

**FRANK THE POET: A CONVICT'S TOUR TO HELL
ABC RADIO NATIONAL HINDSIGHT – 5 AUGUST 2012**

SFX WIND AND CLANKING CHAINS

SFX LASH

VOICE OF FRANK One
 Two
 Tree
 Four
 Five

My name is Francis MacNamara
A native of Cashel, County Tipperary
Sworn to be a tyrant's foe
And while I'll live I'll crow

I'll crow, I'll crow

MARK GREGORY For three long years I was beastly treated
 And heavy irons on my legs I wore
 My back from flogging ...

MAREE DELOFSKI OK so that man singing, that's my partner – Mark Gregory – he's a
 musician, a folklorist, and some might say an obsessive, we'll get to that in
 a minute, and he's singing that song he's singing, Moreton Bay, was written
 by or maybe written by another man Frank the Poet, who really is the object
 of his obsession –

MG ... places of New South Wales
 Like the Egyptians ...

MD To be truthful it's just driven me crazy for years his interest in him. I've had
 a bit of an aversion to some forms of folk music over the years because of
 their ter-rum, ter-rum, ter-rum and predictability, but you got to be careful
 really because a song like Moreton Bay ... I realised that even though I've
 heard it hundred's of times I haven't really listened to it, and when you
 listen to it, it opens up a whole new world

MG ...from bondage we are liberated
 Our former sufferings will fade from mind ...

MD I still say you're an obsessive, I don't care ... you are obsessed by Frank
 the Poet

MG Well what's obsessive? The Australian convict story is incredibly
 interesting. Frank the Poet tells that story, from a convict's point of view.
 It's often hidden, he tells it in verse. That's incredibly attractive.

VOF Growing weary from compulsive toil
Beneath the noontide sun
While drops of sweat bedew the soil
My task remains undone.
I'm flogged for wilful negligence
Or the tyrants call it so
Ah what doleful recompense
For labouring with the hoe.

MD These are really great lines – and they really do, they embody a convict's point of view, I can see that – but you just dismiss the fact, maybe he writes it or maybe he doesn't write it. It seems that with Frank you can say oh he might have done this or he might have done that, nobody seems to be able to pin him down, so that's what I don't understand.

MG He is very hard to pin down, but there are plenty of people who recognise what he wrote as being tremendously important in terms of Australian literature.

MD: Yeah, like who?

MG Les Murray for instance.

VOF Les the poet.

LM I would have got it from Meredith's biography and the general idea that was floating around still that communists had been looking for a folk culture in Australia. In general they found fairly slim pickings, they were there but not a big thing ...but there was one big thing. There was this wonderful piece of treasure called Frank the Poet, who gives us the only poetic view of that system, the convict system ... It's a genial and humorous vision but nonetheless a hard vision of what really happened. And the Hell that convictism was.

The first metropolis in Australia is not Melbourne or Sydney. It's Hell. Although Frank goes through there on a conducted by the Devil being shown all his old enemies, you know, the commandants and the floggers and the officers and so on, all by name and they're nearly all still alive when he wrote about them.

VOF A Convict's Tour to Hell
Composed and written October 23 Anno 1839
A Poem by Francis MacNamara

You Prisoners all of New South Wales
Who frequent watch houses and gaols
A story to you I'll tell

'Tis of a convict's tour to hell.

- LM It's a wonderful piece of performance poetry. You wonder how many times it got performed too. A lot of people would have committed it to memory and muttered it to each other around where the officers weren't looking.
- VOF Whose valour had for years been tried
On the Highway before he died
At length he fell to death a prey
To him it proved a happy day.
- LM There's something a little bit deeper and tougher in it, which you find at the heart of MacNamara you're beginning to look at a real alternative tradition, which doesn't get echoed much in modern Australian verse. They carry on about it, but they mostly borrowed it from America
- BOB HODGE Well you can't understand Australian culture if, in a sense, you only listen to the warders, you don't listen to the prisoners. Australia was made by the prisoners more than the warders.
- LM I reckon it ought to be that if you are teaching Australian literature, it ought to stand at the beginning, this is, of literature in English in Australia, the other opening is to start with Aboriginal verse, but then that has probably got to be done by Aborigines. But starting with verse in English it ought to start with Frank.
- VOF Downwards he bent his course I'm told
Like one destined for Satan's fold
- LM I do sometimes feel Frank looking over me shoulder.
And I wouldn't want to let him down, you know. Always remember he's another dimension in our history and he's a validation of the individual as his own political party. I mean I've never belonged to any political party. A party of one that's me.
- VOF Stranger I say from whence art thou
And my own name, pray tell me now,
Kind sir I come from Sydney gaol
My name I don't mean to conceal
And since you seem anxious to know it
On earth I was called Frank the Poet
- MUSIC
- BH Frank the Poet is the real deal. Frank the Poet is a precious trace from the past that we need to attend to and then attend to and attend to...
- VOF ... and attend to, and attend to and attend to.

VOF Frank The Snatch and Grabber
READING FROM
KILKENNY JOURNAL The Kilkenny Journal 18 January 1832

Of the five persons sentenced to be transported, not one of them was a native of Kilkenny; they were all strangers...

VOF Stranger I say from whence art thou?

KILKENNY JOURNAL
READING CONTINUES To be transported for seven years: Francis MacNamara, a real Corkonian, for breaking the shop window of Mr. John McDonnell, and stealing there from a piece of worsted plaid

VOF A PIECE OF WORSTED PLAID!

JOURNAL READING The cross examination of two witnesses by this prisoner afforded much amusement to the court; his peculiar accent, cutting remarks and mode of Delivery, were both quaint and forcible.

On a verdict of guilty being returned, sentence was immediately passed, and he was ordered from the dock. Prior to his leaving it, he flourished his hand, and with a cheerful and animated countenance, said:

VOF I dread not the dangers by land or by sea
That I'll meet on my voyage to Botany Bay;
My labours are over, my vocation is past
And 'tis there I'll rest easy and happy at last.

PROF BOB REECE And there I'll rest happy contented at last
Well, it was interesting because it sounded as if he'd committed the offence in order to be transported, which wasn't all that uncommon in the late 1820s and early 1830s, we have other documented cases of precisely the same thing where convicts were committing crimes to be transported – sometimes to be reunited with their kin. But it was an expression of hard times, bad harvests, bad weather conditions in Ireland, and England, in the late 20s and early 30s that led people to do this. To the extent that Dublin Castle, that is the Government of the day, commissioned Bishop Ullathorne in Sydney to write a pamphlet called 'The Horrors of Transportation' to try to tell convicts that being transported was no picnic.

MUSIC:
Banished Now from My Native Shore
T10 Convict's Tour to Hell Tom West

SFX ROWING – OARS IN WATER

VOF Are you that person? Charon cried
I'll carry you to the other side

Five or six pence I mostly charge
So stranger do not troubled be
For you shall have a passage free

SFX ROWING

COCKATOO
ISLAND

Morning passengers, this is the Woolwich Service stopping at Thames Street Balmain, Birchgrove, Greenwich, Woolwich and Cockatoo Island. If you intended to travel anywhere else this is not your ferry.

MD OK Mark it's a pretty grey, grim kind of day isn't it to be going to a place like Cockatoo Island

MG Yeah.

MD We know that Frank was moored on a ship, the hulk, the Phoenix Hulk, off Cockatoo for two years, which is, I think, incredible

MG And he absconded from that ship and was brought back to it so he'd have seen a bit of Cockatoo

MD And I guess when you were telling me he was actually on Cockatoo in around 1842 is that right? On bushranging charges?

MG That's correct. He was here on the 11th July 1842, according to the records

MD So what do you, you're taking me here today to say something about Frank.

MG Well it's about the kind of hell that convict's endured really, in this kind of penal station

VOICE OF FRANK

Alas cried the poet I've come to dwell
With you and share your fate in Hell
Says Satan that can't be, I'm sure
For I detest and hate the poor
And none shall in my kingdom stand
Except the grandees of the land.

MD He's so elusive, Frank, eh? I love that about him.

MG Yeah well he was anonymous in many ways. I mean that's part of the problem of ascribing material to him. Because the need for anonymity was pretty big in those days. If you put your name to a scurrilous piece of verse, you would get a further sentence.

VOF But Frank, I think you're gone astray
For convicts never come this way.

continuously insolent to authority, people who wouldn't let go of the bone, who would hit back as soon as they saw something which riled them.

SFX LEG IRONS

Banished Now from My Native Shore
T2 Labouring with the Hoe Sean McMahon

MG Maree, you know you have a problem with the predictability of old songs
MD Some old songs
MG Well just have a listen to some young musicians who've discovered Frank.

SONG CONTINUES

JACOB HABNER I had known about Frank the Poet for a couple of years on the off-chance of stumbling across his stuff, and when we were thinking about a theme for this compilation album, the works of Frank the Poet were the perfect fit for what we were trying to do.

In talking to a lot of artists and getting musicians interested in the project, a lot of people have come back to us and said well this is kind of like Australia's blues tradition, where we've got these convicts refer to themselves as slaves, coming out to Australia against their will. One of the beautiful things about Francis MacNamara, it's that type of history that isn't just a string of facts, you know it's partly fact, it's partly oral history, it's sort of partly history and partly mystery is what I've been saying to a lot of people, that we've got a lot of skerricks of information about him but then we have to try and rebuild the rest of his life to try and understand the man that he was.

One of the tenets of his personality that I often consider is how eccentric and how belligerent he must have been, you know, we're talking about a guy who punished consistently, he was never shut up and he almost never got the message.

SFX LEG IRONS

VOF This place was made for priests and popes
'Tis a world of our invention
But friend, I've not the least intention
To admit such a foolish elf
Who scarce knows how to bless himself
Quoth Frank were you mad or insane
When first you made this world of pain?

BR What we know about Frank, ironically, is mostly from the punishment record kept by the authorities in Sydney, Newcastle and later of course Hobart and Port Arthur, where he was incarcerated at different times.

SFX WHIPPING
CONVICT RECORDS

50 lashes, absconding from duty
One month treadwheel, disgraceful conduct
Twelve months irons, absconding two times
23 lashes, having a stolen shirt
75 lashes, insubordinate conduct
3 days solitary, absent from duty
36 lashes, destroying a government cart
100 lashes, obscene language
7 days solitary, disobeying orders
36 lashes, refusing to work

VOF 266
267
268
269

VOF And oft times painted with crimson gore

COCKATOO ISLAND
FERRY

MG The Hulk was moored off Cockatoo Island for a while, so he would have known about the island that way.

MD He might have even got off and gone on the island.

MG He may have, yeah, I don't know about that.

READING Report from a convict who spent time on the Phoenix Hulk
In Sydney Harbour in 1836.

The men of the adjoining cell to that in which I and nine others were chained, had been smoking a tobacco pipe one evening, Contrary to the Rules of the Establishment, when the Keeper came to our cell and charged us as the offenders.

He sent for 10 pairs of handcuffs, took our shirts, blankets and clothes away, and manacled each of our hands behind our backs, he reefed the legs which were heavily ironed, to the upper part of the iron stanchions of the cell by means of a bar outside, with the whole weight of our chains and our bodies pressing on our shoulder blades for the night, in a state of perfect nudity.

The Keeper's predecessor, Captain Murray, who had practised similar cruelties, died in a state of mental derangement

MD I'm wondering if Cockatoo Island, does it feature at all in that poem the epic A Convict's Tour of Hell or to Hell?

MG It features through Captain Murray, Captain Murray was the commandant of the Phoenix Hulk. Because the first person he meets in Hell, after he's greeted by Satan is Captain Murray....

MD Well you know what we can do, we can actually bring that poem up on the mobile, so hang on just a minute and I'll do it

VOF Well cried the poet since 'tis so
One thing of you I'd like to know
As I'm at present in no hurry
Have you one here called Captain Murray?

Yes Murray is within this place
Would you said Satan see his face?
May God forbid that I should view him

MD (laughs)

MD So Frank the Poet knew him and in fact there's a little epigram that was attributed to Frank the Poet. He was drunk on the Phoenix Hulk and Captain Murray punished him ten days in the cells, which meant solitary confinement, and Frank made up this little verse in response, asking for clemency:

Captain Murray if you please
Make it hours instead of days

VOF For you know it becomes the Irishman
To drown the shamrock while he can

MUSIC

MG Meredith and Whalan talk about a verse in 'Moreton Bay' about being the worst penal settlement in NSW.

LM And congratulating the Aborigines on killing Commandant Logan
One of their great achievements (laughs)

MG Well there was this exhilaration amongst the convicts.

LM They got Logan

MG That Logan was killed.
And a native black lying there in ambush

VOF Did give this tyrant his mortal stroke

LM Yeah, it might have happened like that. It might have happened as something else altogether, you know, having a crack at an Aborigine with a whip and getting a spear in reply.

MG Yeah, and he'd already upset the local tribes by various ...

LM The Yaggarah people

MG And there were some of them imprisoned in Moreton Bay.

LM Oh they would be.

MUSIC
Banished Now from My Native Shore
T9 Moreton Bay Mia Dyson

VOF Who is that Sir in yonder blaze
Who on fire and brimstone seems to graze?
'Tis Captain Logan of Moreton Bay

MG Now just getting back to that Moreton Bay ballad, one of the theories that John Meredith and Rex Whalan have is that at Port Arthur Frank the Poet was there at the same time as John Kelly, Ned's Dad, and Ned Kelly cites that particular verse his Jerilderie Letter.
LM You can bet that Ned Kelly knew all about Frank the Poet.

MUSIC
Banished Now from My Native Shore
T9 Moreton Bay Mia Dyson

But Moreton Bay you'll find no equal
Norfolk Island or Emu Plains
At Castle Hill and Cursed Toongabie
And old time places in New South Wales

VOF FRANK THE LASHED

SFX LEG IRONS

MD Wow looking over here at the convict museum at Sydney's Hyde Park Barracks. So this is a Cat O' Nine Tails eh?

MG See the little tails, nine of them with knots at the end? Each lash, imagine, done with force would gradually rip the back apart, basically. They called it the stripes, my stripes, because it left these scars for the rest of your life so you had these stripes on your back. There's stories about the blood was so much it was filling their boots, people watching it being sprayed with blood and bits of skin while they were watching this spectacle of punishment.

MD You can really understand that for convicts then, I guess like Frank it was a form of torture. Would you say that?

MG Yes it was a form of torture, in today's world it would certainly be called torture. Well this frame here it's got three legs and MacNamara puts it this way: people were mangled at the triangles of Moreton Bay

SFX FLOGGING

HMS It's a theatrical punishment, convicts in gangs were routinely mustered to watch floggings. A hundred lashes could last an hour. The primary object of a flogging was to make the convict scream. A convict who was game was said to be a pebble, they kept their mouth shut through the whole ordeal. It was very common for the convict to be unconscious by the time the punishment had finished.

SFX RHYTHMIC FLOGGING

VOF 347
348
349

LM I mean a dry account of the convict system would not give you the feel of it the way Frank can and we are lucky that we have him, because there's nothing else in Australian poetry which gives us much of a feel of it

VOF FRANK THE PETITIONER
AND THE SCOURGER DUFFY

MG Another of his petitions about the flogger, Duffy.

LM Oh Duffy the cook!

MG They refused to eat his food, because he's been a flogger.

LM Yeah, now where exactly is Duffy...(consulting book)...

MG Which is a bit like a hunger strike in a way isn't it?

LM Ah, here we are, yeah, A petition from the chain gang at Newcastle to Captain Furlong, the superintendent

NICK HOLLO By being in a very confined space and dark it was sensory deprivation as well. I think the maximum amount was around 28 days.

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MD I saw in some of the information from the island that for insolence you might get 21 days.

NH It depends, it was insolence to who I think, yeah.

SFX METAL DOOR SLAMS

HMS You have convicts who compare flogging with solitary confinement, I mean although solitary confinement was meant to be a more humane punishment, they feared it just as much but for different reasons. One convict said of solitary confinement the brain is the sea of all pain, very dreadful. So it's not just a punishment that was designed to get you to reflect, it was a punishment that was designed to segregate you, to move you off into a classified space. It was thought to be part of a new way of managing working class malcontents.

VOF WORKING CLASS MALCONTENTS

SFX LARGE CHURCH BELL

VOF Just as I spoke a coach and four
Came in full haste to the door
And about six feet of mortal sin
Without leave or licence trudged in
At his arrival three cheers were given
Which rend I'm sure the highest heaven
And all the inhabitants of hell
With one consent rang the Great Bell
Which never was heard to sound or ring
Since Judas sold our heavenly King.
Drums were beating, flags were hoisting
There never was such rejoicing
Dancing singing joy or mirth
In Heaven above or on Earth.
Straight away to Lucifer I went
To know what these rejoicings meant.
Of sense cried Lucifer I'm deprived
Since Governor Darling arrived
With fire and brimstone I've ordained him.

SFX CHURCH BELLS

MD OK. Well such a beautiful church outside here, we're standing outside St James and there's a etched into the sandstone is this plaque which says: In memory of Francis Greenaway, architect of this church and of the artisans

and labourers who erected it...so it doesn't say anything about convicts though.

MG No it doesn't say anything about convicts but it's entirely convict built, convict designed, convict built, and it's the most beautiful church in Sydney and, I want to take you inside because there's a there's a plaque there that connects this church to Francis MacNamara, Frank the Poet.

FX DOOR OPENS...LIGHT F/STEPS

MD OK so what's this then? It's amazing, actually amazing, the head of a man on another big marble plaque. He looks so Roman.

MG (whispering) It's Robert Wardell, killed in 1834 by a guy called John Jenkins, a bushranger. The trial of Jenkins was absolutely overflowing with the dignitaries of Sydney, because Wardell looked like he was in line to become the Attorney General of New South Wales. And what's interesting about Wardell, he's one of the many names that Frank the Poet put into A Convict's Tour to Hell

VOF Hark do you hear that dreadful yelling
It comes from Doctor Wardell's dwelling

MD And what about Jenkins?

MG Jenkins gets in there too. Which is even more extraordinary

MD They're both in there?

MG They're both in the same poem.

MD And I can only guess what Frank has done with them. Where he's put Wardell and where he's put Jenkins.

VOF Says Peter, where's your certificate?
Pray who in Heaven do you know?
Well I know Brave Donohue
Young Troy and Jenkins too.

MG: But what's interesting about the trial, and the report of the trial it really focuses on the killer Jenkins, and you learn a lot about Jenkins' attitude to the court. There's nothing retiring about him, he just says it as he finds it.

READER I acknowledge I shot the doctor, but it wasn't for gain, it was for the sake of my fellow prisoners because he was a tyrant, and I have one thing to recommend to you as a friend. If any of you take to the bush, shoot every tyrant you come across, and there are several now in this yard who ought to be so served.

SFX GALLOPING HORSES

MUSIC

Banished from my native Shore
T11 The Ballad of Martin Cash
Cal Williams Jr

VOF FRANK THE BUSHRANGER

HMS Remember how in the poem Frank slips into Hell, it's because he's shot on the roads as a bushranger

READING The Sydney Gazette 2nd June 1842.

About 10 o'clock on the night of the 30th ultimo, Sergeant Michael Doyle and two troopers fell in with a party of five bushrangers at the foot of Razorback, and succeeded in apprehending them. They are now safely lodged in gaol at Campbelltown. Their names are: Francis McNamara, John Jones, Edward Allen, William Thompson ...

HMS A bushranger in official speak is the sort of ultimate wicked act, to take up arms against the state, but you know in the poem it's turned into a thing which will send you straight to Heaven

VOF FRANK THE PREACHER

MD I really like this church because its got a certain kind of plain elegance about it and all the beautiful dark wood.

MG And we've got this magnificent pulpit in front of us, you can only guess what Frank the Poet might have done, given the chance to preach from there.

MD Don't tell me I can imagine.

MG Well he was known as a preacher, in a number of cases he took the part of a missing parson or a missing priest and gave the service, and the convicts and also sometimes the soldiers who were guarding them were so intrigued by his preaching that they wanted to know more about it, where did he get his ideas from. Frank was a biblical scholar really, when you read some of his poetry he knew a lot about the Bible.

MD I didn't get a sense from you before though that he was religious.

MG I think he was religious, and I suppose if you looked at A Convicts Tour to Hell, you'd have to say that it's full of biblical references.

HMS We used to think that convicts had very little sense of God, Heaven and Hell, because 19th century commentators on working class culture in general but particularly the transported said that they were godless, and they

belonged to a lumpen proletariat that believed in little more than honour amongst thieves. However in more recent years we've looked at the descriptions of prisoners. About one in five male convicts and one in six female convicts were tattooed. So after family initials religious iconography is the most common thing found on convict bodies. Many of them are tattooed with images of Christ on the cross. Some of them even have verses from scripture, like 'thou shalt not steal', actually inscribed on their bodies. The more that we actually look at these the more there seems to be a sense that convicts identified with characters in the Bible who were victims. And this in some ways shouldn't be surprising at all because its exactly the same kind of trick that's used by slaves in the New World. It was very easy for slave to identify with the children of Israel, because they'd been forced into slavery, in a foreign land. And I think that there's a similar sense with convicts – that they're flogged, that they go through all of these punishments – makes it quite easy for them to identify with the sufferings of Christ. And, you know, after all Christ crucified next to two thieves.

SFX CONVICT CHAINS ON ROAD GANG/ SFX OF PICKS AND SHOVELS

VOF FRANK THE WORKER

LM He's bound up with the history of coal mining and Newcastle and all that too – the beginnings of Australian industry.
He's got a couple of poems about – one he was working as a shepherd up at Peel River towards where Tamworth now is – sleeping in a box at night to keep the dingoes from eating him.

VOF FRANK THE SHEPHERD

LM And then he gets orders to report to Newcastle to work underground. Because they worked stripped naked in these sweaty dangerous holes – breathing dust – it was very dangerous set of working conditions. And he realised he's not gonna do it, this is where he jacks up, and he writes this poem – I quote from it, it doesn't sound like an Australian, Irish Australian kind of protest poem.

For the Company underground Francis MacNamara of Newcastle to J, Crosdale Esq., greeting

When Christ from Heaven comes down straightway
All His Father's laws to expound
MacNamara shall work that day
For the company underground

When the man in the moon to Moreton Bay
Is sent in shackles bound,

MUSIC

Banished from my native Shore
T14 For the Company Underground
Hat Fitz and Cara Robinson

LM MacNamara shall work that day
For the company underground

Now that's what you get in Gaelic poetry, in Irish poetry. It's very much as if it's a translation from Irish

MG It's interesting because it's a petition.

LM Yeah, oh that one's not a petition that's the one where he's refusing.

MG OK.

LM The petition comes from the A.A. Company's flocks at Peels River On Behalf of the Irish Bard.

MG There's something interesting about Frank's petitions – they're in verse.

LM They're in verse – and these are supposed to be spoken by the sheep that he's looking after up at Peels River.

MG Which is like a lovely bit of insolence in a way, to send a petition from your flock of sheep

SFX SHEEP RUNNING

LM Absolutely – if they'd treated the convicts as well as they treated their sheep they'd have been very good fellas.

LM By Permission of the Great Esquire Hall
Being assembled here this day
Unanimously bleating all
For him that's far away

Our noble sires in the rich vales of Germany long sported
But alas we to New South Wales
By the Company were imported

We were borne across the main
From Holland and from Russia
Some from Saxony, more from Spain
France, Switzerland and Prussia

We the prime of the Company's stock
Fat wethers, rams and ewes

None excepted, all the flock
Peel for the Poet's woes.
Of the has charmed with his notes
The Plains of fair Killala
To him we owe our fleecy coats
Our flesh, our hides our tallow

He ever proved our constant friend
'Tis plain from our contrition
In his behalf therefore we send
The following petition

They tried to get Crosdale to let him off this assignment to being effectively a slave in a coal mine. The whole irony of it is that the sheep speak up on Frank's behalf.

MG But the other thing is this is kind of industrial poetry in the sense that it's talking about working conditions and refusal to do work which is particularly dangerous

LM Our cries from the hills shall resound to the extremes of the poles
If our friend goes underground at Newcastle to wheel coals
Why should the poet be sent down to toil in a coal pit
Such service best suits a clown but not a man of wit

SFX HYDE PARK BARRACKS LEG IRONS

MD If you think of the treadmill at the gym usually I've only ever seen one person on it ...but this little miniature they've designed to represent it has got 1, 2, 3 there's 5 blokes this side and 5 blokes that side so that's 10 blokes standing side by side, and the point would be that they wouldn't be able to get off it. So it says here that the larger treadmill was worked by 36 prisoners at a time, with 18 on each side, I mean it must have been huge.

MG They had an intention of getting as much labour out of convicts as possible. And they thought, well if they spend all day grinding corn by walking on this rotating kind of mill they would get their pen'orth out of them so to speak and they could do a thousand kilograms a day. In Sydney there were two treadmills at Carter's Barracks which is where now Central Railway is and Frank spent time on treadmills there. He also was flogged for refusing to go on the treadmill.

VOF 411
412
413
414
415

VOF Isaiah go with him to Job

And put on him a scarlet robe
St Paul go to the flock straightaway
And kill the fatted calf today
And go tell Abraham and Abel
In haste now to prepare the table
For we shall have a grand repast
Since Frank the poet has come at last.

MG There's a lot of evidence that he's coming out of a personal crisis this is with A Convict's Tout to Hell and those three verse petitions.

LM I mean he could have gone into a depression and written a kind of poem of revenge, but instead he maintains his equanimity and his self control. He is master of himself and he does it beautifully.

I suspect towards the end of his life he had a different kind of crisis. He was sent to Tassie and I suspect there that they broke his spirit at least for a while. And I think it might have been prison rape, of course he mentions rape in one little poem, you know.

Van Diemen's Land – a land of buggers fare thee well.

VOF Van Diemen's Land a land of buggers fare thee well.

LM Then he comes back to NSW. And he seems to have recovered his equanimity.

MG He followed the gold basically – like a lot of convicts and ex-convicts from Tasmania.

LM Well you would, wouldn't you? Yeah.

SFX RUNNING WATER

VOF FRANK THE GOLD MINER

MG Well in 1849 Frank gets his pardon in Tasmania, he's living in Launceston at that time and he takes off, he goes bush – not in Tasmania but he goes bush in Mainland Australia.

MD It's interesting because you told ages ago, years ago, the poet became a gold prospector. The convict became a gold prospector.

MG Yeah well you know there were thousands and thousands of people who became gold prospectors in the 1850s and that's when Frank struck gold.

There's an article in the Sydney Morning Herald in 1853 where he's gold mining in Tambaroora and they call him Frank the Poet. They didn't refer to him as Francis MacNamara, they refer to him as Frank the Poet.

Sort of sneeringly the journalist says at the end of the Herald article that expects Frank is much more useful for his brawn than for his brains.

MD So why would he say that, I don't understand because how old would Frank have been now?

MG He'd have been 42

MD OK so he's 42, how old was he when he arrived in the Colony?

MG He was 21

MD OK it 20 years on, he's obviously got a name, he's got a reputation as a poet. Poets are thinkers. Why would the Herald journalist talk about him like that?

MG Because his poems were so full of blasphemy and so political. So against convictism.

MD So the poet becomes a gold miner...

MG Remember – he was a miner when he left Ireland – according to the ship's record anyway, the prison ship record, Frank was the only miner on that ship.

MD But the interesting thing I want to know is was he successful?

MG Yes, he was successful. He made a lot of money at Hill End.

VOF FRANK THE RICH

MD How do you know?

MG Well, when he dies in 1861 in Mudgee, there's a coroner's report and his friend who'd worked with him at Hill End says Frank made sometimes hundreds of pounds a week, digging gold in Hill End, so this was eight years before he died.

MD So this is the coroner's report, and you would think well that's evidence and supposed to all very truthful and so on. But it sounds to me like, it sounds weird that this guy would be making this much money, but he was living in pretty poor circumstances. He's such a fascinating figure because he comes and he goes; now you see him, now you don't, he's a very mysterious person

MG And that's been the problem in tracking him down. From his poetry you learn that he's Frank the Poet, first. Then he becomes Frank the Poet in the newspapers, and now he turns up with the name Hill

MD What?

VOF FRANK THE HILL

MG Well in the coroner's report, his friend says that he went by another name, Hill.

MD So Frank MacNamara becomes Frank Hill at some point?

MG I think so, yes.

MD Why?

MG Well to disguise, for whatever reason, and there's plenty of reasons that an ex-convict could find for disguising what they once were.

SFX BANJO

READING
VOICE 1 WESTERN POST 31st AUGUST 1861
SUDDEN DEATH

An inquest was held on Friday morning by W. King Esquire at the Fountain of Friendship on the body of FRANCIS MCNAMARA

VOICE 2 Alias Hill, better known as

VOICE 1 Frank the Poet

SFX WIND

VOICE 2 Robert Welsh, having been sworn, said the deceased had resided with him at Clay Pipe Diggings. They came into Mudgee together on Wednesday, deceased left him, promised to meet him by a certain time at McGuigan's

VOICE 1 He went to Phillips and found him in bed

VOICE 2 He was half drunk

VOICE 1 Had known him for 8 years. He had a complaint which caused him to spit blood.

VOICE 1 He earned a great deal of money

VOICE 2 And spent it very freely

VOICE 1 Had known him to earn hundreds a week at Tambaroora

SFX WIND

VOICE 2 The wind used to annoy him very much in the hut in which he resided

VOICE 1 He was no better off for his visit to Mudgee

VOICE 2 The day before they'd been drinking

VOICE 1 On and off all day.

VOICE 2 On and off all day.

VOICE 1 Arthur Thomas Piggott Cutting, being duly sworn, stated that he was a duly qualified medical practitioner.

VOICE 2 He'd viewed and examined the body and it was his opinion that the deceased came to his death

VOICE 1 He'd viewed and examined the body and it was his opinion that the deceased came to his death

VOICE 2 By the effects of cold and inanition.

MG Not looking after yourself, not eating properly. The coroners report also mentions his heavy drinking. So inanition was often a term used to describe people who drank rather than ate.

MD I think my Irish grandfather died of inanition actually.

MUSIC:
Banished Now from My Native Shore
T10 Convict's Tour to Hell Tom West

BH Constructing himself as Frank the Poet was a life project for Francis MacNamara. And he did it, he succeeded in it, he was recognised as that, there was no other Frank the Poet. I know some people have suggested that maybe there were many other Francis MacNamaras who all called themselves Frank the Poet. I think the onus would be people who claim that to prove it.

HMS I mean I think he's someone you'd love to meet, isn't he? You know from the safe distance of the 21st century, you know I'd love to sit down and have a jar with Frank. But I'm just not sure that if I was a convict trying to keep my nose clean that that's what I'd want to do, he was too subversive.

LM I suppose a lot of poets have got an instinct for dangerous ground. You walk out on dangerous ground. Because that's where the demons are - and the interesting figures.

Jacob Habner These songs are important standing on their own two feet no matter who wrote them. It's great that we've got this quirky little mystery about who Francis MacNamara was, and whether or not he wrote all of them or some of them or one of them. But at the end of the day that's a great way to weave these songs together, but it doesn't really matter who wrote them, what matters is the content.

Chris Parkinson We tend to look to America as our own source ...yet all this stuff, the Frank stuff, is basically where songwriting began in Australia, apart from the Aboriginal body of work. For me as a songwriter it's darned important because it's kind of like our blues, this is like our Mississippi River, you know the Muddy Waters of Australia

VOF 582
 583
 584
 585

MG Maree you know that you've been saying that you've been living with me and Frank for thirty years, well I've got news for you, thirty years ago the historian Russel Ward wrote 'Frank's life and verse will be of even more concern to Australians a hundred or a thousand years hence.'

MD Wow, I don't know about the thousand but if that's the case I give in – Frank's the man.

MG Frank's the man.

MUSIC:

Banished Now from My Native Shore
T10 Convict's Tour to Hell Tom West

Stranger I say from whence art thou came
Your name pray tell me now
Oh kind Sir my name I don't mean to conceal
I'm Frank from Old Sydney Gaol