The Headless Horror of Berrima

One night after drinking in the Surveyor General Inn

A man and woman stumbled out, full of brandy, full of gin

They started getting ‘romantic’ on the nearby village green

He thought ‘she was a looker’

she didn’t care where he had been

And though he didn’t know it

Although he couldn’t tell

She was the ‘Horror of Berrima’

And she had come straight from hell

They went to the nearby common

and as they lay upon the grass

the woman changed beneath him into a fiend in wedding white

She was covered in blood, a real horror, such a terrible sight

And as she rose, the man screamed out in terror at what did stand

The woman before him had no head – she carried it in her hand

‘He he,’ she cried in a fiendish tone

as he clung to the grass in fear

“My name is Lucretia Dunkley and I used to live around here

At the jail in fact

But prior to that,

Near Gunning, and way before

I was a dairymaid in Wales

Though some thought I was a whore

I came out on the Pyramus in 1832

Transported here for life, forsook

for burglary, and my life – well that is what they took

“At Parramatta I was assigned

to Henry Dunkley of Gunning,

he took me back there as his wife

-he told me his farm was ‘stunning’

But in truth it was a God-forsaken place

With rats as big as sheep

I worked my fingers to the bone, each day

For me keep,

And in those cold and miserable climes

he took me roughly to his bed

at night, too many times.

“A sad, lonely existence, for ten years I endured

his whore, his wife, his lucky charm

Until one day, a handsome young man

came to Henry’s farm

His name was Martin Beech

and it was love at first sight.

He picked wildflowers from the hills

and brought them to me at night

“And it wasn’t long into our song

That I was sneaking out to meet him

and then one night he said to me:

He said to me as his friend,

‘it’s no good,

I’ll not share thee with that man.

He will meet a sticky end.’

“And when Henry returned from the Goulburn sales

Full of rum, and full of ales

Martin was ready with an axe

I lured Henry into his bed

And soon he had me on me back

And when he was on top

Martin came out with that axe

And gave Henry the chop

“Down the axe came on Henry’s head

And down it came again

The blood it flew –

I tell you true

it painted the walls bright red

And down it came one last time

and there was a loud CRACK

to the back

of Henry’s head,

he was dead

all limp, and heavy as lead

“We dragged him out to the pigs

to finish our nasty work

our murderous, bloody deed

And indeed, they was hungry, them swine

And they had a damn good feed

With all their snorting and their squealing

They thought it was Christmas time.

But them clever pigs

them clever pigs

they didn’t finish him off

Those nasty little rotters,

Cos Pigs is smart

Right down to their trotters,

They left some bones in their stye

To be found another day

Meanwhile, I gathered up the rest in a sack

and threw them into the dam

“And we carried on, Martin and me

Drinking and dancing and cavorting ‘til 3

He became my lord and master

But he drank rum, and he grew lazy

the walls he did not replaster

he got bolder, and against my nous

moved himself into the house

“I said: ‘what will folk say,

when after Henry they enquire?’

He said ‘those stupid Gunning fools

Wouldn’t know if their arses were on fire.

‘We’ll tell them he’s gone, we know not where,

To the goldfields, maybe, or the city

And if they get nosy, or they seek more facts

Then I’ll answer their questions with my axe.’

“But found out we was, by a nosy trap

From Gunning, who came out on a whim

For Henry had not been seen for days

And that was quite unlike him

The trooper scratched at the wall and found

Blood stains under the whitewash

And before Martin could get his axe

The trooper hit him on the cosh

and chained him.

“More troopers came out to the farm

and found blood on the wall

And bones in the stye

And blood in the hall

And they found the bag of bones

That I’d thrown into the dam

And so, I confessed

I said to them: “To hell, I know I’m damned”

“And to Berrima we was brought

In chains they dragged us before the court

They found us guilty of murder

Though Martin took the blame

‘Hang me,” he said unto to the judge

“I’m the one who killed Henry, let Lucretia go.”

But the jury wouldn’t have it,

they sent us both to hell, below.

“And on the day they hanged me

townsfolk came out for the sport

but the hangman, he was full of drink

he had made the rope too short

So as the trapdoor opened

and my body dropped below

My head was torn off at the neck

and blood spurted out on all, below

“So that’s why I carry it with me,

But to get my sweet revenge

I appear as a delight

to young men at night

in the pub, when they get too randy

and I lure them our here to their deaths

when they’ve had too much brandy.”

At that the horror snatched up an axe

And swung it at him wildly

He stepped back, and tripped

And cried out: ‘oh feck!’

and she brought the axe down

With a ‘thwack, thwack, thwack’

And removed the man’s head from his neck

And now among travellers, heading south

I have heard it said

‘You best not go through Berrima at night

If you want to keep your head.

For the Headless Horror she is about

And she’ll take thee to thy doom

You’d best move on to Marulan

To get yourself a room.’