

Christina's
Matilda



Edel Wignell Elizabeth Botté

Who was Christina Macpherson?
Most people say, 'I've never heard
of her.'



Portrait of Christina Macpherson
ca. 1900. National Library of
Australia, MS 9065, Item 5.

They know that Andrew
Barton ('Banjo') Paterson
wrote the words of Australia's
most popular song, 'Waltzing
Matilda'.

Banjo Paterson created the lyrics at the home of Christina
Macpherson's brother, and she provided the tune, so why
isn't she famous too?

Who was Banjo Paterson?
Most people say, 'A famous
Australian poet.'



Portrait of AB Paterson ca. 1890.
National Library of Australia,
nla.pic-an22199070.

Christina was the ninth child in a wealthy pastoralist family
of eleven children. The Macphersons came to Victoria from
Scotland in 1854 and took up land near Geelong, then in
north-eastern Victoria and New South Wales and, later, in
Queensland.

When Christina was born, her family lived in a
large house in Melbourne. Her father, Ewan
Macpherson, owned
a grazing property,
Peechelbar, on
the Ovens River,
20 miles (32
kilometres) south
of Wangaratta
in north-eastern
Victoria.

Christina became
famous as a baby,
ten months old,
when some members
of her family had
an encounter at
Peechelbar with a
bushranger, Daniel
Morgan.



Christina at around the age of 4.
Photo from the Macpherson Archive,
courtesy of Diana Baillieu.

In the early 1860s, Daniel Morgan, a violent bushranger (nicknamed 'Mad Morgan' and 'Morgan the Murderer'), operated for three years in the Riverina district of New South Wales. He became notorious for shooting unarmed and sleeping men and for escaping from the police. Once he held up a coach, and made a squatter dance for his employees and several swagmen.

Dan Morgan said he would shoot any farmer who would not give rations to swagmen. They idolised him, and would never tell the police where he was hiding. In 1864, the reward for his capture was £1000.

In April 1865, he crossed the Murray River and, for four days, mounted on a splendid racing mare, terrorised the district. He set fire to granaries, shot cattle, held up carriers on the Melbourne road and robbed travellers. Soon everyone knew that Morgan had arrived, and all were armed and ready.



WANTED

Daniel 'Mad' Morgan



REWARD £1000

During the evening of Saturday, 8 April 1865, intending to steal a thoroughbred horse, Dan Morgan rode up to Peechelbar and bailed up the Macpherson household. He ordered the family to gather immediately in the homestead dining room.

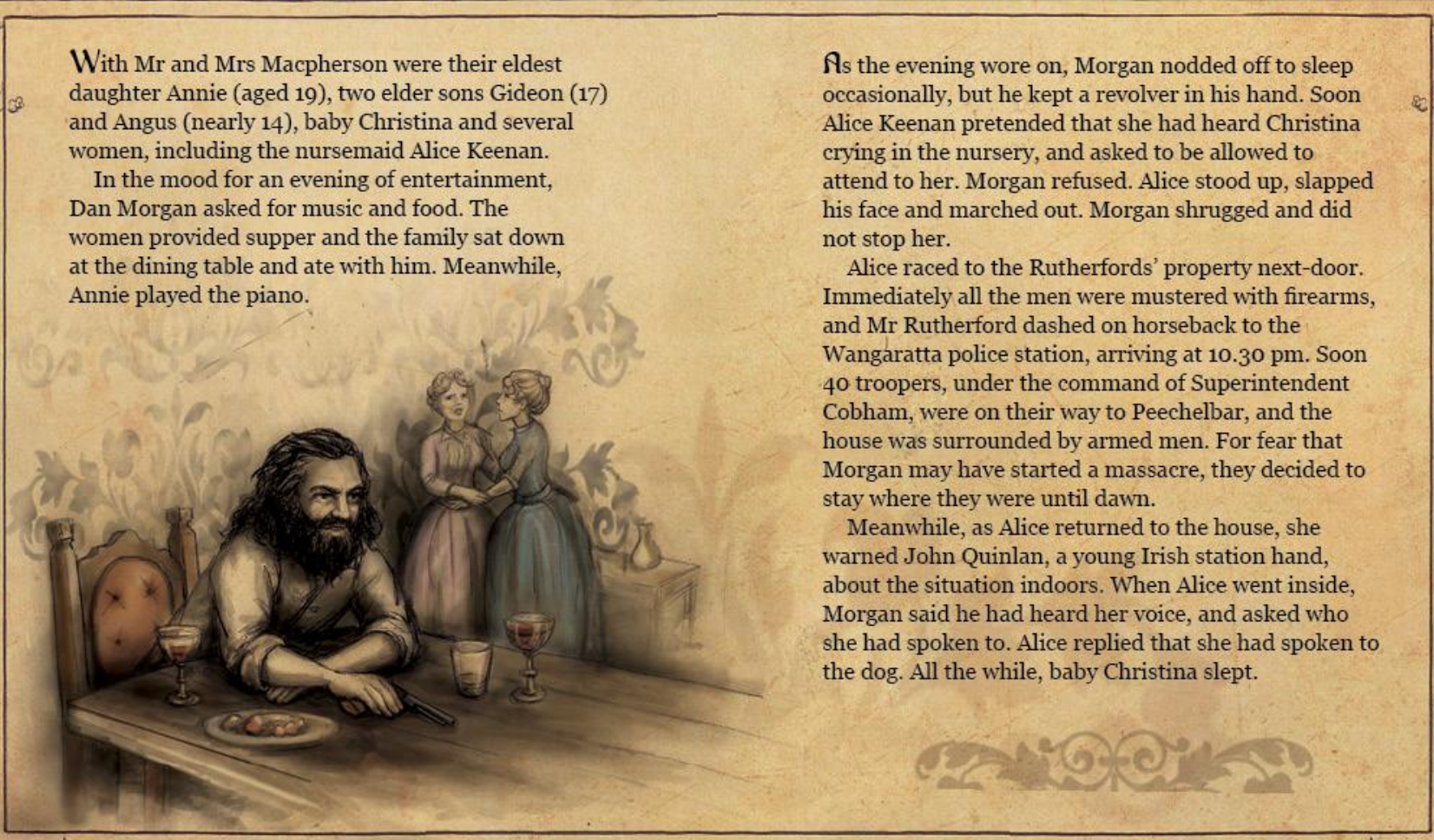
With Mr and Mrs Macpherson were their eldest daughter Annie (aged 19), two elder sons Gideon (17) and Angus (nearly 14), baby Christina and several women, including the nursemaid Alice Keenan.

In the mood for an evening of entertainment, Dan Morgan asked for music and food. The women provided supper and the family sat down at the dining table and ate with him. Meanwhile, Annie played the piano.

As the evening wore on, Morgan nodded off to sleep occasionally, but he kept a revolver in his hand. Soon Alice Keenan pretended that she had heard Christina crying in the nursery, and asked to be allowed to attend to her. Morgan refused. Alice stood up, slapped his face and marched out. Morgan shrugged and did not stop her.

Alice raced to the Rutherfords' property next-door. Immediately all the men were mustered with firearms, and Mr Rutherford dashed on horseback to the Wangaratta police station, arriving at 10.30 pm. Soon 40 troopers, under the command of Superintendent Cobham, were on their way to Peechelbar, and the house was surrounded by armed men. For fear that Morgan may have started a massacre, they decided to stay where they were until dawn.

Meanwhile, as Alice returned to the house, she warned John Quinlan, a young Irish station hand, about the situation indoors. When Alice went inside, Morgan said he had heard her voice, and asked who she had spoken to. Alice replied that she had spoken to the dog. All the while, baby Christina slept.



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