

The Great Eastern

The following is from the long poem, *The Great Eastern*. 'The Great Eastern', as they were known around town, was a man who, during the early 1860's, perambulated the streets of Collingwood and Fitzroy in women's dress soliciting men for sex. He favoured the wide promenade of Victoria Parade. Members of the community reported seeing him there nearly every night plying his trade, or engaging in related recreations, with noted tenacity.

On the night of October 10, 1863 he was arrested on prostitution charges, which were later converted to the then capital crime of sodomy. Found guilty he was sentenced to death, eventually commuted to a life of hard labour the first three years in chains. The prosecution case was primarily based on witness statements from lovers and patrons of The Great Eastern, all who lived in the Collingwood and Fitzroy area. The court archives of these depositions offer insights into part of early Melbourne life, a neglected part of the city's history. Neglect, however, is not due to a lack of lively substance.

Note:

All poems on the left hand page are composed of direct transcriptions of court and newspaper records related to the Victorian Supreme Court case of *The Queen v. John Wilson* (1863). Syntax has not been altered. Spelling and grammar is true to the record. S-t-r-u-c-k- -o-u-t- -w-o-r-d-s are struck out in the record.

DEPOSITIONS OF WITNESSES

VIII.

JOHN MCKEEVOR¹

I met him at 12 O'clock
after the theatre
it was not moonlight
as I remember.

I had had a glass of porter
at the Theatre Royal

¹ Clerk. East Collingwood. 21 years old.

Star Alley, Melbourne

February, 1863

matter might at night
plait I don't know how

gaslight hangs
on the new, crowded
streets

porter decants
at the theatre
royal

the camper was magnificent
n'est-ce pas?

champagne?

star alley stinks of piss
men loiter
lean on bricks
still warm from the day
a heat of eyes

mckeevor licks out
dry—hated the opera anyway—
scuffs a loose heel

DEPOSITIONS OF WITNESSES

IX.

JOHN MCKEEVOR

near Myers Bakery Fitzroy. / he then stopped me
and asked me if I was going to shout. / I said I would not. /
he pressed me
and I at last consented

to a house in Young Street. / He went into the front
room. / There was a candle

mckeevor sops through the bog and
fitzroy gardens (no mounds yet)
to victoria parade

its not
moonlight

her oval face catches
the gas lamp

the dark parade behind
fades with the colony

two 'n six
darling, for the whole evening

ellen places his hand across his
smaller but rougher

the southern heat swallows
the night the bluestone the
seven years

DEPOSITIONS OF WITNESSES

XVI.

BARTHOLOMEW O'DONNOVAN²

I went into the front room.

he kissed me.

he then asked me had I any money. I said I had not.

he asked me had I 5/6 I said "no"

had I 3/6 I said "no"

then I offered him 2/6—

he said "we wont fall out about the rest". /

he then lay down

upon the sofa

² Carpenter. Condell Street, Collingwood.

Peel Street, Collingwood

July, 1863

shaded in the naked light
ellen had spent all night grooming
the body now trimming
for the soul

some fur to pelt
drain the cracked leather morning
seven years and the exile
more than could be felt

DEPOSITIONS OF WITNESSES

XVII.

JAMES MORRIS³

He asked me to go home with him. I told him I had no money.

Oh he said come along.

Oh no I says there's no use to go into your place without money.

I then agreed to meet him on Wednesday evening. /

It was wet

& the appointment was not kept

On Thursday I called at the prisoner's house.

No. 30 Georges St. / Knocked. / & prisoner came to the door
in man's apparel

& that night I saw him at the Poly Technic.

about 10 ½ same evening after leaving

the Poly Technic I met the prisoner

near corner of Brunswick Street and Victoria Parade

& agreed to meet him on Saturday evening. /

³ Poly-Technic Assistant. Lt. Oxford Street, Collingwood

Corner Victoria Street & George Street, Fitzroy

10 October, 1863

its late saturday evening
the lamp light peters

waiting she's plied
herself with porter and walking
up and down the parade
trade's been slow
more blue shirts calluses
few diggings, buck cradles
must be.

ellen, giving it best
leans against the gas lamp post
taps a pub jig
holding back open pine for a promised tryst.

morris drawls up the parade
yelling out, *miss wells*
a lavish stink slinks
out his collar

a few yards short of nine, ol'
daddy
ellen thumbs his moleskin

slow night then. rough go,
just squeezing what I can

she glints

then, i suppose you have the two 'n six