

THE MURDERED SWEETHEART BALLADS:
A DISCURSIVE CATALOGUE AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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This is a substantially revised version reflecting the discovery (by David Atkinson) of the earlier and longer broadside version of *Mary Thomson* postulated at the conclusion of the original's Introductory Essay, and following the renewed analysis of the material this occasioned.

THE MARY THOMSON CLUSTER

RACHAEL CROSSL(E)Y

BETSY SMITH

MARY TOM(P)SON

ANN WILLIAMS

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

THE CLUSTER

This contribution concerns a cluster of ballads, all published as broadsides in England or Scotland in the nineteenth century, on the murders, by their respective lovers, of four different women (in alphabetical order): Rachael Crossly;¹ Betsy Smith; Mary Thomson;² Ann Williams, two of which have subsequently been recovered from performance tradition. But the cluster actually consists of *five* ballads, as Mary Thomson had the singular misfortune (or was it carelessness) of being murdered by two different lovers in two different locations. These ballads are dealt with together because despite quite concrete discrepancies with regard to the names of the murdered sweethearts and the murderous lovers, and the specified locations of the crimes, they are manifestly variants of the same song. The two longest comprise the same 24 stanzas in the same order; all the shorter songs are made up entirely of selections, also in the same order, of these same stanzas, with the exception of one ballad that has one stanza unique to itself, and another that is achieved by conglomerating lines from several of the stanzas shared by the others. The group is here designated the “Mary Thomson Cluster” essentially for purposes of recognition among students and performers of folk song, as three of the four versions recorded from singing tradition in Great Britain and North America name her as the victim (the fourth, a one-stanza fragment, is assigned this title by its editors, but derives from another member of the cluster). Meanwhile the other broadsides, if

¹ The spelling Crossley / Crossly differs between the two available printings of this ballad (and may consequently be inconsistent in my discussion).

² The spelling is uniformly “Thomson” on the broadsides, “Thompson” in three of the four known versions from performance tradition (at least as published).

they are known at all, are generally not perceived as being the same song.³ This does not in itself imply that the longer Mary Thomson ballad (distinguished in what follows as *1Mary Thomson*) is the original of all the others, although this is manifestly the case with the shorter *2Mary Thomson*, and may be the case for others. The narrative shared by the ballads within the cluster conforms closely to the Murdered Sweetheart genre, telling the tragic story of a girl seduced by a lover who promised her marriage, but when she becomes pregnant and importunes him to live up to this commitment he lures her away to a lonely spot and kills her. Following the discovery of the crime he is arrested, and now awaits his trial. This means that unlike perhaps a majority of Murdered Sweetheart Ballads, but far from uniquely, these ballads do not follow the narrative through the trial to the eve of the execution (they are not ‘last goodnights’ in the voice of the lover-murderer, and are narrated in the third person).

THE BROADSIDES

Before entering what may develop into a complex exploration with confusing multiple comparisons, the simple ‘factual’ differences identifying the five broadside ballads in the cluster may be noted at once and schematically:

sweetheart	lover	location	date (printer)	Roud no.
1Mary Thomson ⁴	David Gaston	“near Amsterdale in Derbyshire”.	-- (1810-36)	2458 ⁵
2Mary Thomson ⁶	David Brown	“near Amsterdale in ... Carlisle”.	-- (1835-6)	2458
Betsy Smith ⁷	‘Thomas’	“Manchester in Lancashire”	-- (1820-60)	V6818
Ann Williams ⁸	William Jones	“Wirksworth ... in Derbyshire”	‘1823’ (1819-44)	V41960
Rachael Crossly ⁹	William Shaw	“Kirkburton” “Yorkshire”	-- (1834-88)	V9935.

The information here on people and places and (in the one case) the year specified for the events, is in each case derived exclusively from material on the broadside concerned (be it the ballad text itself, the extended title, or an accompanying prose account), as there are no

³ Witness the distinct Roud Index nos. immediately following. These ballads were initially referred to in my Introduction to this Murdered Sweetheart Ballad Bibliography as the “Betsy Smith” cluster, this being the first ballad in the group I encountered.

⁴ Long version, quoted in what follows from version printed by Menzies of Edinburgh (see Bibliography, below).

⁵ This is the number assigned to versions from singing tradition; the broadsides are not registered in the Roud Index.

⁶ Short version, quoted in what follows from version printed by Sanderson of Edinburgh (see Bibliography, below).

⁷ Quoted in what follows from broadside printed by Robert McIntosh, Glasgow (see Bibliography, below).

⁸ Quoted in what follows from the reproduction by Charles Hindley (see Bibliography, below).

⁹ Quoted in what follows from the printing by G. Walker of Durham (see Bibliography below)

records outside the broadsides of any of these women being murdered by any of these men.¹⁰ This circumstance, that despite the considerable circumstantial details some of them supply, all the events are evidently *invents* (or as we now say, are fake news),¹¹ complicates discussion of their relationships – it might have been expected that one was based on a real case, the others opportunistic remixes.

Encountering the same ballad deployed for multiple cases is very rare compared to the opposite, multiple ballads on one case (amply illustrated by the nine songs on Maria Marten), but as it happens both situations apply here, as there was evidently a third broadside ballad on Mary Thomson, or rather a second ballad on her murder (as in *IMary Thomson*) by David Gaston. This other ballad may ultimately have indirect contextual implications for the relationships between those within the cluster (say in the matter of which came first), but by virtue of being a quite different ballad in a quite different verse-form it does not itself qualify as a member, and will not be considered further.

Something similar might also be said of Rachael Crossly, of whose murder we also have two ballads, only one of which qualifies for attention here, but under unusual, not to say weird, circumstances. As recounted in a broadside entitled *The Yorkshire Tragedy* (no connection with the Elizabethan play of that name) she was murdered by her sweetheart, William Shaw, who is duly tried and hanged, in a scenario which would have been in conformity with the Murdered Sweetheart paradigm had he not waited to kill her until she was pregnant with their second illegitimate child. Whatever its generic status this is obviously a quite different story having no connection with the present cluster. However it constitutes only “Part First” of the verses on the broadside. Narrating a given story in two parts on the same broadside is normal enough, and doing so with a Murdered Sweetheart ballad would not be unique, but here “Part Second”, unusually and perhaps uniquely, is not a continuation, since the judicial aftermath having played itself out in the first Part the protagonists are both dead before the second begins. Puzzled readers were presumably to construe it, since the names are the same, as a retelling of their story from the beginning. It is effectively a second song, therefore, but now with only the one, murder-instigating, pregnancy, fully qualifying as a Murdered Sweetheart ballad. Moreover, in comprising exclusively, in the same order, stanzas shared with two or more of the others, it qualifies as a further member of the Mary Thomson cluster. It will be referred to in what follows as *Rachael Crossly*.¹²

In the light of these circumstances it is a relatively simple task to survey schematically which broadside ballad has which stanzas. While sometimes printed as eight-line (or four long-line) stanzas (on which see further the concluding remarks on music), for purposes of comparison all the broadside ballads belonging to this complex (and their performed derivatives) can and will be resolved into (and cited by reference to) numbered units

¹⁰ I have consulted the internet archive of the London *Times*, and checked all the names of persons specified in a comprehensive database of English murder-trials, *Capital Punishment U.K.*, <http://www.capitalpunishmentuk.org/>.

¹¹ This would mean they are all what were known as ‘cocks’, cases invented to provide commercially profitable material during a dearth of spectacular news.

¹² Saving *Yorkshire Tragedy* for the broadside as a whole, and in accordance with the convention applied in the particular circumstances of this paper that broadsides will be identified by the name of the murdered sweetheart in italics, and derivative versions from performance tradition by the name of the murdered sweetheart in inverted commas. This nonetheless means that references to an italicized name sometimes refer to the printed ballad, sometimes to the broadside (and the other contents) on which it was printed.

corresponding to regular ('common measure') ballad quatrains, that is rhyming abcb, with verbal stresses 4.3.4.3.¹³ The five ballads are here presented in descending order of length; the narrative sub-sections indicated are those characteristic of the genre and will be invoked in ensuing discussion.

<i>IMary Thomson</i>	<i>Ann Williams</i>	<i>Betsy Smith</i>	<i>2Mary Thomson</i>	<i>Rachael Crossly</i>	
LEAD-IN					
1	1	1	1	1	Listen to a song about a recent murder of a fair maiden – it's quite dreadful.
2	2	2	2		
AFFAIR					
3	3	3	3	2	she lived at ... ;
4	4	4			her beauty prompted a man to say
5	5	5			he was resolved to marry her;
6	6	6	4		she was beguiled, and got pregnant.
7	7		5	3	she wrote him a tender letter
8	8		6	4	asking when the wedding would be.
MURDER					
9	9	7		5	He went to see her at ...
10	10	8	>8.3	6	and asked her to take a walk
11	11	9			but he took a knife with him.
			7		They met in Lime Wood.
12	12	10	>8.1		He declared he was going to kill her.
13	13	11	>8.2,4		She begged for mercy on her knees
14	14	12		7	& said she wouldn't ask to be his wife.
15	15	13			He said, no mercy, and stabbed her.
16	16	14		8	She begged him to think of the child;
17	17	15			he stabbed her again and cut her throat;
18	18	16			blood poured onto her white breast.
19	19		9		He threw her body weighted with stones
20	20		10		into a lake. It was stained by her blood.
AFTERMATH					
21	21	17	11		so he was arrested and put in prison
22	22	18.	12.		where he awaits his trial and doom.
MORAL					
23	23			9	Men be warned; maidens likewise
24.	24.			10.	-- don't be beguiled by flattery.

In summary:

IMary Thomson
and *Ann Williams* comprise the same 24 stanzas;
while *Betsy Smith* comprises 18 stanzas

¹³ The verse in the alternate, third broadside on Mary Thomson is in long measure (4.4.4.4.) rhyming aabb.

- all corresponding to stanzas in the 24-stanza ballads;
- 2Mary Thomson* comprises 12 stanzas
 - 10 corresponding to stanzas in the 24-stanza ballads
 - + one made up of lines from 3 stanzas in the 24-stanza ballads
 - + one unique to this song
- Rachael Crossly* comprises 10 stanzas
 - all corresponding to stanzas in the 24-stanza ballads.

With reference to complete stanzas, ‘corresponding’ here means not merely the same information (other than names) but (allowing for occasional moderate variation) the same verbal formulations. There are no textual features in which two or more of the shorter broadside ballads share a feature which is not also shared with the 24-stanza ballads, but conversely each shorter ballad shares stanzas with the longer which it does not share with the others. The comparison therefore suggests very strongly that one of the 24-stanza ballads was the original, from which the others, directly or indirectly, are derived.

THE LONG BALLADS: ANN WILLIAMS AND IMARY THOMSON

If we had been looking for an original ballad based on an actual case, then *A mournful and affecting Copy of Verses on the death of Ann Williams, Who was barbarously and cruelly murdered by her sweetheart, W. Jones, near Wirksworth, in Derbyshire, July, 1823* is technically the best qualified, if only because the specified location, unlike *IMary Thomson*’s “Amsterdale” (also “in Derbyshire”) can actually be shown to exist. With regard to precedence the unique specification of a year, 1823, is not decisive, as the printer of *IMary Thomson* was active at the address specified on the sheet from 1810, but on the other hand the appearance of a “Copy of Verses on Ann Williams, Who was murdered” in a catalogue issued by a Brighton printer in 1820-24 indicates an intention to mimic the function of an authentic, real-crime ballad, which was to exploit the notoriety of a recent case. Its London printer, J. Pitts, was in business at this time (and one might expect a ballad trend like this to start in the capital).

Otherwise *Ann Williams* is a business-like piece of work, the ballad prefaced, after the title quoted, only with an 80-word summary concluding, “The following verses are written upon the occasion, giving a complete detail of this shocking affair:--“. *IMary Thomson* in contrast is a multi-media product making a bid for authenticity whose energy borders on desperation. The “Full and Particular Account of a Most Cruel and Barbarous Murder, Committed upon the Body of Mary Thomson, by her Sweet-heart, David Gaston ... ” promised in its lengthy (60-word) title is delivered in the respective forms of the 24-stanza ballad, a woodcut illustration, and a lengthy (350-word) prose account, whose opening is dense with circumstantial information:

David Gaston, a young man, aged 21, has been fully committed to Derby goal, for the wilful Murder of his sweet-heart, Mary Thomson, a lovely girl, aged 19, the only daughter of Isaac Thomson of Amsterdale, and servant to a respectable farmer in that neighbourhood. ...

Given this willingness to provide detail it is odd that the events are specified as occurring in that mysterious Amsterdale,¹⁴ and confidence is further undermined by the glaring discrepancy between the ballad, where the murder occurs “Among the flow’ry fields” (10.2), and the illustration, which depicts it as happening in a bedroom. Discrepancy between the ballad and the prose account is meanwhile equally glaring, but of ambiguous import. The authenticity of the prose account is ostensibly enhanced by its verbatim reproduction of David Gaston’s letter asking Mary to meet him at a lonely spot to discuss their marriage, but as indicated by the summary above there is nothing of this in the ballad, where it is on the contrary Mary Thomson herself who writes a letter to Gaston imploring him to marry her. This is a not altogether unique illustration of the discrepant narrative protocols of the verbal forms sharing space on the broadside, and might not have unduly disturbed readers at the time (a few years later something similar would happen in a mixed prose narrative and ballad broadside on the well documented Maria Marten case). The prose account, in journalistic mode, is interested in the judicial process, and the man’s letter to Mary Thomson, “happily for the ends of justice, was found upon her person after she was murdered”,¹⁵ and regular newspapers routinely quoted in full documents related to a (real) case. Meanwhile in ballad mode the pregnant sweetheart’s desperate plea for marriage (if more often spoken than epistolary) is standard within the Murdered Sweetheart paradigm. But in the present context, paradoxically, the sense of authenticity is equally undermined by the similarity between the two accounts, that in prose, other than adding names and numbers, largely elaborating with commonplaces what is already available in the ballad (of which that lengthy title is also very much a paraphrase).

2 MARY THOMSON

Whether or not it is the origin of the cluster as a whole, *1Mary Thomson* evidently stands at the head of a significant strand within it, comprising both the other broadside on this particular murdered sweetheart (published by another Edinburgh printer) and those three of the four versions known from performance tradition in which the murdered sweetheart is explicitly named Mary Thom(p)son.

While manifestly derivative in terms of both prose and verse,¹⁶ the broadside containing *2Mary Thomson* has introduced many changes, and if anything further enhanced at least the appearance authenticity. The title is now significantly extended (from 63 to 108 words) to become a fully-fledged summary of the case, but the additional information from either the ballad (the manner of disposing of the body) or the prose account (specification of their meeting-place). Least altered is the prose account itself, which among a few inconsequential words and phrases, adds the quite specific information that the lover-murderer, now David Brown, was “farm-servant to Mr James Luke of Campton”. As unknown to northern England’s topography as Amsterdale to Derbyshire’s, this may be another invention, unless

¹⁴ Having checked Amsterdale against the list of 7000 Derbyshire “Wapentakes, Hundreds, Parishes, Towns, Villages, Hamlets, Homesteads, Farms, Woods, Moors, Rivers and Brooks “ at <http://www.wirksworth.org.uk/DPI.htm>.

¹⁵ My colleague Nina Nørgaard pertinently wonders whether the letter would still be legible after several days in the water.

¹⁶ See Bibliography below for a link to a reproduction of the whole sheet.

the reference is to Camerton in Allerdale, some 30 miles from Carlisle, to whose neighbourhood the action has now been relocated.

The most striking enhancement of authenticity by far however is the woodcut illustration, which now comprises a depiction of the murder scene manifestly based on the verbal narrative, worthy of note in a business that frequently recycled illustrations from one ballad to another, as presumably the case with the bedroom scene accompanying *IMary Thomson*. Here on *2Mary Thomson* a man is depicted attacking a woman with a knife against the backdrop precisely of the prose account's "lake surrounded with trees" into which he will throw the body. (The free-standing farmhand and milkmaid figures on each side are in contrast probably generic, but may have provided models for those in the main illustration). There remains nonetheless an interesting discrepancy, in that while the accompanying prose account has him stab her in the side and then "repeat his murderous blows", and in the ballad as here revised he merely "Did pierce her body threw" (8.4), the woodcut clearly shows him putting the blade to her throat. This detail derives from *IMary Thomson*, where both prose account and ballad agree with the later version on the stabbing of the body (and the *2Mary Thomson* woodcut also seems to show dark blood flowing from her waist down the lighter-coloured skirt), but the longer ballad has a second phase to the attack in which "Her throat was cut from ear to ear" (17.3). Presumably the illustrator had access to this earlier version which his literary colleague was in the process of shortening.

This latter process saw the ballad halved in length to only twelve stanzas, and as these retain both the two-stanza lead-in and the two stanzas on the judicial aftermath, it is inevitably the genre's core narrative phases, the affair and the murder, that are subject to most radical reduction -- this balance is altogether unlike what would be expected to occur in performance tradition (although the two-stanza moralizing conclusion *is* discarded). And the process is not without some literary adroitness. The original's elaborate murder scene (with the sweetheart begging for mercy both after the threat of violence and after its onset) is reduced to a single stanza made up of two lines repeated verbatim from different points, sandwiching reformulations of other lines:

IMARY THOMSON

- 12.1 When to the fatal spot they came
15.3 He took the knife all from his side
13.3 Aloud for mercy she did call
15.4 And pierced her body through

2MARY THOMSON

8. When to the fatal spot they came
A knife then forth he drew
And while she loud for mercy call'd
Did pierce her body threw. [sic]

In the case of the affair, the reduction is achieved, uniquely within the cluster, by the composition of a new stanza (conforming to the technical requirements of the ballad quatrain) to achieve the same narrative work as three stanzas (9-11) in *IMary Thomson*:

7. That selfsame night he did appoint
 To meet her in Lime Wood,
Where his true love soon did him meet,
 Ne'er dreading ought but good.

It is an interesting construct. The specification of their meeting in “Lime Wood” stems from the prose account, and the same may apply to the unsuspecting mood of the sweetheart (of which *IMary Thomson* has nothing), who after receiving the reassuring letter approached the rendezvous “with a heart somewhat relieved”; but as a device to enhance the ensuing horrors it is a commonplace of the genre.

RACHAEL CROSSLY

Predictably in light of its odd auspices, *Rachael Crossly* is also in textual terms the most eccentric member of the cluster. It has all the marks of a lackadaisical exercise in filling up space, the “Part First”, which is evidently the ‘real’ story of Rachael Crossly, having left just enough column inches to merit adding something else, but of limited scope. In which case the choice was unfortunate, and whoever was responsible had both to reduce one of the long ballads in the cluster to a suitable length, and at the same time avoid major inconsistencies with Part First, of which it is ostensibly a reiteration (The concatenation of stanzas shows it cannot have derived from either of the other shorter ballads). The result is an account that moves fairly slowly through the affair, until it makes two drastic leaps to wrap up the story, so that the sweetheart begs for mercy without the lover having threatened, let alone harmed, her, and the narrator draws the moral without any crime having been committed. The first leap is probably space-saving, the second perhaps to avoid an overt discrepancy on the disposal of the corpse, which elsewhere in this cluster is thrown into a river or lake, while the Rachael Crossly of Part First was thrown down a mine-shaft. While not mentioned explicitly this latter is also responsible for a concrete environmental shift, the lover now inviting the sweetheart less romantically to take a walk “Into the coalpit field” (6.2) rather than the “flowery fields” of the long versions (10.2). Exactly which long ballad was being adapted may be signaled by a single word at one of the few places in the selected material where they have a discernible verbal discrepancy: while the last line of *Ann Williams* promises that those who heed its warnings will live “In comfort, joy and love” (24.4), *IMary Thomson* (24.4), followed by *Rachael Crossley* (10.4), has “comfort, *peace* and love”.

BETSY SMITH

Of all the broadside ballads in the cluster the most frequently printed, *Betsy Smith*, makes the least effort at achieving the look of real news. Its title is simply (*The*) *Murder of Betsy Smith*, and there is no material concerning the case on the sheet other than the ballad itself (in both the available prints it shares the sheet with another ballad). The specification that the murder occurred “On the nineteenth day of August” (7.1) says very little without any reference to a year, and of the lover-murderer we learn only (when addressed by his victim, st. 14.3) that his name was “Thomas”.

Compared to the hapless *Rachael Crossly* the eighteen stanzas of *Betsy Smith* produce an efficient and viable reduction, omitting the concluding valediction and two pairs of narrative stanzas (the girl’s letter saying she is pregnant; the disposal of the corpse) which are dispensable in providing information stated or implied in material that is retained. Other than the specifics of names and places its textual revision extends from single words (“dreadful murder” for “cruel murder”, both st. 1) to the quite radical “And with solemn vows and

promises / his love he oft declared” for “My love is such I am resolved / To wed you I declare” (both 5.3-4).

Other changes are of the kind of that might suggest the impact of performance tradition, for instance the internal contamination producing (or enhancing) verbal repetition between similar narrative moments, here the two-phase attack interrupted by her plea for mercy:

<i>ANN WILLIAMS / IMARY THOMSON</i>	<i>BETSY SMITH</i>
15. He took the knife all from his side, And <u>pierced</u> her body through.	13. Then took the knife all from his side & <u>pierced</u> her body through.
...	...
17. Twice more then with the bloody knife ¹⁷ He ran her body through,	15. Twice more then with the fatal knife he <u>pierced</u> her body through

Something similar occurs with the connected moments in which he first invites her to a lonely place, and on arrival informs her of his intentions, except now it is a substituted word that engages in the contamination.¹⁸

10. Saying, Nancy dear, come let us walk, Among the flowery <u>fields</u> ,	8. Says, "Betsy, dear, come let us walk down in the flowery <u>grove</u> ,
...	...
12. When to the fatal spot they came, These words to her did say: ¹⁹ All on this very night I will Your precious life betray.	10. When to the fatal spot they came he thus to her did say, All on this night, within this <u>grove</u> , I will your life betray".

Another change characteristic of performance tradition is the substitution of one traditional formula, “milk white breast” (18.3) of the longer versions with another (16.3: “lilywhite breast”).

Within the stanzas retained by Betsy Smith there are no verbal discrepancies between the longer versions that would permit identification of its source. There is an indirect indication, however in the fact that George Walker, Junior, of Durham, was involved in printing both *Betsy Smith* and *Rachael Crossly* (that is *The Yorkshire Tragedy*), which (as just noted) is derived from *IMary Thomson*. It may not be coincidental that he printed *Betsy Smith*, which sets the action in Manchester, on commission from John Livsey of that city.

PERFORMANCE TRADITION

At the outset of further, potentially confusing, comparative analyses, it may be useful to survey the stanzas encompassed by the four versions from performance tradition as set against the broadside ballads (of which the two longer, *Ann Williams* and *IMary Thomson*, in these terms identical, can now be conglomerated).

¹⁷ At 17.1 *IMary Thomson* has “this horrid knife”

¹⁸ It is probably more curious than significant that in shifting the venue from “flowery fields” to “flowery grove” *Betsy Smith* is more in line with Scandinavian traditional balladry in which the default for such a “fatal spot” is the rose grove, *rosenlund*.

¹⁹ At 12.2 *IMary Thomson* has “Those words he then did say”.

BROADSIDES

IMary Betsy 2Mary Rachael
 Thomson Smith Thomson Crossly
 & Ann
 Williams

PERFORMANCE TRADITION

Holdstock Harvey Walker Sangster
 (England) (Maine) (Maine) (Scotland)

LEAD-IN

1	1	1	1		1		
2	2	2			2		

AFFAIR

3	3	3	2	1	3	1	1.
4	4			2	4	2	
5	5			3	5	3	
6	6	4		4	6	4.	
7		5	3	5	7		
8		6	4	6	8		

MURDER

9	7		5	7	9		
10	8	8.3	6	8	10		
11	9			9	11		
		7					
12	10	8.1		10	12		
13	11	8.2&4		11	13		
14	12		7	12	14		
15	13			13	15.1-2		
16	14		8	14			
17	15			15	15.3-4		
18	16			16	16		
19		9		17	17		
20		10		18	18		

AFTERMATH

21	17	11		19	19		
22	18.	12.		20	20		

MORAL

23			9	21			
24.			10.	22.			

SCOTLAND: MRS. SANGSTER

This single-stanza fragment was sent to Gavin Greig in 1910 (with other “bits” of it he unfortunately does not reproduce) by the appropriately named Mrs. Sangster,²⁰ who also knew that the “damsel” was murdered by her lover. As reported the stanza concerned does not name

the murdered sweetheart, and Greig was not able to identify the ballad from which it derives. The title has been supplied by the Greig collection's more recent editors (who invoke the published text of the Holdstock version from English performance tradition), and the fragment has accordingly been indexed under Roud no. 2458 ("Mary Thom(p)son"). But while the broadsides *1Mary Thompson* and *2Mary Thompson* were both printed in Edinburgh (and it seems only there), this fragment does not derive from either of them. It reproduces almost verbatim the stanza of *Betsy Smith* (which was also published, by two printers, in Scotland) with its distinctive introduction of the sweetheart as a "damsel" and specification of where she lived:

Betsy Smith

3. Near Manchester in Lancashire,
 this damsel she did dwell,
 In service she long time had lived,
 till this to her befel:

Mrs Sangster

1. In Manchester in Lancashire
 A damsel she did dwell
 In service a long time she lived,
 Till this to her befell.

Mrs. Sangster's childhood recollection that the ballad was both sold as a broadside at a named fair and sung locally therefore supplies further information on the circulation of this particular ballad.

ENGLAND: SAMUEL HOLDSTOCK

At the opposite extreme, from almost exactly the same time, we find the lone English version of "Mary Thomson", collected from Samuel Holdstock of Wittersham in Kent. Recorded in August 1909 and May 1910 he ultimately supplied a text of 22 stanzas, effectively a complete *1Mary Thomson* lacking only the two first stanzas with their opening "Come all ye" gambit. But this was after a complex process whose resulting documentation not represented with optimum clarity in the VWML Index and Catalogue, and whose results, when fully identified, merit further examination in their own right.

On 21 August 1909 Holdstock was visited at his home by Percy Grainger, who recorded the tune of "Mary Thompson", accompanied by his local contact, Edith Lyttleton, who recorded the words. The latter survive in two forms. What is presumably a transcript made in the course of performance comprises nine pages of very scrappy writing (<https://www.vwml.org/record/PG/10/50> -- the Index entry erroneously placing Wittersham in Gloucestershire and misquoting the first line). What is evidently a derivative fair copy comprises four pages more neatly written in what may be a different hand or more likely the same copying at greater leisure, and accompanied by two pages of musical notation (<https://www.vwml.org/record/PG/15/3> -- the location now correctly specified and first line correctly quoted). This version of August 1909 comprises 20 stanzas, as in addition to the first two it also lacks a pair of stanzas from the narrative. It is discussed here on the basis of the fair copy: I shall not compete with the writer of the latter in deciphering the field transcript, but have compared the two in sufficient detail to determine their relationship to the same performance session.

²⁰ Greig is reticent in naming his female correspondents and it is just possible that 'Sangster' is an alias.

While the retention of 20 stanzas out of 24 (as always, it seems, in the same order) suggests Holdstock's version was still fairly close to the broadside, alterations do include symptoms characteristic of transmission through performance tradition. This includes the omissions. Broadside 'packaging' which is there for the benefit of the ballad hawker, like those two opening stanzas, is particularly vulnerable to omission, and the loss of the other two makes for a more 'efficient' narrative progress in the traditional ballad manner. The original broadside over-indulges somewhat in the murder scene, having the sweetheart twice beg for mercy: first after the lover announces his intention to kill her, then after his first onslaught, following which he finishes her off. The omission of the first plea for mercy avoids that first hiatus. The physical attack nonetheless still has two phases, and memory-based transmission has generated a classic instance of verbal repetition resulting from internal contamination between these similar moments:

Mary Thomson

Samuel Holdstock August 1909

- | | | |
|---|-------------------|--|
| <p>15. O then this wicked young man said,
No mercy will I show,
He took the knife all from his side,
And pierc'd her body through.</p> <p>...</p> <p>17. Twice more then with this horrid knife,
<u>He ran her body through;</u>
<u>Her throat was cut from ear to ear,</u>
<u>Most dreadful for to view;</u></p> | <p>→</p> <p>→</p> | <p>11. <u>He took the knife all from his side</u>
<u>& run her body through</u>
<u>her throat he cut from ear to ear</u>
<u>most dreadful for to view</u></p> <p>...</p> <p>13. <u>Twice more all with his horrid knife</u>
<u>he run her body through,</u>
<u>her throat he cut from ear to ear,</u>
<u>most dreadful for to view</u></p> |
|---|-------------------|--|

The two moments already shared a line with similar formulations, but here too contamination has brought the more into line with the other: while in the broadside the perpetrator first "pierc'd ... through" and then "ran threw" the sweetheart's body, in the performance version it is "run ... through" in both instances.

Whether or not these features (which from conventional points of view are errors) were the cause, Percy Grainger was evidently dissatisfied with the words recorded on this occasion, and at his instigation Edith Lyttleton called on Samuel Holdstock again on or shortly before 10 May 1910. Both the 22-stanza version she obtained on this occasion (at <http://www.vwml.org/record/PG/15/2>), and her covering letter to Grainger (at <http://www.vwml.org/record/PG/15/1>), are accessible via the VWML catalogue, but the entry on the text erroneously dates it to 21 August 1909 (the first visit). The two entries, however, in combination with cross-references in the documents themselves, indicate quite clearly that 'PG/15/2' was the text enclosed with the letter 'PG/15/1' of 10 May 1910 (and unlike any of the documents from the August visit they are both on Edith Littleton's personalized stationery). Resolving this is however not the end of the difficulties with accessing the Holdstock versions, for the seven manuscript pages to which the song entry (PG/15/2) links contain only the first 14 stanzas, breaking off immediately before the murder is fulfilled. This is evidently a mechanical error in the VWML digitalization process, for the full text of 22 stanzas had previously been published by R.S. Thomson in the *Folk Music Journal* in 1974,

although its significance is confused by his assigning them, presumably in accordance with the erroneous VWML catalogue entry (in whatever form it had in 1974), to the August 1909 session.²¹

Comparison of the thus identified 1910 version with its 1909 predecessor indicates that Samuel Holdstock had in the interim done some serious work on his “Mary Thomson”: symptomatically, while he had previously set the action “In Hampstead down in Derbyshire” he now insisted (Edith Lyttleton reports) it was “In Amsterdon near Derbyshire” (1.1 in both cases), closer to the original’s “Amsterdale” (3.1). While the 1909 transcript may have registered what the listener heard as much as what the singer sang, it is symbolic of the significant adjustment back into line with the broadside original also reflected in the restoration of those two stanzas (now 11-12) omitted from the murder scene at the first recording session. Furthermore with regard to discrepancies in individual words or phrases between the two performances there are no less than 17 instances where, the 1909 version having deviated from it, the 1910 version restores the reading of the broadside (as against only 4 instances where the 1909 version represents a broadside reading which the 1910 version changes). The retention of the verbal repetition caused by internal repetition just glanced at (although the broadside’s ‘pierced’ has reappeared in one line) and the substitution of an original line with a verbal commonplace,²² indicate that Holdstock in making these ‘corrections’ probably did not have direct access to a copy of *IMary Thomson*, but he does seem to have been conscious of a ‘correct’ (because print-derived?) original which he strove to reproduce as accurately as possible (and tried harder the second time around).

By way of contrast there is also a distinctive thematic feature in Holdstock’s 1909 rendition of the ballad which has remained stable to 1910, and that is an orientation towards the female protagonist. The general tendency in Murdered Sweetheart ballads is for attention to shift from the plight of the sweetheart to that of the lover as the narrative moves on from the affair and the murder into the aftermath, not least if this takes the form of a trial and execution. But in those cases where we have derivative versions from performance tradition the judicial aspects tend to be whittled away, so that the girl remains rather more in focus. In Holdstock’s version of this ballad, where what little is said about the judicial aftermath is mostly retained, the same shift is achieved in a more subtle way. In *IMary Thomson* the crime is uncovered by the blood-stained water, but Samuel Holdstock reformulates the lines so that it is the victim’s blood which *actively achieves* the revelation:

IMary Thomson

Samuel Holdstock, 1909²³

20. O then into the watery lake
He plunged her straightway,
But with her precious blood
was stained,

18. & then into a watery lake
he plunged her straight away,
but where her precious blood
did stain,

²¹ Textual juxtapositions show both that Thomson’s transcription of the first fourteen stanzas is accurate, and that he has not supplied the remaining stanzas from the broadside or the version that really was collected in 1909 – and it is evident from his notes elsewhere in the same article that had he done so the fact would have stated.

²² “the truth to you I’ll tell (1.4) for the the broadside’s “Till this to her befell” (3.4.; retained by the 1909 version as 1.4).

²³ Retained without significant alteration in 1910.

Which soon did him betray.

it soon did him betray.

The sustained awareness of the girl is also reflected in what would technically count as a mistake in the concluding valediction. Quite often the focus on the lover towards the end of Murdered Sweetheart broadsides is so strong that it is “young men” who are urged to take warning from the events rather than “young women”. *IMary Thomson* divides attention equally, with one statement for each, but Holdstock addresses both of these to females:

IMary Thomson

Samuel Holdstock August 1909²⁴

23. Now all you thoughtless young men,
A timely warning take;
Likewise ye fair young maidens,
For this poor damsel's sake.

19. So all you thoughtless young girls
a timely warning take
likewise ye fair young maidens,
for this poor damsel's sake.

But there remains a sting, almost literally in the tail, of Samuel Holdstock's “Mary Thomson”, for the valediction ends, in both his performances (20.4; 22.4), promising a future of “joy & love” for those who heed its warning. But this, as already noted in another connection, reproduces the last line, not of *IMary Thomson* (which promises “peace and love”) but of *Ann Williams* (24.4 in both instances). This may be the place to observe that the broadside of *IMary Thomson* whose availability solved so many problems concerning this ballad cluster, states not that it was “printed” but that it was “Re-printed” by Menzies of Edinburgh, raising the spectre of a yet earlier *Ur-Mary Thomson* with perhaps some verbal features more in line with *Ann Williams*

NORTH AMERICA

Performance tradition in North America²⁵ similarly provides one fragmentary text and one much fuller, both of them the fruits of the indefatigable collection efforts of Helen Hartness Flanders and her associate Marguerite Olney (the latter the collector in both cases here), the singers hailing from two communities only seven miles apart in Maine and indeed recorded on the same day in 1942.²⁶

The 20 stanza version of Murchie Harvey resembles that of Samuel Holdstock in effectively representing a complete *IMary Thomson* minus a pair of stanzas from the non-narrative packaging, only this time it is the concluding valediction that is dropped, although the collector notes that the singer knew there was a “last verse” (that is, an 8 line stanza corresponding to the two missing quatrains) that he “could not recall”. It may be echoed in

²⁴ Reproduced verbatim in 1910 as st. 21.

²⁵ The following discussion ignores the suggestion that *Betsy Smith* (or another of the broadsides in this cluster) may have supplied stanzas for the American ballad “Fair Florella” which belongs to the distinct category of the Jealous Lover Ballad. The connection is discussed by Phillips Barry, “Fair Florella”, *American Speech*, 3 (1928), 441-47.

²⁶ These unpublished texts are curated by the Helen Hartness Flanders Ballad Collection, Middlebury College, Vermont. I am happy to acknowledge the generosity of the Davis Library at Middlebury in supplying copies of both transcripts and the kind assistance of Joseph F. Watson, Preservation Manager, Special Collections & Archives Associate, Davis Library Facilities Coordinator, Middlebury College in this connection, and not least for drawing to my attention the Harvey version, which does not figure in the online catalogue, (nor, therefore, in the Roud Index).

this singer's variant opening, "Come all young men and maiden's fair" (1.1). There is also a two-quatrain reduction in the narrative section, not for the first time here in processing the original's repetitive murder-scene. In Harvey's case this involves omitting the girl's second plea for mercy which had divided the knife attack into two phases, achieved by aggregating two half-stanzas:

IMary Thomson

Murchie Harvey, 1942

14. With clasped hands, and uplift eyes,
She cried, Oh spare my life,
I never more will ask at you
To make me your lawful wife.

14. With clasped hands and uplifted eyes
she cried, O spare my life,
And never more will I ask you
to make me your lawful wife.

15. O then this wicked young man said,
No mercy will I show;
He took the knife all from his side,
And pierc'd her body through.

15. He pulled the knife out from his side
-- he runs her body through

16. But still, she smiling said to him
While trembling with fear,
Ah! David, David, spare my life;
Think on your baby dear.

17. Twice more then with this horrid knife
He ran her body through,
Her throat was cut from ear to ear,
Most dreadful for to view;

Her throat was cut from ear to ear
-- most dreadful for to view

As can be seen, apart from these omissions, there is considerable textual stability, change restricted to substitution like "lawful wife" for "wedded wife". Symptomatically, unique among the oral versions of the Mary Thomson story, Harvey reproduces exactly the Amsterdale (3.1) of the original broadside.

The same cannot be said of the version recorded from Arthur Walker, which takes the location to the *Zielform*, "In Amsterdam" (1.1) manifestly awaiting it. Otherwise this four-stanza fragment looks set fair to produce a derivative of *IMary Thompson* closely related to Murchie Harvey's, some of whose deviations it shares, had it not broken off at an early point in the narrative. It also took Harvey's reduction of the packaging a stage further by omitting the first two, "Come all ye ...", stanzas.

A NOTE ON THE MUSIC

None of the broadside printings of any of the ballads in the cluster specify a melody to which it is to be sung. Of the Scottish singer who supplied him with one quatrain of what transpired to be a version of *Betsy Smith*, Gavin Greig notes that he had just previously collected from

her a “big instalment of tunes”, but (perhaps precisely because this one came by post) he provides no tune for this ballad. At least, as we saw, the informant confirmed that it was indeed “sung” in her neighbourhood. Both of the American versions were recorded mechanically, and the discussion above is based on the collector’s transcripts of these, but frustratingly for one reason or another neither are currently accessible on the Middlebury College Library’s extensive internet sound archive; nor do they seem to be available elsewhere.

Despite his notorious enthusiasm for the phonograph as a research tool, Percy Grainger does not seem to have recorded the singing of Samuel Holdstock during his visit in 1909, but his detailed musical notation is accessible in the VWML (<https://www.vwml.org/record/PG/15/3>). It records variations in the melody between individual stanzas, and has annotations of both a technical (like repeating a bar of music), and a more general, nature (“sung rhythmically, gracefully ...”). This (although recorded in 1909) is evidently the source for the somewhat simplified notation provided with the text (from 1910) in R.S. Thomson’s article in the *Folk Music Journal*.

Significant more generally is the way the latter’s presentation indicates that the melody was clearly designed to accommodate a stanza of eight (four-beat) lines, in which format two of the ballads in the cluster (Betsy Smith; 1Mary Thomson) were indeed printed (the others do not register stanza divisions). The same stanza form appears in the collector’s transcripts of the two versions of “Mary Thomson” from American performance tradition, and of course in Thomson’s own text of Holdstock’s version. With the sole exception of the Scottish fragment, therefore, my resolution of the songs of this cluster into ballad quatrains, while reflecting the verbal aspect of the songs (syntax; punctuation; sense; rhyme) does not adequately capture the musical structure of performance. And this in turn (for those of us incorrigibly interested in words) has repercussions for the understanding of verbal change and transmission. Inevitably, whatever their differences, all five ballads as originally printed comprise an even number of my quatrains, but it is also noticeable that the shorter renditions, in print and performance, have a distinct tendency to omit what my discussion has called “pairs” of stanzas (the first invariably an odd number), each of which will however have been experienced as a (musical) unit by singers and audiences. And in the instance where a new stanza has been constructed by conglomerating lines from two or more others, is perhaps better understood in terms of eight- rather than four-line units.

ooo

CATALOGUE OF SONGS AND VERSIONS

THE BROADSIDES

RACHAEL CROSSL(E)Y

Roud Index No. V9935

THE YORKSHIRE TRAGEDY. A correct Account of the MURDER on the 9th of March, of RACHAEL CROSSLEY, of KIRKBURTON, near HUDDERSFIELD, by WILLIAM SHAW, her Sweetheart.

G. Walker, Jun., Printer, Sadler-Street, Durham. No. 309

National Library of Scotland

<http://deriv.nls.uk/dcn9/7489/74898003.9.htm> (transcript)

<http://deriv.nls.uk/dcn30/7489/74898003.30.jpg> (fac.)

N.B. "Part Second" is adapted from "Mary Thomson" ; this is the printer who produced "Betty Smith" for Livsey

-- Kirkburton is a village on the outskirts of Huddersfield

The Yorkshire Tragedy, Giving an Account of The Murder of Rachael Crossly, of Kirkburton, near Hussersfield, by William Shaw, her sweetheart.

William Walker, Otley

Two sizeable woodcuts:

between title and text: in a rural setting, a man drags a supine female figure towards a dug grave

at bottom, beneath song text and between columns of prose:

hooded man with noose around neck on balcony facing onlookers in street below.

the prose material adds nothing to the information available in the ballad, and largely comprises commonplaces about the trial, the execution, and the perpetrator's remorse.

Oxford Bodleian Library. Firth C.17 (189)

<http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/view/sheet/12677>

ooo

BETSY SMITH:

-- Roud Index No. V6818

-- case unknown to list of executions at <http://uk.geocities.com/becky62655@btinternet.com/>

-- unknown to *Times Digital Archive*

Murder of Betsy Smith

together with "My Ain Fireside"

at top of column small woodcut of church and dilapidated graveyard

Durham: Printed by George Walker, Jun. – Sold by John Livsey, Shudehill, Manchester [early 19th century]

Roud says Livsey is 1833-cs1851

Walker 1834ff.

Edinburgh. National Library of Scotland. Shelfmark Crawford.EB.1753
facs. pr. [http://digital.nls.uk/english-
ballads/pageturner.cfm?id=74891983&mode=transcription](http://digital.nls.uk/english-ballads/pageturner.cfm?id=74891983&mode=transcription)

extract pr. Barry, Phillips. "Fair Florella". *American Speech*. 3 (1928), 441-47
-- in connection with his thesis that it is the origin of the American ballad "Fair
Florella" (which is actually a jealous lover ballad)

Murder of Betsy Smith

Robert McIntosh, Glasgow ca 1820-60
white letter
woodcut (indistinct) of people in a garden

Edinburgh. National Library of Scotland. shelfmark L.C.Fol.73(126).
facs. & pr. "The Word on the Street".
<https://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/broadside.cfm/id/14749/criteria/%22Betsy%20smith%202>
[2](#)
NLS says ca 1849

Bodleian 2806 c.13(222)
facs. pr. <http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/view/edition/21382>
-- reproduction illegible, but evidently identical with above.
Bodley says 1849-59

Murder of Betsy Smith together with "Betsy of Drumore"

white letter
woodcut of couple (regency dress?) sitting close together on a bank in a rural setting, a large
Cupid hovering over them carrying a bow and a heart pierced by several arrows.
James Lindsay, Glasgow
n.d. (Bodelian says of Lindsay 1851-1910)

Glasgow. Glasgow University Library. Mu23-y1:091.
facs. pr.
[http://www.gla.ac.uk/t4/~dumfries/files/layer2/glasgow_broadside_ballads/mu23y1091.
html](http://www.gla.ac.uk/t4/~dumfries/files/layer2/glasgow_broadside_ballads/mu23y1091.htm)

The Murder of Betsy Smith

n.d.
white letter
woodcut of man and woman in front of an avenue of trees leading to a small building

Oxford. Bodleian Library. Firth c.17(113)
facs. pr. <http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/20000/18798.gif>

ooo

MARY THOMSON

Roud 2548 (under Mary Thompson)
case unknown to list of executions at
<http://uk.geocities.com/becky62655@btinternet.com/>

-- not known to TDA

1Mary Thomson

A Full and Particular Account of a Most Cruel and Barbarous Murder, Committed upon the Body of Mary Thomson, by her Sweet-heart, David Gaston, who Seduced her, under promise of Marriage, and she became pregnant; also shewing how the Villain Murdered her and threw her body into a Pond, where it was discovered on Monday last, and he apprehended and committed for Trial.

Re-printed by R. Menzies, Lawnmarket, Edinburgh

-- Atkinson says printer was operating at this address 1810-36.

[image of murder in bedroom]

[prose text in three columns above verse ballad in three columns]

-- sets events in Amsterdale, and has lover committed to Derby gaol.

ballad has 24 quatrains

London. British Library. HS.74/1250.(351.) formerly 11621.k.(304)

<<transcr. David Atkinson

DIFFERENT BALLAD(?) ON SAME COUPLE

"A full and particular account of a most barbarous and cruel murder committed upon the body of Mary Thomson, by her sweetheart David Gaston, who seduced her under pretence of marriage, and how she became pregnant -- showing how the Villain murdered her, and threw her body into a pond"

London: British Library: Broadside Ballad Collection BL. 1880.C.10

-- this is a collection of prose crime ballads, some with verses; precise catalogue reference uncertain (see note below).

-- source: Martin Wiener, *Men of Blood: Violence, Manliness, and Criminal Justice in Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 136, n. 51; p. 136 states that the sheet concludes:

So all pretty maidens, wherever you be,
Beware of enticements and false perjury;
For fear, like young Mary, you're mind full soon, [sic]
Like a rose in the summer you're plucked in your bloom.

N.B. original not yet checked and Wiener does not explicitly say it is a ballad: this may be a prose account with a few verses (or even perhaps just this one).

2Mary Thomson

"Horrid and Barbarous Murder Committed upon the Body of Mary Thomson, By her sweet-heart David Brown, a farm-servant near Carlisle".

Who Seduced her under promise of Marriage, -- and when, on account of her pregnancy, she became urgent on their marriage, he appointed to meet her at Lime Wood, where, in a lonely spot, he stabbed her with a knife, and then threw her into a pond, with a quantity of stones tied into her shawl. With an account of the wonderful discovery of the body, on which was found the letter of appointment, -- and which led to the apprehension of the perpetrator of the dreadful crime.

Sanderson, Edinburgh

n.d. [NLS says 1835-36]

white-letter: modern-looking format with large title.
at top picture of man attacking girl by a lake (as in narrative), flanked by separate depictions of man (left) and girl.

-- substantial and circumstantial prose account (including claimed citation of a letter), followed by song (12 quatrains)

Edinburgh. National Library of Scotland. shelfmark F.3.a.13(92)
facs. & pr. "The Word on the Street".

<http://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/broadside.cfm/id/14629/criteria/Mary%20AND%20Thomson>

ooo

ANN WILLIAMS

Roud Index No. V41960

case is unknown to list of executions at <http://uk.geocities.com/becky62655@btinternet.com/>
nothing in *Times Digital Archive*

Copy of Verses on Ann Williams, Who was murdered

Roud has an entry (Roud No. B5019) for a "Copy of Verses on Ann Williams, Who was murdered": in the Catalogue of songs, penny sheets of broadside printer R. Hook (1820-24) who is not responsible for any of the surviving printings.

A mournful and affecting Copy of Verses on the death of Ann Williams, Who was barbarously and cruelly murdered by her sweetheart, W. Jones, near Wirksworth, in Derbyshire, July, 1823.

Printed at J. Pitts, Wholesale Toy and Marble Warehouse, 6, Great St. Andrew Street, Seven Dials. 1819-1844

-- no copy seems to survive independently of Hindley's reproductions (just like *The Murder of Maria Marten* – should we be worried?)

Hindley, Charles. *Curiosities of Street Literature*. London: Reeves and Turner, 1871, p. 186.

<<internet access at :

<https://archive.org/details/curiositiesofstr00hinduoft>

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/49128/49128-h/49128-h.htm>

-- also in :

Hindley, Charles. *The Life and Times of James Catnach (Late of Seven Dials), Ballad Monger*. London: Reeves and Turner, 1878; repr. Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1968, p. 141 (facs.)

<<internet access at:

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo1.ark:/13960/t1jh44q75;view=1up;seq=163>

-- evident from Hindley's Introduction that the facsimiles in this publication derive from the original Catnach blocks, which he had purchased, but this can apply only to the illustrations: the texts must have been reset.

Oxford. Bodleian Library. Harding B 34(f. 31)

- an ambiguous note in the Allegro catalogue says this is a reproduction, [probably a page cut out] from C. Hindley, *The History of the Catnach Press* (1886), p. 67.
- there is no illustration

ooo

PERFORMANCE TRADITION

ENGLAND

Roud 2548

Mary Thompson /Mary Thomson

Samuel Holdstock

(Mill House, Wittersham, Kent)

- the following put together from entries in VWML Full English database, <http://www.vwml.org/#> (checked under both spellings).

VERSION OF AUGUST 1909

Roud Index calls this "version a":

Permanent URL: <http://www.vwml.org/record/RoudFS/S338210>

Collected by Percy Grainger (music) & Edith Lyttleton (words), 21 August, 1909.

- Lyttleton Grainger's local contact (see her letter, below).

- this version survives in two texts:

FIELD NOTEBOOK

Mary Thompson

"In Amsterdon near Derbyshire, Mary Thompson she did dwell"

- incorrect: see below

- this entry also incorrect in placing Wittersham in Gloucestershire

Percy Grainger Manuscript Collection, PG/10/50

Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne (copy at VWML)

alt ref. MG/13/1/14

Permanent URL: <http://www.vwml.org/record/PG/10/50>

- link to images of 9 pages of hand-written text (scrawl) of song

- looks like immediate transcript in field notebook

- first line actually reads "In Hampstead down ..."

FAIR COPY

Mary Thomson

"In Hampstead down Derbyshire, Mary Thomson she did dwell"

Percy Grainger Manuscript Collection PG/15/3

Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne (Copy at VWML)

alt ref. MG/13/1/7 Grainger 395

= Percy Grainger Collection: MG/13/1/7 Kentish Folksongs No.395

Permanent URL: <http://www.vwml.org/record/PG/15/3>

- link to images of 4 pages of text (looks like a fair copy of above)

+ 2 with music

+ a VWML transcription

-- lacks two stanzas (sweetheart begs for mercy on knees) in version of May 1910

VERSION OF MAY 1910

Roud Index calls this "version b"

Permanent URL: <http://www.vwml.org/record/RoudFS/S338211>

as explained in accompanying letter (see below) recorded by Lyttleton on an extra visit "to get the words", evidently at Grainger's behest and probably to check details.

Mary Thompson

"In Amsterdon near Derbyshire, Mary Thompson she did dwell"

Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne (Copy at VWML)

Percy Grainger Manuscript Collection PG/15/2

21 Aug 1909 (sic: an error)

England: Kent: Wittersham

alt ref. MG/13/1/7 Grainger 395

Percy Grainger Collection: MG/13/1/7 Kentish Folksongs No.395; included in letter PG/15/1

Permanent URL: <http://www.vwml.org/record/PG/15/2>

-- link to 7 pages of text + a VWML transcription checked and corrected tp

N.B. not the full text (error in copying at VWML???)

What is evidently the full text (not what there is here supplemented by remainder from version a) is supplied in:

Thomson, R.S. "Songs from the Grainger Collection". *FMJ*. 2.5 (1974), 335-51, at pp. 349-50.

-- states it was recorded 21 August 1909, but discernibly different from above.

Letter from Mrs. Edith Lyttleton, from Wittersham, Kent, to Percy Grainger (10 May 1910) re singer Samuel Holdstock and including text to song 'Mary Thompson'

Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne (Copy at VWML)

Percy Grainger Manuscript Collection PG/15/1

10 May 1910

England: Kent: Wittersham

Permanent URL: <http://www.vwml.org/record/PG/15/1>

-- link to 4 pages of text

+ a VWML transcription (extract copied below)

-- the first three pages are the letter itself (with Wittersham House letterhead)

-- the fourth page is a transcript of it

-- the enclosed text of the song is at PG/15/2 (immediately above, here)

WITTERSHAM HOUSE, WITTERSHAM

May 10th 10

Dear Mr Grainger

I was only too glad to go & get the words for you & am ashamed I have not done it before

You will see there are a few variations from the original copy as I enclose. I took great care to get the name of the place he was quite clear that Amsterdon was the place & you will observe near Derbyshire.

But I expect he is easily muddled. There is another line w. he insisted upon the instead of she in spite of his daughter who

corrected him.

The old Gentleman will be 87 next Monday Oct 16th "if he lives so long" his daughter said before him. he is not very well & the day after your visit was quite ill with the excitement!

...

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SCOTLAND

Mary Thompson [sic]

Mrs. Sangster

(Aikey, Scotland)

Sent to Gavin Greig in 1910 (see S-S and Lyle, below)

ONE STANZA ONLY

pr. Greig, Gavin. *Folk-Song of the North-East. Articles Contributed to the "Buchan Observer" from December 1907 to June 1911*. 2 vols. Peterhead, 1909 & 1914; repr. as one vol. (together with *Folk-Song in Buchan*). Hatboro, Pennsylvania: Folklore Associates, 1963, No. CXLVIII (the individual items are each paginated separately – there is no overall pagination) The following is on p. 2 of CXLVIII:

As the result of a second very pleasant visit to "An Old Correspondent" I have got another big installment of tunes ... Since then my friend has sent me some bits of a ballad which she says used to be sung and sold at Aikey Fair when she was a girl. It begins –

In Manchester in Lancashire
A damsel she did dwell,
In service a long time she lived,
Till this to her befell.

Her sweetheart murdered her. Can any reader supply a copy of the ballad?

-- this suggests it was both "sold" as a broadside and sung from memory.

-- no sign any one offered more information

-- evident that neither the singer nor Greig knew the name of the murdered girl:

the title "Mary Thompson" was supplied by Shuldham-Shaw and Lyle (see below).

It is also they who identify the source as "Mrs. Sangster" (but perhaps that was his alias for her?)

The Greig-Duncan Folk Song Collection. Vol. II. Ed. Patrick Shuldham-Shaw & Emily B. Lyle. Aberdeen, 1983, No. 205. (= p. 55)

+ Notes to 205 (= p. 523):

Cf. *Folk Music Journal* 2 (1974), pp. 349-50, "Mary Thompson".

(Buchan) Ob(server) 148

Acknowledged in this article, 11 October 1910, where Greig says: "[Mrs. Sangster] has sent me some bits of a ballad which she says used to be sung and sold at Aikey Fair when she was a girl. It begins [text]. Her sweetheart murdered her.". The title is editorial.

N.B. The identification of this fragment with *Mary Thomson* is an error: it quite clearly derives from the broadside *Betsy Smith*.

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NORTH AMERICA

Mary Thompson

Arthur Walker, of Littleton, Maine. USA

recorded by Marguerite Olney, 31 August 1942.

FOUR STANZAS ONLY

Sound recording

Quinn, Jennifer Post. *An Index to the Field Recordings in the Flanders Ballad Collection at Middlebury College*. Middlebury, Vermont: Middlebury College, 1983, no. 2424.

<https://archive.org/details/IndexToTheFieldRecordingsInTheFlandersBalladCollectionAtMiddleburyCollegeMiddleburyVermontOCR>

Helen Hartness Flanders Ballad Collection, Middlebury College, Vermont, D-67 A 16

= Disc 67, side A, item 16

https://archive.org/details/HHFBC_tapes_D67A , track 16 (but recording ends with item 15)

Collector's transcript (typescript)

<http://sites.middlebury.edu/flanders/files/2013/09/HHFBC-Papers-Collection-finding-aid.pdf>

Helen Hartness Flanders Ballad Collection. Papers Series VI. Song Texts

<<pdf supplied by Middlebury College Library

acknowledge Joseph F. Watson, Preservation Manager, Special Collections & Archives Associate, Davis Library Facilities Coordinator, Middlebury College.

-- see Textual Appendix below

Mary Thomson

Murchie Harvey of Houlton, Maine, USA

recorded by Marguerite Olney, 31 August 1942.

-- sic; same date as Walker at Littleton; only 7½ miles between them

Sound recording

does not figure in Quinn, Jennifer Post. *An Index to the Field Recordings in the Flanders Ballad Collection at Middlebury College*. Middlebury, Vermont: Middlebury College, 1983.

<https://archive.org/details/IndexToTheFieldRecordingsInTheFlandersBalladCollectionAtMiddleburyCollegeMiddleburyVermontOCR>

Helen Hartness Flanders Ballad Collection, Middlebury College, Vermont, D-563

= Disc 567 (Library reports not available)

Collector's transcript (typescript)

<http://sites.middlebury.edu/flanders/files/2013/09/HHFBC-Papers-Collection-finding-aid.pdf> (finding list)

Helen Hartness Flanders Ballad Collection. Papers Series VI. Song Texts

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-- see Textual Appendix below.

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TEXTUAL APPENDIX

As the above should indicate, most of the ballads within this cluster, and their derivatives from performance culture, are readily accessible via internet resources. This is not true, however, of the two versions of “Mary Thomson” from American performance tradition, collected by Marguerite Olney in 1942, which are accordingly appended here. The texts have been kindly supplied from the Helen Hartness Flanders Ballad Collection by its curators at Middlebury College, Vermont (see acknowledgements immediately above). It is understood that copyright resided with the singers and collectors, all now presumed deceased. Middlebury College does not claim copyright.

“MARY THOM(P)SON” IN AMERICAN PERFORMANCE TRADITION

Murchie Harvey

of Houlton, Maine, USA

Arthur Walker,

of Littleton, Maine. USA

Both recorded by Marguerite Olney, 31 August 1942.

Helen Hartness Flanders Ballad Collection, Middlebury College, Vermont.

It is believed that the words of the songs are not in copyright.

FOUR STANZAS ONLY

1. Come all young men and maidens fair
 come listen to my song
It's of a cruel murder
 that lately has been done
2. On the body of a maiden fair,
 the truth I will unfold,
The very secrets of this crime
 would make your blood run cold
3. In Amsterdale near Derbyshire,
 Mary Thomson, there did dwell
Long time and service she had been,
 'till this to her befell;
 - 1.1 In Amsterdam ...
 - 1.2 Mary Thompson ...
 - 1.3 ... in service ...
4. Her cheeks were like the blooming rose,
 all in the month of May
Which made her wicked young man,
 this unto her to say
 - 2.3 ... this wicked ...
5. Mary, my charming creature
 I am ensnared by thee
My love is such, I am resolved
 to wed you I declare.
 - 3.3 My heart ...

6. Thus by his false and flattering tongue
 poor Mary was beguiled
 And to her sad misfortune
 by him she proved with child
7. Sometime ago this damsel fair
 did write to him with speed
 Such tenderness, she did resolve
 would make a heart to bleed.
8. She said, "My dearest David,
 I am with child, by thee,
 Therefore, my dear, pray let me know
 when you will marry me.
9. The following day at evening,
 this young man did prepare
 Up to the town of Amsterdale
 to meet his Mary there;
10. He said, My dear, let's take a walk
 amidst the flowering field
 And then the secret of my heart
 to you I will reveal.
11. O then this wicked young man
 a knife he did prepare
 And all unknown to his true love,
 concealed it by his side;
12. When they reached the fatal spot,
 these words to her did say:
 All on this very night I will
 your precious life betray.
13. On bended knees she then did fall,
 in sorrow and despair,
 Aloud for mercy she did call
 her cries did rend the air.
14. With clasped hands and uplifted eyes
 she cried O spare my life
 And never more will I ask you
 to make me your lawful wife.
15. He pulled the knife out from his side
 -- he runs her body through,
 Her throat was cut from ear to ear
 -- most dreadful for to view
16. Her hands and arms and beautiful face,

4.1 It's by ...

4.4 ... she grew ...

he cut and mangled sore,
While down upon her milk-white breast
the crimson blood did pour.

17. He took the shawl from round her neck
and around her body tied,
With pebble stones he did it fill
thinking the crime to hide.

18. Then into a watery lake
he plung-ed her straightway
But where her precious blood was shed
it soon did him betray.

19. O then this young man taken was
and unto prison sent,
In rattling chains he was confined,
his crime for to lament

20. Soon the jury did come on
where trembling he must stand
Reflecting on the deed he'd done
-- waiting the dread command.

(the last verse Mr. Harvey could not recall)

-- i.e. two quatrains, evidently the moralizing valediction, making 22 in all

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