



# KelticDead Music

## Stories, Tunes and Songs in the Traditions of our Celtic Dead

To the Four Ayrts to Guide Us, and  
For the Four Winds to Get Us There!

The mission of the **KelticDead Music** initiative is to find tunes and songs from around the world that have Celtic, Folk, World, Americana, and Seafaring origins, and arrange them into simple sheet music formats for folk musicians to use and share. In addition, the KDM initiative provides the in-depth stories with possible lyrics that follow the video-based, **KDM Broadside**s for a more complete music-education experience.



## KelticDead Music Broadside

*All the selections and sheet music content provided in the **KelticDead Music** initiative are from traditional, made-public, made-public with credits, or cited credits where applicable. This material content is the personal interpretations of the subject and provided by **Patrick O-Shaun Young, KelticDead Music**.*

## Black Velvet Band

In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Queen Elizabeth the 1<sup>st</sup>, sought to continue the vision of Henry VIII to establish England as a Global Empire, but at that time England was a fragmented country due to the Irish Rebellions from the west, and there were hints of war with France and Spain from Europe who also sought “Globalism.” There were also several attempts from the rebels in the north, in Scotland, to re-establish the Church of Rome in the place of the Protestant Church of England to which Elizabeth presided.



Regardless of what one thinks of Queen Elizabeth, she had to be ruthless in putting down the rebellions within her domains. The rebellions continued into the 1700s, and Parliament established “Penal Laws,” to continue to subjugate the Irish and Scots population into near “slave” status conditions. These Penal Laws were so severe that many of the Irish and Scots lost their lands, culture, language, and many were placed into prisons for the slightest infractions.

By the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, England had established colonies around the world, such as America, India, Africa, Australia, and Asia. It was common practice to transport prisoners to these colonies for hard labor which helped Britain’s globalization plans as well as alleviating overcrowding in England’s prisons.

Made public painting. Queen Elizabeth I (1533 – 1603 A.D.)

## Black Velvet Band

Transportation of convicts to the colonies was viewed by the English Parliament as a form of the “King’s mercy,” in lieu of execution, and it was marketed as a way for the chosen convicted felons to rehabilitate and start a new life in the colonies. In 1615, in the reign of James I, a committee of the council had the power to choose which prisoners deserved a pardon from death and those eligible for transportation.

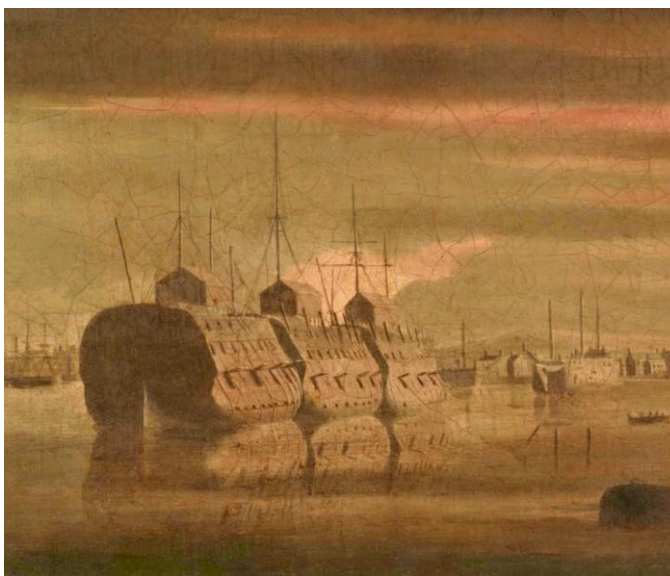
During the Commonwealth period, Oliver Cromwell, overcame any objection to subjugating Christians into slavery or selling them into foreign parts, especially with military and other prisoners deemed to be deplorable in civil society to include the clergy. In the 1600s until the American revolution of 1776 Britain sent many criminals to American destinations primarily in the West Indies and into some American colonies on the mainland.

Transportation to the American colonies was frequently carried out at the expense of the convicts or by the shipowners. The Transportation Act of 1717 allowed the courts to sentence convicts to seven years transportation, and it also promulgated the buying and selling of “slaves” to get a return for profit which meant there would be no return. The number of Irish and Scots convicts sent to America was not verified, but estimated to be anywhere from 50,000 to 120,000 men, women, ... and children.



Convicted Prisoners for transportation from Plymouth, 1792.

The American Revolution brought a halt to transporting prisoners to America, and Britain’s prisons became overcrowded once again. Dilapidated ships moored in various ports were pressed into service as floating gaols, (aka “hulks”). Transportation of prisoners was then diverted to Cape Coast Castle (modern Ghana) and Goree (Senegal) in West Africa. The authorities also turned their attention to transporting prisoners to New South Wales (modern day Australia.)



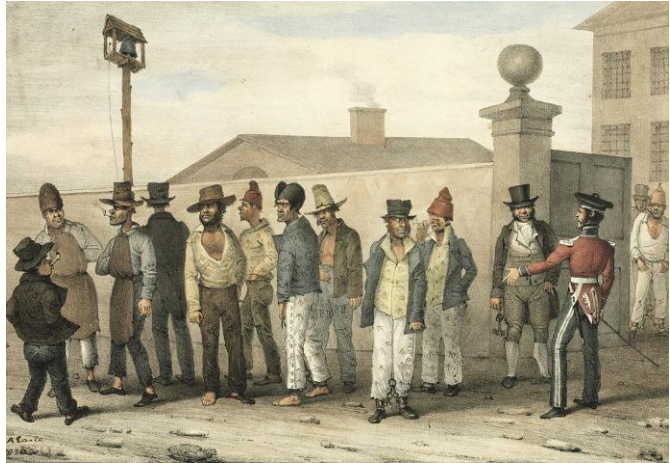
Painting of dilapidated ships (“Hulks”) on the River Thames in 1814.

In 1787, the First Fleet, a group of convict ships departed England to establish the first colonial settlement in Australia, as a penal colony. The fleet arrived at Botany Bay, Sydney on 18 January 1788, and then moved to Sydney Cove (modern day Circular Quay) to establish the first permanent European settlement in Australia.

Convicts were forced to work in the Australian frontier, and there were violent breakouts between the indigenous Australians and the “colonists.”

## Black Velvet Band

In 1803, another penal colony was established in Van Diemen's Land (modern-day Tasmania). The penal servitude system continued there and in other parts of the world into the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The Potato Blight (an **Gorta Mór** 1845-1847) only exacerbated the overcrowding problems in the British prisons when millions of people crowded into British seaports such as Liverpool to escape starvation and death.



A group of Transported Prisoners to Van Diemen's Land in 1830.

Convicts were generally treated harshly, forced to work against their will and doing hard physical labor in dangerous jobs. In some cases, they were cuffed and chained in work gangs. Seven years of "penal servitude" was a common practice, and they were applied to trivial crimes, such as petty theft, or even stealing a loaf of bread to feed a hungry family.



An etching of a prison ship (The Neptune) that transported prisoners to the colonies.

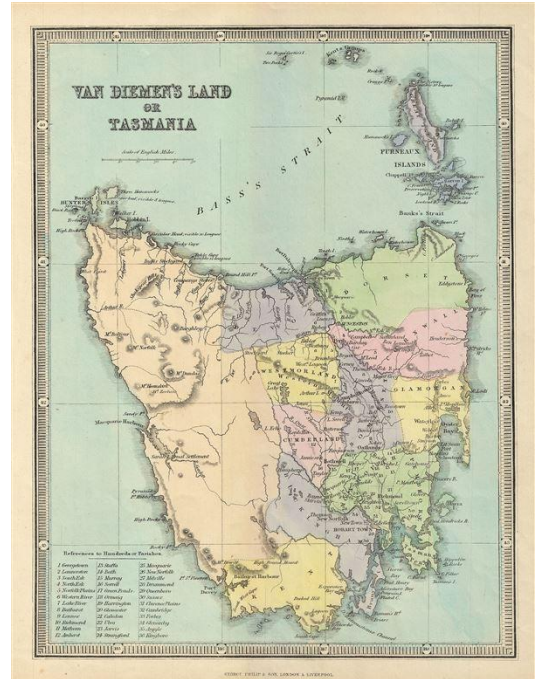
Prison ships had segregated sections designed to classify types of criminals being transported depending upon the severity of the crime. First time offenders were assigned in the "Star Class." Criminals with less serious convictions were placed into the "Intermediate Class," and habitual offenders were placed into the "Recidivist Class."



## Black Velvet Band

The penal colonies in Australia and on Van Diemens Land between 1788 and 1868 were usually picked for these ballads as historical examples of “convict labor.” In this period of time thousands of convicts were transported there as “laborers,” many of whom received harsh sentences for minor misdemeanors in both Britain and Ireland.

Reforms to the penial servitude system began in 1885, and 75% of all prison inmates were involved in some sort of productive endeavor, mostly in private contract and leasing systems. By 1935 the portion of prisoners had fallen to 44%, and almost all prisoners (90%) worked in state-run programs rather than for private contractors.



Map of Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) circa 1850s.

With this historical backdrop, one gets a better understanding of the lyrics for this seafaring/folk ballad. See the YouTube link of the KDM Broadside on the next page.

**While in the town they call Belfast  
Apprentice to trade I was bound.  
And many the hours of happiness  
Did I spend in that neat little town.  
'Till a sad misfortune came o'er me  
Which caused me  
                to stray from the land,  
Far away from me friends and relations  
Betrayed by a black velvet band.**

## Chorus

Her eyes they shone like the diamonds,  
You'd think she was the queen of the land  
And her hair flung o'er her shoulder  
Tied up with a black velvet band.

As I was strolling one evening  
Not meaning to go very far  
When I met with this pretty fair maiden  
Who was selling her trade in a bar.  
A gold watch she took from a customer  
And slipped it right into my hand  
Then the law came and put me in prison  
Bad luck with that black velvet band.

## Chorus

Next morning before judge and jury  
For the trial I had to appear.  
And the judge he says

“Now look here me lad,  
Your case has proven quite clear.  
And seven long years is your sentence.  
You’re going to Van Damein’s Land.  
Far away from your friends and relations,  
To follow her black velvet band.

## Chorus

Her eyes they shone like the diamonds,  
You'd think she was the queen of the land  
And her hair flung o'er her shoulder  
Tied up with a black velvet band.

**So come all you jolly young fellows  
This warning be taken from me,  
Whenever you're on the liquor me lads,  
Beware of them pretty colleens.  
For they'll fill you with liquor and porter  
'Til you are unable to stand,  
And the very next thing  
that you'll know me lads,  
You've landed in Van Diemens Land.**

## Chorus

## Black Velvet Band

The “Transportation system” was widely known even into the early 1900s. Songs like the “Black Velvet Band” spread across the world and were modified by differing cultures. For example, in Australia and Tasmania, the song was known as the “**Hat with the Velvet Band**,” and in America the song was known as the “**Girl in the Blue Velvet Band**.” In Ireland the song was known as the “**Black Ribbon Band**,” and while it used the same story it was set in Tralee rather than in Belfast.

### Black Velvet Band

Arrangement by KelticDead Music  
♩ = 90

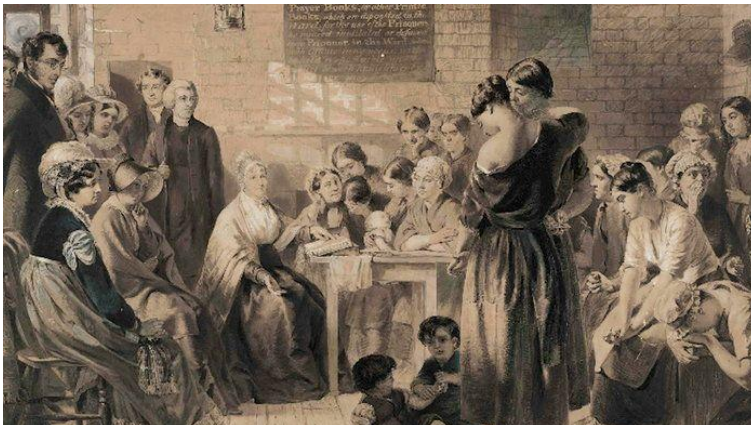
Traditional, Seafaring



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRKiMfMjzbU&t=45s>

The penal servitude system in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries were severe and termed as the “Bloody Code.” A large number of offences were punishable by execution (usually by hanging) which limited the choice of sentencing by the judges for the convicted criminals, no matter how minor.

The penal servitude system within Britain did not entirely disappear until 1958, and it officially ended in 1998. In 2015 it was estimated that 20% of the Australian population had convict ancestry. An estimated 30% of the Australian population (around 7 million) were of Irish descent which is the largest percentage of Irish outside of Ireland itself. This is due, in part, to the conditions imposed by the Penal Laws upon that group of people starting in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, and partially due to the historical convict transportation system in order to promote Britain’s globalization efforts.



An etching of convict women (and children) sent to Australia and Van Diemen’s Land, circa 1850s.



**Shaun,  
That KelticDead Guy  
Patrick O-Shaun Young**

<https://KelticDeadMusic.org>