

Death Of Cock Robin

(Introducing the Beef House Bullies)

Foreword by Judith Lewis

I first learned of this poem when it was published in the *Riverstone* Press, leading up to the "Back to Riverstone School" Day held on 14th August, 1971. It was given to the organisers by Mrs Joyce Wood (O'Kane) and was written by my mother, Mrs Garnet Shepherd in 1935.

My mother died in 1950 and my father in 1964 so the only one who could shed some light on its significance was my aunt, Mrs Vera Stockwell. She thought the poem was probably written as a "get back" to Garnet's Beef House workmates for the ribbing they gave him when, as a newly-wed, my mother used to take my father a hot lunch to the rail line fence outside the Beef House.

My parents were both well in their thirties when they married. My mother was a widow from Arncliffe. She came to Riverstone with the family of her first husband to visit their friends, the Garnet Schofields' family. The Schofields and Shepherd families played tennis on the Shepherd family court behind their home in Crown Road. My parents met there.

The Beefhouse Butchers were all great mates and stayed so throughout their lives. I imagine the marriage of one of their number at such a late age in life (at least it was in those days!) would have resulted in quite an amount of teasing.

I am not surprised that my mother chose poetry as a vehicle for her "reply" as some of my most cherished memories are of my brothers and I curling up in her bed whilst she recited poetry to us. The poems of A.A. Milne were our favourites and I am still able to read all the words of "Christopher Robin is Saying his Prayers" and most of "Little Boy Blue".

"Who Killed Cock Robin" was a popular nursery rhyme of the day. Probably, like most nursery rhymes, it had its basis in an historical happening or was aimed at an historical figure of the time in which it was written. The original nursery rhyme began:

"Who killed Cock Robin?"
"I," said the Sparrow,
"With my bow and arrow,
I killed Cock Robin."

"Who saw him die?"
"I," said the Fly,
"With my little eye
I saw him die." etc.

Judith Lewis

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Who killed Cock Robin?"

"I", said Billie Doolan,
"He wouldn't quit foolin',
I killed Cock Robin."

Bill Doolan

"Who saw him die?"

"I", said Friend Pop,
"I called in the cop,
I saw him die."

Pop Johnson

"Who caught his blood?"

"I", said Dick Stockwell,
"I caught it as it fell,
I caught his blood."

Dick Stockwell

"Who'll lay him out?"

"I", said Tiger Clifford,
"I'll tie him up with cord,
I'll lay him out."

Bob Clifford

"Who'll be pall-bearer?"

"I", said Friend Yellow,
"He won't be heavy, poor fellow,
I'll be pall-bearer."

Herb Freeman

"Who'll dig his grave?"

"I", said Hughie O'Kane,
"I'll dig it down the lane,
I'll dig his grave."

Hugh O'Kane

"Who'll be the parson?"

"I", said Pal Chalker,
"Because *I'm* the best talker,
I'll be the parson."

Jack Chalker

"Who'll sing a psalm?"

"I", said Les Clark,

"I can sing like a lark,

I'll sing a psalm."

Les Clark

"Who'll be chief mourner?"

"I", said Friend Bones

"I'll give loud cries and groans,

I'll be chief mourner."

Arthur Bones

Then all the bullies of the Beef House

Fell a'sighin'and a'sobbin'

When they heard of the death

Of poor Cock Robin.

Aunt Marie