most respectful YE humble servant

George Perry

Musician, Brisbane Street

Comment from Secretary J.E. Bicheno

I concur with the Police Magistrate FB 21/11/48

There is no harm in fiddling itself, but the harm in it is made subservient to rows and disorder. The Gov'r will no doubt refuse the prayers.

J E Bicheno.

Response from Lieut. Gov. Denison

refused of course

W Denison 23/11/48

Further supporting letter from musician George Perry

Hobart 24/11/48

Having transmitted a petition to HE the LG on the 11th inst signed by myself and others, praying that we should not be deprived of an honest living for ourselves and families and not yet having received an answer, we are, or I am at least with my wife and children on the verge of starvation, AN UNLESS A SPEEDY ANSWER IS given TO OUR reasonable prayers, I will be compelled to dispose of what little furniture I have together with my clothing to get my children bread; may I hope then Sir that you will be pleased to cause an answer to the Petition.

I am

Sir Respectfully Yr Ob Svt

George Perry.

3 days later the musicians, through Perry, were informed of the Lieut. Governor's decision.

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