

**The Fiddler, the Juggler  
&  
Mrs Champ**

**Popular Entertainers & Music at  
Port Arthur Penal Station**

**SCENARIO FOR A PLAY SET AT PORT ARTHUR**

**by**

**Peter MacFie**

**(former historian, Port Arthur Historic Site**

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**PART 2  
BACKGROUND & SCENARIO FOR THE PLAY**

## Scenario for a Play Set at Port Arthur

### The Fiddler, the Juggler & Mrs Champ

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#### THE SETTING

1848 was a pivotal year for Port Arthur. Commandant WTN Champ's brief period was about to end, but he had introduced long standing changes to the appearance of Port and to the Commandant's House. The ornamental gardens and fountain were added by him, and structural additions to the Commandant's House transferred the building from a colonial Georgian cottage to a Victorian residence. Major additions were the main bedroom, and parlour.

**THE SCENARIO.** The Scenario uses real events plus some optional ones, with the aim of making an entertaining yet revealing insight into the lives of entertainers/musicians, caught in the convict system. The scenes are located around the site, some based on actual occurrences and others invented, with the idea that the audience could move with the performers in a production that began late afternoon, ending at either the Church or the Parlour of the Commandant's House.

**Venues.** The ornamental gardens and the Commandant's House parlour are suggested as venues for two scenes in the play. Other locations for scenes are the Workshops, centred on repairing a violin, (Foggo was an instrument maker) and the Church, where Foggo played the cello and trained a string quartet of staff members. (This latter actually occurred during the time of Commandant Boyd however.)

**Music/Performance.** Melodies suggested played include those remembered being played by Foggo by the former Port Arthur official. These were *The Last Rose of Summer*, *Blue Bells of Scotland*, and *Caller Herrin.*, Others are taken from a Fyvie's Embrace, - the Golden Age of the Scottish Fiddle, a CD by Australian fiddler, Chris Duncan . This features melodies by both Neil and Nathaniel Gow, among others.

Nathaniel Gow's most popular melody was a 'pop' song of its day, *Caller Herrin'*. The song uses the cries of the 'Newhaven fishwives' who carried fish - herring-caught overnight around the town for sale. This was done by carrying a large creel or basket resting on their back, supported on the forehead by a broad leather band. 'They accoutred their walk through even the best streets of Edinburgh, bringing their wares to the door of the consumer.' The second melody within the composition is derived

from the bells of St Andrews Church, then recently erected in George Street, Edinburgh.<sup>1</sup>

The popularity of the *Caller Herrin'* was wide spread. (The recent History of Dover, Vol 2 by Norm Beechey, records the song being sung at a local concert at Port Esperance, Tasmania in the late 1870s.) So there is the real event of a Scottish convict fiddler playing a melody, *Caller Herrin*, written by his great uncle, being performed at Port Arthur by Neil Gow Foggo, yet being almost forgotten by posterity.

**Joseph Crapp.** The second entertainer was also a musician, playing the accordion, as well as being a juggler, skills useful as a seaman in his previous life- as had Foggo. The period approach to juggling needs to be developed, but the combination of a fiddler and a juggler lends itself to lively action. Crapp could be used as the commentator on prison life.

**THE ACTION.** The action at present is set at Port Arthur based on the entertainers, focusing on the music and the various locations, which present an opportunity for commenting on both the entertainers and their lives. The play also invites audience participation with both dancing and juggling.

A well drafted text could examine other aspects of 19th century social and prison life.

In addition the play could be written at 2 levels, for younger age students, and/or a harder edged adult focused play.

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<sup>1</sup>MacFie, PH The Forgotten Convict Fiddler, Neil Gow Foggo, draft text, 2003.

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### THE FIDDLER, THE JUGGLER & THE COMMANDANT

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### THE PLAY

#### SCENE 1. TRACK FROM IMPRESSION BAY TO PORT ARTHUR

**SCENARIO:** Fiddler Neil Gow Foggo and juggler, Joseph Crapp, arrive at Port Arthur from Saltwater River Probation Station, having walked the ?? miles. They are on their way due to a request from Commandant Champ to Superintendent Courtenay, wanted the prisoners to provide entertainment for his children.

As they approach Port Arthur they come across a timber gang, and after some judicious bribing of the overseers, the gang in some energetic dancing. A cockatoo/lookout suddenly warns of an approaching military patrol, and the two entertainers grab their few belongings, and continue toward Port Arthur while the gang reluctantly returns to work.

#### SCENE 2. ENTERING PORT ARTHUR

**SCENARIO:** Entering Port Arthur As Crapp & Foggo come over the rise, overlooking Port Arthur , Foggo strikes up a reel on his fiddle, while Crapp dances and juggles.

The Garden Gang stops work, and also joins in a reel, using the handles of their hoes as improvised 'swords' for a traditional reel.

Further on, a rail truck loaded with cut sandstone, heads for the settlement from a quarry. The driver, holding onto the brake as the truck runs down hill, stands on top of the load and dances a jig, engaging in some Irish vs Scottish ribaldry.

#### SCENE 3. COMMANDANT'S OFFICE

Foggo and CC are brought into the Commandant's Office under 'arrest' by semi-irate soldier, who never the less, jokes with his charges.

On their entering, Champ shakes his head at Foggo incorrigible effervescent nature, commenting on his rough appearance yet his amazing talent with the fiddle. Champ outlines the 2 day events planned. These include tutoring a small ensemble of staff members, repairing a damaged instrument, restringing a fiddle and cello.

The reason for their arrival is a party planned for Champ's children at the Ornamental Garden. This is to be followed by an adult dance in the Parlour of the Commandant's House the following evening.

#### **SCENE 4 THE WOOD WORK/CARPENTER'S SHOP**

**SCENARIO:** Foggo Enters, accompanied by Champ, who makes it clear that Foggo is not to be interfered with by over-zealous overseers. He continues working at making a fiddle/viola, with a Huon pine back (to the same description as his viola found in a Hobart music shop in 1904).

Foggo on a cello and plays a haunting version of 'Caller Herrin,' a popular 19th century tune composed by his great uncle, Nathaniel Gow.

Then follows a sailor's reel, as Foggo tries to explain away the hole in his forehead.

Also bawdy or work song from a convict carpenter?

#### **SCENE 5**

##### **CHILDREN'S PARTY AT THE GOVERNMENT GARDENS**

**SCENARIO.** New parlour room at Commandant's House, cleared of rugs and furniture.

Adults & Children. Champ's family, (NB the two men served at Macquarie Harbour 1829)

Crapp starts proceeding with some card tricks, games of sleight of hand, proceeding to increasingly complex juggling. Involves children in juggling.

As act gets faster, Foggo joins in on fiddle. Champ leads party into a reel, with children brought into circle for impromptu tuition.

Audience joins in.

#### **SCENE 6 ADULTS PARTY AT COMMANDANT'S HOUSE**

**SCENARIO:** Adults meet for traditional Scots /Celtic evening entertainment in new Parlour, Commandant's House.

#### **SCENE 7 REHEARSAL & SERVICE AT PORT ARTHUR CHURCH**

**SCENARIO:** Foggo kept meteorological record at Port Arthur and played cello in church, also trained a string quartet at Port Arthur

Before church service, Foggo is playing *The Blue Bells of Scotland*, an other sentimental tunes of the period, & known to have been played by Foggo at Port Arthur Quartet arrives for rehearsal under Foggo tutoring. Ask Foggo if he knows a particular tune, and he writes it from 'his head', as reputed, with parts for the four instruments.

After 'practise', Foggo & quartet plays '*Caller Herrin*' then '*Last Rose of Summer*' of similar etc

Quartet leaves, and Foggo and Crapp play a last performance, with Crapp this time on the accordion as reputed. Lights fade on performers in church at night etc