

GRAPEVINE CUTTINGS (October 2002)

By Rob Upson

“SAID HANRAHAN” by JOHN O’BRIEN

Patrick Joseph Hartigan was born at Yass, NSW, in 1878. He was ordained into the Catholic priesthood in 1903 and appointed inspector of Catholic Schools in the Goulburn Diocese in 1910. From 1917 to 1944 he was the parish priest for Narrandera. He retired in 1944 and died in 1952.

Under the pseudonym of John O’Brien he wrote a series of humorous verses about farming life and life of the Irish settlers in Australia – at home, on the land and at the Church on the Hill that was the centre of their lives.

He published two volumes of verse, the most well known being *Around the Boree Log and other Verses* (1921). The other was *The Parish of St. Mel’s* (1954). Boree is the aboriginal term for the weeping myall tree or Acacia Pendula.

One of his poems, that typify the harsh reality of climate on those who make a living from the land, is valid today as it has been since colonisation. It is entitled “Said Hanrahan” from *Around the Boree Log* and here it is.

“We’ll all be rooned,” said Hanrahan,
In accents most forlorn,
Outside the church, ere Mass began,
One frosty Sunday morn.

The congregation stood about,
Coat-collars to the ears,
And talked of stock, and crops, and drought,
As it had done for years.

“It’s looking crook,” said Daniel Croke;
“Bedad, it’s cruke, me lad,
For never since the banks went broke
Has seasons been so bad.”

“It’s dry, all right,” said young O’Neil,
With which astute remark
He squatted down upon his heel
And chewed a piece of bark.

And so around the chorus ran
“It’s keepin’ dry no doubt.”
“We’ll all be rooned,” said Hanrahan,
“Before the year is out.”

“The crops are done; ye’ll have your work
To save one bag of grain;
From here way out to Back-o’-Bourke
They’re singin’ out for rain.”

“They’re singin’ out for rain,” he said,
“And all the tanks are dry.”
The congregation scratched its head,
And gazed around the sky.

“There won’t be grass, in any case,
Enough to feed an ass;
There’s not a blade on Casey’s place
As I came down to Mass.”

“If rain don’t come this month,” said Dan,
And cleared his throat to speak,
“We’ll all be rooned,” said Hanrahan,
“If rain don’t come this week.”

A heavy silence seemed to steal
On all at this remark;
And each man squatted on his heel,
And chewed a piece of bark.

“We want an inch of rain, we do,”
O’Neil observed at last;
But Croke maintained we wanted two
To put the danger past.

“If we don’t get three inches, man,
Or four to break this drought,
We’ll all be rooned,” said Hanrahan,
“Before the year is out.”

In God's good time down came the rain;
And all the afternoon
On iron roof and window-pane
It drummed a homely tune.

And through the night it pattered still,
And lightsome, gladsome elves
On dripping spout and window-sill
Kept talking to themselves.

It pelted, pelted all day long,
A-singing at its work,
Till every heart took up the song
Way out to Back-o'-Bourke.

And every creek a banker ran,
And dams filled o'ertop;
"We'll all be rooned," said Hanrahan,
"If this rain doesn't stop."

And stop it did, in God's good time;
And spring came into fold
A mantle o'er the hills sublime
Of green and pink and gold.

And days went by on dancing feet,
With harvest hopes immense,
And laughing eyes beheld the wheat
Nid-nodding o'er the fence.

And, oh, the smiles on every face,
As happy lad and lass
Through grass knee deep on Casey's place
Went riding down to Mass.

While round the church in clothes genteel
Discoursed the men of mark,
And each man squatted on his heel,
And chewed his piece of bark.

"There'll be bush-fires for sure, me man,
There will, without a doubt;
We'll all be rooned," said Hanrahan,
"Before the year is out."
