

# *I Wish There Was No Prisons*

## Various performers

MTCD372

### I Wish There Was No Prisons

#### Introduction:

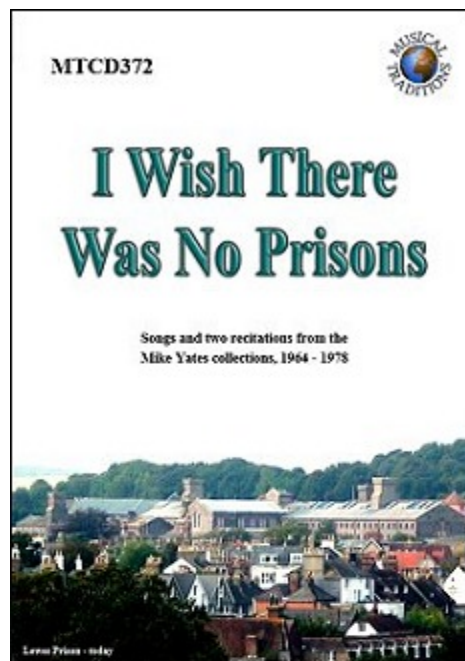
During late summer of 2015, Rod Stradling and I decided that it would be a good idea to issue all of the recordings that I had made of the Sussex folksinger Harry Upton on a single CD. Everything was going well until we discovered that we did not have room to include all of Harry's songs on the single CD *Why Can't it Always be Saturday?* (MTCD371). Two songs, *Buttercup Joe* and *The Banks of Sweet Dundee* were omitted and so we decided that a follow-up CD, containing these two tracks, would be needed. I also decided that the remaining tracks on this CD should be relevant to Harry and his songs. Accordingly, some of the songs are versions of songs which Harry sang, others are sung by people that Harry knew and, finally, we have songs that Harry would probably have recognised as being the sort of thing that he also liked to sing.

Harry Upton was only one of two singers to have been recorded singing the song *The Wreck of the Northfleet*. The other singer was Johnny Doughty and we have included Johnny's version here. I also decided to include a version of another of Harry's songs. This was *Young Maria*, a version of the song *Poison in a Glass of Wine* which Harry called *Near Arundel Town*. I had recorded the song *Young Maria* from Louise Fuller (later Saunders) and, having made up my mind to have her on the album, I decided to include all of the other songs that I recorded from her. These are *Green Grow the Laurels*, *Hopping Down in Kent*, *The Molecatcher* and her short version of *If I Was a Blackbird*. Louise loved to sing, but, rather surprisingly, she only had a small repertoire of songs, unlike Harry and some of the other singers heard here.

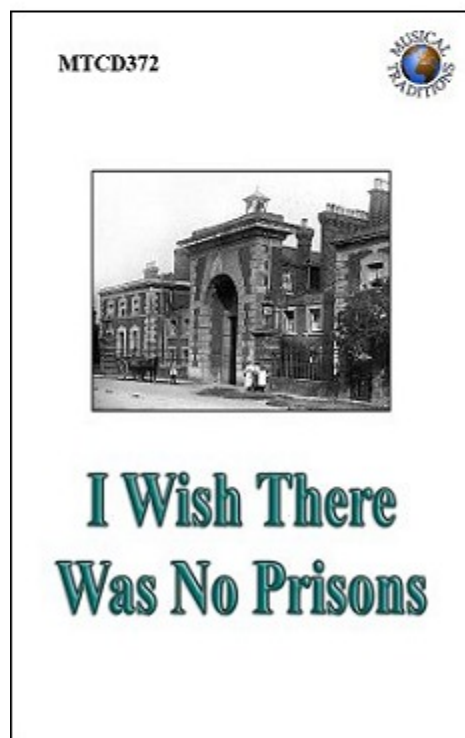
Louise Fuller/Saunders had met Harry Upton at local one-day singarounds in Sussex. He had also met the singer George Spicer and, as I said in the booklet notes to MTCD371, there was some kind of rivalry between the two singers. It seemed only fair that I should include some of George's songs here and I have chosen versions of *The German Clock Maker*, *Some n'Ham & some n'Eggs* and an *n'Onion*, *The Irish Hop-Pole Puller*, *I Wish There Was No Prisons* and *The Cunning Cobbler* for this CD. Harry, Louise and George were all from Sussex, as were Johnny Doughty, George attrill and Fred Welfare. However, the majority of singers heard here were from the Cotswolds and the Thames Valley, areas where I was also actively song collecting in the 1960s and '70s. These singers are Percy Bridges, The Cantwell Family, Alice Green, Cyril Nunn, Freda Palmer, Son Townsend and Bill Whiting. William Harding, from Urchfont in Wiltshire, was slightly to the south of the Thames Valley; which leaves us with Fred Jordan, from Shropshire, and Ruth and Clare Pinner, then young daughters of a friend of mine who lived in the East End of London.

Many of the songs heard here are versions of songs that Cecil Sharp would have called folksongs, while others come from the 19th - early 20th century Music Hall. A few songs, *The Wreck of the Northfleet*, *Wonderfully Curious*, *Hopping Down in Kent* and possibly *The Ringers*, are local songs which have seldom travelled far from their place of origin. To the best of my knowledge Cyril Nunn's *Tucker's Feast* song *Wonderfully Curious* has only been recorded from this singer.

Many of these songs would not have been called 'folksongs' by the well-meaning Cecil Sharp and many of his Edwardian contemporaries. But ideas were changing. In the booklet notes to the Harry Upton CD I gave a quotation, made only a year after Cecil Sharp's death, by Josiah H Combs and it bears repeating here:



CD case cover



CD booklet cover

The collector should take down all songs that are the exclusive property of the folk, whether they be traditional or modern, of the Child type or not ... the modern folksong (I use the word boldly) may one day perhaps have the interest for the future student which the traditional song now enjoys. Besides ... it offers a partial solution for the origin of the traditional song.

In 2010 I wrote an article, titled *Wonderfully Curious*, for *Musical Traditions*. I had, of course, taken the title from Cyril Nunn's fascinating song of the same name. In the article I briefly mentioned how song definitions had changed over the years. Cecil Sharp had defined what constituted a 'folksong' and anything outside that definition could not, therefore, be a 'folksong'. This meant that Sharp and the other collectors omitted a vast number of songs from their collections, songs which were being sung by their 'informants'. In the article I said that:

These collectors certainly came from a different social background from that of their singers, but they must also have found themselves, musically speaking, miles away from performers who sang in modes that, to begin with, were extremely alien to their own musical backgrounds. Examinations of these collectors' manuscripts have shown that songs with modal tunes were often given priority over other songs when it came to publishing the songs, and it is tempting to see such collecting activity as but a part of the general interest in otherness that then existed in a country with a worldwide Empire.

By the 1960s collectors and scholars had finally given up trying to define 'folksongs' and, instead, were using Archie Green's all-embracing term vernacular songs to describe just what it was that singers were actually singing in total. If anything, my own attitude to this type of music and song was also influenced in 1999 by something that two American anthropologists said about their own field of study, but which could equally apply to my own:

Gone are the days of describing discrete, 'authentic' traditions. Welcome, instead, to the exploration of change, movement, hybridization, creolization, negotiated identities, borderlands, and unstable authenticities.

I concluded my article with the following words:

I sometimes think that it is rather strange to be talking of witches, of maidens rescued (or, more likely, seduced) by passing knights, of builders who feel the need to spill human blood and of all the other thousand and one topics that make up the subjects of folksongs. After all, we are now living in a post-modern world! And yet, when Cyril Nunn sang his song *Wonderfully Curious* to me in his Oxfordshire home I quickly realised that this was a fitting title not only for Cyril's song, but also for all the folksongs that were still being sung. They were wonderful, truly wonderful. And if they were curious, then it was because they were simultaneously not only a reflection of the past, but also an aspect of the living present.

The reason that people were still singing of witches and knights and 'all the other thousand and one topics' was partly because people were still interested in songs and ballads that told of such things, and partly because the words to these songs had been printed on countless thousands of small paper sheets, which were called broad-

sides. In the early and mid-19th century the texts to Cecil Sharp's 'folksongs' appeared over and over on these sheets and many 20th century singers still kept a few sheets in their homes. But, by the end of the 19th century, musical tastes had begun to change and singers were increasingly singing songs which had come to them from the Music Hall stage. Indeed, by the end of the 19th century printers, like the Such family of London, were printing more music hall songs and parlour ballads than so-called folksongs. So it was little wonder that the earlier songs were beginning to disappear from the repertoire of traditional singers. Then there was the arrival of the radio, which again altered musical dynamics, as did television. Suddenly, musicians and singers could be heard in the home, simply by flicking a switch.

Yet, as these and many other recordings attest, many older songs did survive into the late 20th century. Many may still be being sung today. I often feel, however, that the tradition in England which Cecil Sharp was trying to rescue is now, more or less, over, and that it has been replaced by new generations of singers and storytellers who often come from different backgrounds and who perform to new audiences in different situations and venues. In other words, as one tradition comes to a close, another one has risen to replace it.

Most of the singers heard on these recordings were in their sixties or seventies when I met them and most are no longer with us today. They were proud of their songs and of their ability to sing them so well; and I was pleased to have met them and to have had the opportunity to help them record these snapshots of their lives.

### **The Singers:**

**Percy Bridges** lived in the Oxfordshire village of Ascott-under-Wychwood. I called in the village pub one Saturday afternoon, looking for singers, and was directed to Percy's cottage. This was the only song that he appeared to know.

Members of **The Cantwell Family** had been recorded by the BBC in the 1950s. I called on their home in Standlake, Oxon, one Saturday in 1964 and discovered that a family party was in progress. I suggested coming back at a later date, but was invited into the kitchen where the men had gathered. They were already singing when I arrived and were quite happy to let me record the songs. Another song from this session, *The Yorkshire Blinder*, can be heard on VTC7CD.

**Johnny Doughty** (1904-86), originally from Brighton, Sussex, was living in Camber Sands when we met. Vic Smith interviewed him for BBC Radio Sussex and a transcription of this lengthy interview can be found on the *Musical Traditions* website (article 100). Other recordings that I made of Johnny may be heard on MTCD311-2, VTC5CD, VTC7CD, TSCD600, TSCD652, TSCD657, TSCD662 and TSCD664.

**Louise Fuller/Saunders** was born in Woolwich, London on 6 June 1914 where her father worked at Woolwich Arsenal. The family was living in West London, around Ladbrooke Grove in the Thirties, but she moved to Newchapel in Surrey with her Traveller husband at the

outbreak of war to avoid the bombing. She wanted her mother to join them, but she remained in London where she worked at Cadby Hall in Hammersmith, the HQ of Lyons Tea Houses. There was a direct hit on the factory where her mother worked and she was badly traumatised and never got over it.

Louie's husband died in the early seventies and she remarried - to his best friend - so that it was as Louie Fuller that she appeared on Topic's LP *Green Grows the Laurels*, in 1976. She went to a number of Ken Stubbs' singing sessions in the Seventies, and was also invited to the 1998 National Festival. Louie learned songs from both her parents who, like many Londoners, took her hop picking in Kent during the late summer and there she spent her leisure hours singing and storytelling at hop-picker gatherings and family parties. She also learned most of her songs there, although many of them are short or fragmented versions. She was a singer of great spirit and style and her enthusiastic, smiling delivery of her songs won her admirers wherever she chose to perform them. Her version of *Hopping Down in Kent* enjoyed enormous popularity. Louie can be heard singing another version of *Young Maria* on MTCD309-10.

**Alice Green** lived in the village of Bampton, Oxon. She was an elderly, and charming, lady who could only remember the two songs heard here. I called on her several times before she would let me record her songs and, as chance would have it, her neighbour decided to do some heavy garden work when Alice was singing. I hope that the noise will not detract from the singing at the end of *When Shall We get Married, John?*

**William Harding:** In 1978 I spent some time travelling around Berkshire and Wiltshire in the company of fellow folklorist Roly Brown. One lunchtime we called at *The Lamb Inn* in Urchfont, Wiltshire, where we met William Harding, who not only agreed to sing to us, but who also gave us a local poem and a reminiscence of a band that had once played in the village of Potterne.

**Fred Jordan** (1922-2002) was first recorded in 1952 by the BBC. He became a firm favourite with Festival audiences and many of his songs may be heard on the double Veteran CD set *A Shropshire Lad* (VTD148CD).

**Cyril Nunn** was from Witney, Oxon, and had worked as a tucker at the Witney Mill for almost all of his life. This was the only song that I recorded from him.

**Freda Palmer** was living in Witney, Oxon, when I met her. She was originally from Leafield and had learnt most of her songs from an aunt, when, as a young girl, she worked making gloves in her aunt's home. She can also be heard on MTCD311-2, TSCD653, and VTC7CD.

**Ruth & Clare Pinner** were the daughters of a friend of mine who lived in East London. They had learnt the song *We Are the Gypsy Riders* in their school playground.

**George Spicer** (1906-1981) was born in Kent, but became well-known towards the end of his life as a Sussex singer. George Frampton has produced a four-part article about George which may be found on-line on the Musical Traditions website (articles 274/6/7/9). George Spicer can also

be heard singing on MTCD309-10, MTCD311-12, TSCD664, TSCD665 and VTC4CD.

**Thomas Albert "Son" Townsend** (1914--2008) was from Bampton, Oxon, where his father kept the Elephant and Castle pub. He was involved with the Bampton Morris Dancers, first dancing with them in 1925 when he was only eleven years old. Towards the end of his life he was the team's Clown. This was the only song that I recorded from him, although I am sure that he knew others.

**Harry Upton** A biography of Harry Upton can be found in the booklet notes which accompany his solo CD *Why Can't It Always be Saturday?* (MTCD371).

**Alfred 'Fred' Welfare** (b. 1917) was a farmer from North Chailey in Sussex. He had learnt a number of songs from his father and was well-known locally as a singer. Several people mentioned him to me before I was finally able to find him at home one evening.

**Bill Whiting** lived in Longcot, Wiltshire, in a bungalow at the end of a quiet close, an ideal place to record. Bill had been born in 1891 and, much to my amazement, not only knew some of the singers who had sung to Alfred Williams prior to the Great War, but actually remembered Williams visiting William Jefferies in Longcot to collect Jefferies's songs. Over a couple of years I tried to pump Bill's memory for some of the songs that William Jefferies had sung - *Captain Barnwell* or *The Bold Dragoon*, say - but the only song to register was a version of *Old Moll* which Bill insisted he had learnt not from old Mr Jefferies but from members of the Jordan family, who had also sung to Alfred Williams.

Bill told me that singing was something that should be carried out in the pubs. That was where he had learnt most of his songs. The only one that had not come from pub sessions was his fragment of *The Prickle Holly Bush* which had always been sung at Harvest Suppers. He had a good version of *The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington*, one similar to that sung by Freda Palmer, and an excellent version of *Our Goodman*, this again from the Jordans. Bill sang a number of music hall songs, such as *The Way of the World* and George Le Brunn's *The Song of the Thrush* which, I suspect, had come to Longcot via Chris Hall's immensely popular early 78 recording (Edison Bell Winner 5181).

**George Attrill** (born 1887) was discovered by Bob Copper, who recorded him for the BBC in 1954. George had worked for most of his life around Fittleworth, where he was employed as a Council road maintenance worker. He was also a renowned poacher and I remember him showing me what appeared to be a wooden walking stick, but which, on inspection, turned out to be a powerful pump-action air rifle which he used to catch pheasants. Like Bob Copper, I shared a few glasses (or "toothfuls") of George's excellent home-made "parsmitt" wine with him before he felt ready to sing to me. George picked up most of his songs in his youth from another local singer, one John Johnson, whose daughter, Gladys Stone, was also recorded by Bob Copper. The Sussex collector Tony Wales once told me that he had asked George for a list of all the songs that he knew. George replied that he couldn't remember so many song titles, but, if Tony liked, he could recite the names of all the pubs in Brighton!

A recording of *The Broken-Down Gentleman*, recorded from George Attrill by Bob Copper, can be heard on TSCD671. (A recording of Gladys Stone singing *Deep in Love* can also be heard on the same Topic CD.)

## The Recordings:

Roud Numbers quoted are from the databases, *The Folk Song Index* and *The Broadside Index*, continually updated, compiled by Steve Roud. Currently containing more than 452,000 records between them, they are described by him as "extensive, but not yet exhaustive". Copies are held at: The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, London; Taisce Ceoil Dúchais Éireann, Dublin; and the School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh. They can also be purchased direct from Steve at Southwood, Maresfield Court, High Street, Maresfield, East Sussex, TN22 2EH, UK. Recording dates are shown in the sequence day/month/year.

Child numbers, where quoted, refer to entries in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* by Francis James Child, Boston, 1882-98. Laws numbers, where quoted, refer to entries in *American Balladry from British Broad-sides* by G Malcolm Laws Jr, Philadelphia, 1957.

In the following Song Notes, all Musical Traditions Records' CDs are referred to only by their Catalogue Numbers (i.e. MTCDxxx), as are all Topic Records' CDs (i.e. TSCDxxx) and Veteran CDs (i.e. VTxxxCD). The names of all other CD publishers are given in full.

Omitted words, lines or verses are shown in italics, where appropriate, if we have them.

## The Songs:

### 1. **I Wish There Was No Prisons** (Roud 1708) (Sung by George Spicer at his home in Selsfield, Sussex. 1973)

I wish there was no prisons. I do. Don't you?  
For the old treadmill makes me feel ill  
I only steal my belly to fill  
With my hands, with me mits, with me maulers

Oakum picking gives me a licking  
Still I'm very fond of a little bit of nicking  
With me hands, with me fists, with me mauler

I saw a girl with a perambulator  
She'd got twins, and each had a tater  
In its hand, in its fist, in its mauler

I kissed one kid and collared t'other's tater  
With me hands, with me fists, with my maulers

I wish there was no prisons. I do. Don't you?  
For the old treadmill makes me feel ill  
I only steal my belly to fill  
With me hands, with me dukes, with me mauler.

George Spicer's song, which seems to parody the old minstrel song *I Wish I Was in Dixie*, was probably originally sung on the Music Hall stage. Martin Graebe has traced it

to a broadside in the Baring-Gould collection, which was printed c.1890 by R Maynard of 346, Hackney Road in East London. Maynard's text is as follows:

*I'm one of those fellows what gets my livin'  
By taking things what isn't given  
With my hand - with my hand  
With my hand - With my dook*

*Now I started a bis'ness in Petticoat Lane  
I mean I started the fingerin' game  
With my hand - with my hand  
With my hand - With my dook*

*I wish there was no prisons, I do, - I does  
For the old treadmill It makes me ill  
And I only steal my belly for to fill  
With my hand - with my hand  
I wish there was no prisons*

*Today I met a big fat boy  
He'd a lot of peas-pudding and a penny saveloy  
In his hand - in his hand  
In his hand - in his dook*

*The pudding looked nice, it was smoking hot  
I sneaked behind the kid and collared all the lot  
With my hand - with my hand  
With my hand - With my dook*

*I wish there was no prisons, I do, - I does  
For oakum pickin gives me a lickin'  
When I'm run in for a little bit of nickin  
With my hand - with my hand  
I wish there was no prisons*

*As I was getn' past a great music hall  
I saw a kid sneak a trotter off a stall  
With his hand - with his hand  
With his hand - with his dook*

*The owner had gone for change and not seein' copper  
I chucked him under the chin  
And he dropped that trotter  
In my hand - in my hand  
In my hand - in my dook*

*I once met a girl she'd a perambulator  
With two kids in it, one of 'em had a hot potato  
In his hand - in his hand  
In his hand - in his dook*

*As she was courting a nice young baker  
I kissed one of the kids and sneaked the other's tater  
With my hand - with my hand  
In my hand - in my dook*

This text was later printed, as *The Happy Crook* in Charles Joseph Finger's book *Frontier Ballads* (New York, Doubleday, Page & Co) in 1927.

### 2. **Buttercup Joe** (Roud 1635) (Sung by Harry Upton at his home in Balcombe, Sussex. 1976)

Now I be a true-bred country chap,

My father come from Fareham  
My mother she has some more like I  
And well knows how to rare (*rear*) 'em  
Some people call I 'Bacon Fat'  
And others 'Turnip Ned'  
Well I can prove I be'nt no flat\*  
Although I'm country bred

*Chorus:*

For I can drive a plough and milk a cow  
I can rip (*reap*) and mow  
I'm as fresh as the daisy that grow in the field  
And they call I Buttercup Joe

Now have you seen my young woman,  
They call her "Our Mary"  
She works as busy as a bumble bee  
Down in St Johnson's dairy  
And don't she makes those dumplings nice,  
By Jove I mean to try 'em  
And asked her if she'd like to wed  
A country chap like I am

*Chorus*

Some people they like haymaking  
And others they like mowin'  
But of all the jobs that I like best,  
Is a job called turnip hoeing  
And don't I hope when I get wed  
To my old Mary Ann  
I'll help her and I'll try my best  
To please her all I can

*Chorus*

\*flat = fool, a term known from c.1760 onwards.

It seems strange that the origins of this highly popular song remain unclear. Pearson of Manchester printed the words on a broadside c.1870 and the text can also be found in the New Prize Medal Song Book, no.9, which appeared two years later, in 1872. Both printings indicate that the song was sung by one Harry Garratt, though who exactly Garratt was remains a mystery.

Alfred Williams noted a text, without tune, and both Cecil Sharp and George Gardiner collected single versions, both with tunes. In 1928 the Sussex singer Albert Richardson recorded a version for Zonophone Records. Sharp and Gardiner's tunes were distinct from each other, and from the tune used by Richardson. However, versions of the song collected post - 1928 (and there have been quite a few collected sets since then) almost always used Richardson's tune.

Other recordings: Jim Wilson (Sussex) MTCD 309-10. Caroline Hughes (Dorset) MTCD 365-6. Unknown singer (Suffolk) - Veteran VTDC8CD.

**3. The Banks of the Sweet Dundee** (Roud 148)  
(Sung by Harry Upton at his home in Balcombe, Sussex. 1976)

It was of a farmer's daughter,  
So beautiful and fair  
Her parents died and left her

Five hundred pounds a year  
She lived with her uncle,  
The cause of all her woes  
And you will hear this maiden fair,  
Did prove an overthrow  
*Repeats last four lines.*

Her uncle had a ploughboy  
Young Mary loved him well  
Out in her uncle's garden  
Their tale of love could tell  
But there was a wealthy squire  
Who oft came her to see  
But still she loved her ploughboy  
On the banks of the sweet Dundee

It was on one summer's morning,  
Her uncle rode straightway  
He knocked at her bedroom door  
And unto her did say  
"Come arise you pretty maiden,  
A lady you may be  
For the squire is waiting for you  
On the banks of the sweet Dundee

"A fig for all your squires,  
Your lords and dukes likewise  
My William's hands appears to me  
Like diamonds in my eyes"  
"Be ungone you unruly female  
You never shall happy be  
For I mean to vanish (banish?) William  
From the banks of the sweet Dundee

Her uncle and the squire  
Rode out one summer's morn  
"Young William is in favour"  
Her uncle he did say  
"Indeed, it's my intention  
To tie him to a tree  
Or else to board the press gang  
On the banks of the sweet Dundee

The press-gang came to William  
When he was all alone  
He boldly fought for liberty,  
But there was six to one  
The blood it flowed in torments (torrents?)  
"Pray kill me now," said he  
"For I would rather die for Mary,  
On the banks of the sweet Dundee"

This maid one day was walking,  
Lamenting for her own  
She met this wealthy squire  
Down in her uncle's grove  
He put his arms around her,  
"Stand off, bad man", said she  
"You have sent the only lad I love  
From the banks of the sweet Dundee"

He clasped his arms around her  
And tried to throw her down  
Two pistols and a sword she spied  
Beneath his morning gown  
Young Mary took the weapon,

His sword he used so free  
And she did fire and shot the squire  
On the banks of the sweet Dundee

Her uncle overheard the shot,  
He hastened to the spot  
"Since you have killed the squire,  
I'll give you your death wound"  
"Stand off, stand off" young Mary cried,  
"Undaunted I won't be"  
She the trigger drew and her uncle slew  
On the Banks of the Sweet Dundee

A doctor soon was sent for,  
A man of noted skill  
And likewise for a lawyer,  
For him to sign his will  
He willed his gold to Mary,  
Who fought so man-i-fully  
And now she lives quite happy  
On the banks of the sweet Dundee

Once an extremely popular song, the Scottish song collector Gavin Greig wrote that 'Few ballads are so popular and so widely distributed ... It seems to be as well known in England as in Scotland, and appears in several collections. Its popularity may so far be due to its tragic character.' Frank Kidson, a Yorkshire collector and antiquarian, noted that there was enough tragedy and injured innocence in the ballad to furnish the plot of a penny novelette. Kidson did, however, add that he thought the words to be 'sublime doggerel!' It should be noted that Harry's version is lacking the usual ending, one in which Mary uses her gold to free William from the Navy, so that they can then be married "on the banks of the sweet Dundee"; and also that Harry uses a tune related to another of his songs, Canadee-i-o, rather than the tune that we normally find attached to the words. A follow-up broadside, Answer to Undaunted Mary (Roud 5649), does not appear to have been so popular as the original song.

Other recordings: Rebecca Penfold (Devon) - TSCD672D. Fred Jordan (Shropshire) - VTD148CD. Bill Smith (Shropshire) - MTCD351. Danny Brazil (Gloucestershire) - MTCD345-7. "Straighty" Flanagan (Ireland) - MTCD331-2. Caroline Hughes (Dorset) - MTCD365-6. Walter Pardon (Norfolk) - TSCD515. Bob Brader (Lincolnshire) - TSCD665. Maggie Murphy (Ireland) - VT134CD. Joe Thomas (Cornwall) - TSCD673T. Reg Bacon (Suffolk) - Helions Bumpstead NLCD 5/6. Walter Gedge (Suffolk) - Helions Bumpstead NLCD 54.

#### 4. The Wreck of the "Northfleet" (Roud 1174) (Sung by Johnny Doughty at his home in Camber Sands, Sussex. 1976)

Come listen all ye feeling people  
While this sad story I relate  
It's about a vessel called the *Northfleet*  
Which met with such an awful fate  
Five hundred souls she had aboard her  
Lay anchored there, off Dungeness  
Bound for Australia was the vessel  
They'd bid farewell with fond caress

It was a big and foreign vessel  
Came drifting with the channel tide  
Bore down upon the helpless *Northfleet*  
And crashed into her timbered side  
Nor did she stop to give assistance  
Or repair the damage she had made  
While everyone aboard the *Northfleet*  
Went down upon their knees and prayed

*Chorus:*  
God bless those widows and those orphans  
Comfort them where e'er they be  
May God in Heaven above protect them  
From all the perils of the sea.

The Captain sent down for his First Mate  
And bade him try and save his life  
And gave into his trustful keeping  
His young but newly-wedded wife  
"No, let me stay with you, dear husband"  
"No, no, my wife, that cannot be"  
She stayed aboard the sinking vessel,  
With him went to eternity.

The Captain said, "Now to the lifeboats  
Stand back you men, the women first  
I'll shoot the first that disobeys me"  
They did not heed but madly rushed  
The Captain fired, his shot was fatal  
And one poor fellow's life was slain  
While everyone aboard the *Northfleet*  
Went down upon their knees and prayed.

*Chorus*

During the night of January 22nd 1873 the sailing ship *Northfleet* was anchored in the English Channel, ready to sail to Australia. On board were some 379 persons, mostly railway workers, en route to build the Tasmanian railway. The vessel was also carrying a cargo of railway iron. At 10:30pm the Spanish steamship *Murillo* struck the *Northfleet* amidships at water level and within fifteen minutes 320 of the *Northfleet*'s passengers were dead, including Captain Knowles who, revolver in hand, had tried to prevent his crew from panicking (Johnny's 500 dead is an exaggeration). Although it was a calm clear night the *Murillo* did not stop, and it was not until September 22nd that the ship was arrested by the Admiralty who subsequently confiscated the vessel. I believe that a number of families now living in Dungeness also know versions of the song.

Other recordings: MTCD371 - Harry Upton (Sussex).

#### 5. Young Maria (Roud 218) (Sung by Louise Fuller/Saunders at her home in Lingfield, Surrey. 1976)

On yonder hill stood young Maria  
Her jealous young lover stood by her side  
When he asked her for to marry  
"Oh no, my true-love, too young," she cried

Now Maria was invited to a fancy dress ball  
That jealous young lover followed behind

He saw her dancing with some other  
Then jealousy must have entered his mind

Now, how to destroy his own true-love one  
When jealousy it did enter his mind  
How he destroyed his own true-love one  
He gave her a glass of cold poison wine

Now quickly she drunk and quickly she altered  
"Pick me up my true-love," cried she  
"That glass of wine that you've just gave me  
Has made me as ill, as ill can be"

"Now I will drink one of the same, love  
And make myself as ill as thee.  
In each other's arms we will die together  
And put an end to all jealousy."

This song, often given the catch-all title *Poison in a Glass of Wine*, turns up frequently in many different forms and one might think that it had an early origin. However, according to Steve Gardham (private correspondence) it can only be traced back to an eleven stanza version, titled *Oxford City*, which was originally printed by two London broadside printers, Pitts and Catnach. This was then reprinted widely by several other later printers. A seven stanza version, titled *Newport Street Damsel*, possibly from oral tradition, was printed by Batchelar of London. Walden of Gloucester reprinted this version, this time calling it *The Effects of Jealousy*. Steve also points out that 'some versions have become hybridised with other ballads, but this can easily be spotted, especially by comparing with the 11 stanza broadside.'

Other recordings: George Spicer (Sussex) & Freda Palmer (Oxfordshire) - MTCD311-2. Pop Maynard (Sussex) - MTCD 309-10. The Brazil Family (Gloucestershire) - MTCD345-7. May Bradley (Shropshire) - MTCD349. Caroline Hughes (Dorset) - MTCD365-6. Garrett & Norah Arwood (North Carolina) - MTCD503-4. Mary Lozier (Kentucky) - MTCD505-6). Nimrod Workman (West Virginia) - MTCD512. Roscoe Holcomb (Kentucky) - Smithsonian Folkways SF CD 40077. Fred Jordan (Shropshire) - Veteran VTD148CD. Harry Cox (Norfolk) - Topic TSCD512D. Sheila Stewart (Perthshire) - Topic TSCD 515. Joseph Taylor (Lincolnshire) - Topic TSCD 653. Celia Hughes (Dorset) - Topic TSCD672D. Mary Doran (Belfast) - Topic TSCD673T.

## 6. **Green Grows the Laurels** (Roud 279) (Sung by Louise Fuller/Saunders at her home in Lingfield, Surrey. 1976)

I met a young damsel her age was sixteen  
She was as good looking as a young fairy queen  
I walked her, I talked her, I took her astray  
I changed the green laurels for the violets so gay

*Chorus (after each verse):*

Green grow the laurels, so does the dew  
Sorry 'I've seen (*been?*) since I parted from you  
But when I return, love, my joys shall be new  
Then I'll change the green laurels for the violets so blue

Now the next one I met he was a bold tar  
His eyes and his medals shone like the blue star  
I gave him the wink and I called him away  
Then I changed the green laurels for the violets so gay

Now the next one I met he was a pageboy  
I gave him my loving and all of my joy  
Now he has left me and gone far away  
But I'll change the green laurels for the violets so gay.

Ophelia, Shakespeare's tragic heroine, sings a number of song snatches in the play *Hamlet*. Several of these deal with what some writers call 'the language of flowers' as does our present song. Of *Green Grow the Laurels* Peter Kennedy has this to say: 'As love symbolism, green laurels imply innocence and fickleness, whereas violets stand for truth and constancy.' According to Steve Gardham the earliest broadside versions, all having five stanzas, were titled *Can't You Love Who(m) You Please*. There are late 18th century sheets by Morren of Edinburgh and Evans of London and early 19th century sheets by Pitts of London, Kendrew of York and Stephenson of Gateshead. Later sheets were issued, as *I Changed the Green Willow for the Orange and Blue* by printers such as Forth of Hull and Fortey of London. The song is often met with today in southern England and is especially popular with travellers and Gypsies.

Other recordings: Daisy Chapman (Aberdeenshire) - MTCD308. Mary Delaney (London) - MTCD325-6. Caroline Hughes (Dorset) - MTCD365-6.

## 7. **Hopping Down in Kent** (Roud 1715) (Sung by Louise Fuller/Saunders at her home in Lingfield, Surrey. 1976)

Now some say hopping's lousy, I don't believe it's true  
For we only go down hopping to pick a hop or two

*Chorus:*

With my tee-aye-o tee-aye-o, tee-aye-ee-aye-o.

Now when I went a hopping, hopping down in Kent  
I saw old Mother Riley a-sweeping out her tent

Now every Monday morning, just at six o'clock  
You'll hear the old hoppers calling:

Get up and boil your pots

Now Sunday is our washing day, don't we wash it clean  
We boil it in our hopping pots and hang it on the green

Now do you want any money? Yes sir if you please  
To buy a hock of bacon and a pound of mouldy cheese

Now here comes our old measurer,  
With his long nose and chin  
With his ten gallon basket, and don't he pop 'em in!

When our old pole-puller he does come around  
He says: Come on you dirty ol' hop-pickers,  
Pick 'em up all off the grounds

Now hopping is all over, all the money spent  
And don't I wished I never went a-hopping down in Kent



Hops, used to flavour beer, have been grown in Kent since the early 16th century. The cones are ready for picking in September and, before machines took over, the hops would be picked from the vines by hand. Traditionally the work would be carried out by families from London's East End, who considered this to be their annual holiday, and by local Gypsies. It has been estimated that, in some years, as many as 80,000 East Enders would visit the hop fields. So far we have been unable to trace the song to a known author.

Other recordings: Mary Ann Haynes (Sussex) - MTCD320.

### 8. **The Molecatcher** (Roud 1052)

(Sung by Louise Fuller/Saunders at her home in Lingfield, Surrey. 1976)

Now, somewhere in Sussex not far from *The Plough*  
There lived an old molecatcher, I couldn't tell you how  
A-molecatching he'd go from morning till night  
Till he caught the young farmer  
    come and played with his wife  
Now upstairs they went, so fur'vely design  
The old molecatcher followed them closely behind  
Just as they got in the middle of the sport  
The old molecatcher caught hold  
    of the young farmer's coat

He says, "Eh, what have you got at?  
I've got you caught hard in my old mole trap."  
I looked at the farmer and grinned at my wife  
"He's the fined old mole I ever caught in my life"

"Now," so say the farmer for ploughing his ground  
"When I do plough it will cost him ten pounds  
When I do tell him she'll say it's not fine  
But I'm sure she won't come to about tuppence a time!"

Right fol the ri laddy, right fol the ri day  
Now all you young farmers that come down our way  
If you're not napping you're sure to be fine  
But I'm sure she won't come to about tuppence a time!"

The Molecatcher is one of those songs beloved of the folk, if not the song collectors! The earliest known versions can be found in two chapbooks, Daniel Cooper's *Garland*, printed in Bristol c.1765, and *The Frisky Songster*, dated 1776. Edwardian song collectors found this song hard to take. According to the Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould, it was 'very gross'; while Ralph Vaughan Williams, who collected three sets in Norfolk, felt that the words were "unsuitable" for the *Journal of the Folk Song Society*. Surprisingly, there appear to be no known Victorian broadsides.

*Other recording:* Gordon Hall (Sussex) - VT115CD.

### 9. **If I Were a Blackbird** (Roud 387)

(Sung by Louise Fuller/Saunders at her home in Lingfield, Surrey. 1976)

I am a young maiden, my story is sad  
Once I was courting a brave sailor lad  
I courted him truly by night and by day

Now he has left me and gone far away

*Chorus:*

If I were a blackbird I'd whistle and sing  
I'd follow the ship that my true love sailed in  
And in the top rigging I'd there build my nest  
And pillow my head on her lily-white breast

He promised to take me to Donnybrook fair  
And buy me red ribbons to tie up my hair  
But now he has left me and gone on the tide  
I know he'll come back and he'll make me his bride

I said in the notes to Harry Upton's version of this song (MTCD371) that it probably predates the recordings made in 1939 and 1950 by Delia Murphy and Ronnie Ronalde. However, our present short version may have been picked up from one of the recorded versions, via the radio. I say this because there is mention of 'Donnybrook Fair', a place name which is found in the recorded versions.

Other recordings: May Bradley (Shropshire) - MTCD349. Mary Ann Haynes (Sussex) - MTCD320. Cyril Poacher (Suffolk) - MTCD303. Bob Hart (Suffolk) - MTCD301-2, Walter Pardon (Norfolk) - MTCD305-6). Harry Brazil (Gloucestershire) - MTCD345-7). Albert 'Diddy Cook (Suffolk) - VT140CD & TSCD665. Carolyn Hughes (Dorset) - MTDC365-6 & MTCD254. Sheila Hughes (Dorset) - MTCD254. Blanche Wood (Scotland) - Rounder CD 1786. Harry Upton (Sussex) - MTCD371.

### 10. **I Know Where There's a Blackbird's Nest** (Roud 23614)

(Sung by The Cantwell Family, Standlake, Oxon. 1964)

I know where there's a blackbird's nest  
I know where 'e be  
'E be in yon turnip field, and I be after 'e  
'E spies I and I spies 'e,  
    he calls I a bugger and liar  
When I finds that blackbird's nest  
I'll set the bugger on fire

Working on a farm, four and twenty years  
'E can't take the rise out of I  
For there ain't no bird on this y'ere farm  
Can hide his nest from I

I wish I was back home in Gloucester  
Where all them birds they flock round I  
I clap my hands and laugh like buggery  
Ha, ha, ha. Just to see them blackbirds fly

Be I Somerset, be I buggery  
I comes up from Wareham  
Me mother's got ten more like I  
Be God she knows how to rare 'em  
And they calls I "Buttercup Joe"

*Spoken:* That's it!

A well-known, if not well-collected, country song. It seems to turn up all over south-west England and is still clearly popular in this part of the world today. On the surface it is



quite a simple piece, although I have heard it suggested that the song may hold deeper meaning. Could the black-bird actually be a reference to a Catholic priest hiding out in a priest's hole (just as the moorhen in the Scottish song The Bonny Moorhen is actually a hidden reference to Bonnie Prince Charlie?) Had the priest been captured then he could indeed have been burnt at the stake ("I'll set the bugger on fire"). Sadly, there seems to be nothing to actually link the song to those troubled times, and so the idea must remain speculative for the time being. The final line is, of course, from the song Buttercup Joe, while the preceding four lines are often sung separately by singers. My father's version, learnt in the British Army sometime during the Second World War, went something like:

*Be I Bristol? Be I buggery!  
I be up from Wareham  
Where all the whores wear calico drawers  
And I knows how to tear 'em  
(Singer then makes a ripping sound!)*

### 11. **Good English Ale** (Roud 2414) (Sung by The Cantwell Family, Standlake, Oxon. 1964)

Now when I was a little 'un, my father did say  
That ere that sun did shine, 'twas time to make hay  
When hay had been gathered and harvest was got  
'Twas farmer's tradition to drink from the pot

*Chorus:*  
Singing, ale, ale, good English ale  
Served up in pewter, it tells its own tale  
Now some folks likes radishes and some curly kale  
But gi' I boiled parsnips and a good dish of taties  
And a lump of fat bacon and a quart of good ale

Now these folks in parliament, their pledge for to keep  
They do nothing else but they sit there and sleep  
The next one I vote for will be a female  
Who can stand up and drink her fair share of good ale

Now these here tee-totallers, they drink water neat  
It must rust their stomachs and give 'em damp feet  
I allus did say that a man could go stale  
On broad beans and carrots and a quart of good ale

*Spoken:* You got it now, boy.

This has all the hall marks of a Music hall song, although, sadly, we have been unable to trace it to any specific source.

Other recordings: Charlie Showers (Somerset) - MTCD252.

### 12. **I Wish I Was Single Again** (Roud 437) (Sung by Freda Palmer at her home in Witney, Oxon. 1975)

When I was a young man, oh then, oh then, oh then  
When I was a young man, oh then  
I'd a horse to ride upon and a sword beside my side  
And money in my pocket to spend, spend, spend

*Chorus:*  
Again and again and again, again and again and again

For when I was single my pockets they jingled  
Oh I wish I was single again/I was glad I was single again

I married my wife, oh then, oh then  
I married my wife, oh then  
I married my wife she was the plague of my life  
Oh I wish I was single again

My wife she did die, oh then, oh then  
My wife she did die, oh then  
My wife she did die and I laughed till I cried  
For I was glad I was single again

I followed her to the churchyard, oh then, oh then  
I followed her to the churchyard, oh then  
The band of music played and I danced all the way  
For I was glad I was single again

As I was a-coming back, oh then, oh then  
As I was a-coming back, oh then  
As I was a-coming back I met another lass  
And I was glad I was single again

I married the other, oh then, oh then  
I married the other, oh then  
I married the other, she was  
a damn sight worse than t'other  
And I wish I was single again

A well-known and frequently collected song, and one which seems to have once been especially popular in America. Freda's song was popularised on the English Music Hall Stage by the singer Ernest Butcher (1885-1965), who called it I Married a Wife. Butcher's final verse is omitted by Freda:

*Young men who have wives, Oh then  
Young men who have wives, Oh then  
Be kind to the first, for the next may be worse  
And you'll long for the first one again*

Most commentators suggest that the song is based on another piece, When I Was Young (Roud 894), which more or less tells the same story, though from a woman's point of view. This latter song was printed, c.1850, in the songster 120 Comic Songs sung by Sam Cowell and begins:

*When I was a maid, O then, O then,  
When I was a maid, O then,  
As many bright stars as appear in the sky,  
So many lovers were caught by my eye,  
But I was a beauty then, O then,  
But I was a beauty then.*

Other recordings: Dan Tate (Virginia) - MTCD501-2 (as The Devil's Grandmother). Peggy MacGillivray (Edinburgh) - Rounder CD1795 (A children's parody, titled The World Must be Coming to an End).

### 13. **Near Woodstock Town** (Roud 60) (Sung by Son Townsend at Freda Palmer's home in Witney, Oxon. 1975)

This song, complete in itself, is actually the first part of a longer 18th century broadside ballad, which is also known as The Oxfordshire Tragedy (a copy exists in the Bodleian

Library in Oxford.). It will be seen that Son Townsend's set comprises the first six stanzas:

Near Woodstock town in Oxfordshire,  
As I walk'd forth to take the air,  
To view the fields and meadows round,  
Methought I'd heard a mournful sound.

Down by a crystal river side,  
A galliant bower I espied,  
Where a fair lady made great moan,  
With many a bitter sigh and groan.

"Alas!" quoth she, "my love's unkind,  
My sighs and tears he will not mind!  
But he is cruel unto me,  
Which causes all my misery."

"Soon after he had gain'd my heart,  
He cruelly did from me part;  
Another maid he does pursue,  
And to his vows he bids adieu."

The lady round the meadow ran,  
And gather'd flowers as they sprang;  
Of every sort she there did pull,  
Until she got her apron full.

The green turf served her as a bed,  
And flowers a pillow for her head;  
She laid her down and nothing spoke,  
Alas! for her, her heart was broke.

*Soon after was the squire possessed  
With various thoughts that broke his rest,  
Sometimes he thought her groans he heard,  
Sometimes her ghastly ghost appeared.*

*'Since my unkindness did destroy  
My dearest love and only joy  
My wretched life must ended be;  
Now must I die and come to thee!*

*His rapier from his side he drew  
And pierced his body through and through,  
So he dropped down in purple gore  
Just where she did some time before.*

*He buried was within the grave  
Of his true love - and thus you have  
A sad account of his hard fate,  
Who died in Oxfordshire of late.*

The first six stanzas, which Son sings, were later reprinted in J L Hatton & Eaton Fannings's 2 volume book *The Songs of England* (Boosey & Co., London and New York) in 1879, and it would seem likely that Son picked the song up, directly or indirectly, from this later publication. Some stanzas also turn up in others songs, such as *Since Love Has Brought Me to Despair*.

It has been suggested that the ballad may be based on the story of Amy Robsart, wife of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and a favourite of Queen Elizabeth 1st. who, in 1560, was found dead at the foot of some stairs at Cumnor Place, Oxfordshire, a building which happens to be 'near Woodstock town'. Some say that she died of a broken

heart, others that she was murdered by her husband. Whatever the cause, Amy's ghost was said to have appeared in front of Dudley when he was hunting one day in Combury Park. She apparently warned him that he would die within ten days, and, in fact, he did!

Other recordings: Berzilla Wallin (North Carolina) - Smithsonian Folkways SFW CD 40159 (as *Love Has Brought Me to Despair*).

#### 14. **The Irish Hop-Pole Puller** (Roud 1709) (Sung by George Spicer at his home in Selsfield, Sussex. 1974)

I'm Coster Joe from down our street  
Me heart its nearly broke  
I lost me blooming dona  
Me coster cart and moke  
I'll tell you how it all occurred  
From the time we left the road  
'Til we got to the lovely fields in Kent

*Chorus:*

For she was a moder-in laundry girl  
Was blue-eyed Mary Fuller  
'Til she went and sloped from Kent  
With an Irish hop-pole puller

Now we started from the *Rose and Crown*  
With mirth, and pleasure bent  
We caused a big sensation  
In every place we went  
For Mary Ann was well made-up  
With red plaid shawl and hat  
And a lovely ostrich feather  
Was bought by me, the flat (flat = fool)

Now we drove down as far as Crockham Hill  
And onto Hunton Bull  
Mary Ann expressed her wish  
To watch them pick and pull  
I loved her so, I couldn't say no  
We started for the fields  
When suddenly the cart collapsed  
And off came both the wheels

Now my Mary screamed, some fellows came  
I could have done without 'em  
Especially two young Irish chaps  
With willing ways about them  
One said his name was Tim  
And the other Mike O'Brien  
Who I could see, with half an eye  
My Mary pitched her eye on

Now I fell in a jealous rage  
And had a row with Tim  
Mike O'Brien he picked it up  
And knocked me in the bin  
Then some policemen came along  
And run me into jail  
It's a wonder now that I'm alive  
For to tell to you the tale

Now when I got out from doing time

I found me self forsook  
Mary-Ann and Mike O'Brien  
Had slung their blooming hook  
So when you take your dona out  
Just keep away from Kent  
Or you'll come back broke and lose your moke  
And wish you hadn't went

*Spoken:* How's that?

Although we have no idea who composed *The Irish Hop-Pole Puller*, he (or she) certainly knew the route from London to the Kentish hop fields. Unlike the song *Hopping Down in Kent*, this song has apparently never been that popular with singers. When I interviewed George Spicer about where he had learnt his songs he told me that all of his songs had been picked up in Kent, before he moved to Sussex. George must, however, have forgotten about *The Irish Hop-Pole Puller*, because we know that he actually learnt the song from the singing of George 'Pop' Maynard of Copthorne in Sussex.

There is some confusion over the word used to describe 'blue-eyed Mary Fuller'. Some people suggest that it should be 'modern', but I have also heard it suggested, from an anonymous contributor to the Mudcat Café website, that Mary could have been a 'Magdalen laundry girl', the term coming originally from the Magdalen Hospital for the Reception of Penitent Prostitutes, which was in London's East End from the mid 1700s to the mid 1900s.

Other recordings: George 'Pop' Maynard (Sussex) can be heard singing this on the British Sound Library website.

#### 15. **The German Clock-Maker** (Roud 241) (Sung by George Spicer at his home in Selsfield, Sussex. 1974)

A German clock-maker to London once came  
Herman von Tick was this proud German's name  
All round the town on his way he would trend  
Shouting aloud, "Any clocks for to mend"

*Chorus:*

With his toodle-li-oodle, li-oddle, li-ay  
Toodle-li-oodle, li-oddle, li-ay

This German was handsome, the lady's delight  
All of them wanted their clocks to go right  
Some were too fast and others too slow  
But nine out of ten he would makes their clocks go

He once met a lady in Queenberry Square  
Who said that her clock was in need of repair  
She invited him home, that very same night  
And in less than ten minutes he put her clock right  
She invited him home that night to take stock  
When all of a sudden there came a loud knock  
And in walked her husband and oh what a shock  
For he caught that young German a-winding her clock

Then out spaked the husband to his wife Mary-Ann  
"Why is it, my dear, you engage a strange man?  
To wind up your clock and leave me on the shelf  
If your clock wants winding I'll wind it myself"

*Spoken:* That's it ... that's a song that you can take either way you like!

Itinerant workers, such as tinsmiths, navvies and mole catchers, feature in a number of English songs which concern encounters between the worker and a wife whose husband is absent from home (though he often return towards the end of the song!) And it would seem that, at one time, a number of travelling German musicians were also in the habit of plying their trade in this country. The German Clock-Maker (or German Clock Winder as they call it in Ireland), is similar in format to the song *The German Musicianer* (Roud 17774), which was printed in late 19th century chapbooks of bawdy songs that were intended to be sold 'under the counter'.

Other recordings: Bill Smith (Shropshire) - MTCD351.

#### 16. **Some n'Egg and Some n'Ham and Some n'Onion** (Roud 25787) (Sung by George Spicer at his home in Selsfield, Sussex. 1974)

Some people like bacon for breakfast  
No doubt it's the usual thing  
Others like porridge, bananas or tripe  
While some folk would rather have fish  
But I've got a dish of my own  
The finest that I've ever known

And that's some n'egg and some n'ham and some n'onion  
Some n'egg and some n'ham and some n'onion  
Oh what a sight to see spread  
on a plate with a nice cup of tea  
Some n'egg and some n'ham and some n'onion  
For a feast it sounds rather a funny 'un  
All the world over its praise should be sung  
It's better than (Crugens?) for keeping you young  
For what did Charlie Peace eat on the day he was hung?  
Why some n'egg and some n'ham and some n'onion

'Twas Christmas day inside the workhouse  
'Twas Christmas in our house as well  
The inmates were having a party, and then  
A pauper jumped up with a yell  
"It's your Christmas pudding" said he  
"But there's only one thing pleases me

And that's some n'egg and some n'ham and some n'onion  
Some n'egg and some n'ham and some n'onion  
All the world over its praise should be such  
You can have it for breakfast or dinner or lunch  
For what gave Joe Louis that sledgehammer punch  
Why some n'egg and some n'ham and some n'onion

A Music Hall song which was popularised in 1925 by both Ernie Mayne (on Edison Bell Winner record 4292) and Clarkson Rose (on Zonophone record 2589). George told me that he probably picked up the song from the Ernie Mayne (1871-1937) recording, although, in the Mayne recording the boxer is named as Joe Peck, whereas George Spicer called him Joe Louis. Ernie Mayne, whose recording was issued in late 1925, may have been confus-

ing 'Joe Peck' with George Peck, a professional boxer from Stepney, who was active during the period 1925-32. We can also add that the lines:

*Now what did Charles Peace eat the morn 'e was 'ung?  
Why, an n'egg and some n'ham and an n'onion.*

... are interesting because, according to contemporary sources, Peace actually 'ate a hearty breakfast of bacon' prior to his walk to the gallows on the morning of 25th February, 1879.

**17. The Prickle Holly Bush** (Roud 144)  
(Sung by Bill Whiting at his home in Longcot, Berkshire. 1972)

*"Oh, stop your horse, cried George  
Oh stop it for a while  
For I think I can see my mother  
A-coming over yonder stile*

*Oh mother have you got any gold?  
Or silver to set me free?  
And to keep my body from the cold gaol wall  
And my neck from the high gallows tree*

*Chorus:*

*Oh the prickle-holly bush,  
    how it pricks, pricks, pricks  
And it pricks my heart quite sore  
And if ever I get out of the prickle-holly bush  
I'll never get in there anymore"*

*"Oh, stop your horse, cried George  
Oh stop it for a while  
For I think I can see my father  
A-coming over yonder stile*

*Oh father have you got any gold?  
Or silver to set me free?  
And to keep my body from the cold gaol wall  
And my neck from the high gallows tree  
No I've not brought any gold  
Nor silver to set you free  
But I have come for to see you hang  
Oh hang upon the high gallows tree*

*Similarly: sister, brother.*

*Final verses:*

*"Oh, stop your horse, cried George  
Oh stop it for a while  
For I think I can see my sweetheart  
A-coming over yonder stile*

*Oh sweetheart have you brought me any gold?  
Or silver to set me free?  
And to keep my body from the cold gaol wall  
And my neck from the high gallows tree*

*Yes I have brought you gold  
And silver to set you free  
And I've not come for to see you hang  
Oh hang upon the high gallows tree*

Bill Dore was reluctant to sing this to me, saying that "there's nothing to it" and he only sang the first verse. Later

I managed to get the rest of the text down on paper, and these verses are added in italics. This is, of course, a fragment of an ancient ballad and I can do no better than to let A L Lloyd explain the story:

In the opinion of many scholars this is among the oldest, most typical and most interesting of ballads. It has turned up in countless versions in the Scandinavian and Baltic countries, in Central Europe, Hungary, Rumania and Russia, and the ballad specialist Francis J Child considered that the best version of all is Sicilian. It has enjoyed very wide currency in the British Isles and also in the USA, where it has been described as 'easily the favourite of all the traditional ballads among the Negroes.' In many versions, the story tells of a young woman captured by pirates or brigands; father, mother, brother, sister refuse to pay ransom, but the lover sets her free. In earlier forms of the ballad, the girl is condemned to die for the loss of a golden ball (or golden key, either signifying the girl's honour which, when lost can only be restored by her lover). There is a folk tale, once well-known in England, in which a stranger gives a girl a golden ball. If she loses it, she is to be hanged. While playing with the ball she does lose it. At the gallows, her kindred refuse to help, but the lover recovers the ball after terrible adventures in the house of ill-omen where it had rolled. It seems that verses from The Prickly Bush (also called The Maid Freed from the Gallows) were sung in the course of telling the story. The losing of the golden ball and the subsequent scene at the gallows used to form a children's game in Lancashire in the 19th century, again accompanied by the song. In Missouri, the song is used as part of a story of a Negro girl with a magic golden ball that will make her white. From a similar cante-fable, the admired Negro singer Huddie Ledbetter (Lead Belly) evolved a version that became well-known after it appeared on a commercial disc. Many layers of folklore, extending to very primitive times, may be revealed by deep study of this ancient ballad, in which, at some stage and in certain versions, the condemned person has changed sex and becomes a man who is freed by his girlfriend.

The form of the ballad is likewise interesting. It is frequently suggested that the ballad originated as choral dance. That is, a group formed a ring and danced round. A member of the group sang a single line or set of lines, and the rest came in with a refrain. It has been further suggested that ballads were actually created in the course of this operation, with various members of the group improvising sequences (alternated with refrain) until the ballad story was carried to a conclusion. Now, not many ballads, as we know them, show signs of this kind of communal creation. But The Prickly Bush, with its extremely simple construction, may well have come into being in such a way.

Other recordings: Sarah Ann Tuck & her daughter Mrs Julia Scaddon (Dorset) - Rounder CD 1775. Asa Martin (Kentucky) & Sarah Gunning (Kentucky) - MTCD505-6. Hobert Smith (Virginia) - Rounder CD 1799. Frank Proffitt (North Carolina) - Appleseed CD 1036. Charlie Poole (North Carolina) - JSP7734. Huddle Ledbetter ("Leadbelly" southern USA) - JSP7764.

**18. Old Johnny Bigger** (Roud 19111)  
(Sung by Percy Bridges at his home in Ascott-under  
Wychwood, Oxon. 1964)

Now old Johnny Bigger he went out one day  
His horse fell down and his cart run away  
Old Johnny Bigger, well he shouted "Stop"  
As he walked from the bottom of the hill to the top

*Chorus:*

Singing I do believe, I do believe  
Old Johnny Bigger was a gay old nigger  
And a gay old nigger was he

Now old Bigger's wife she went out one day  
She caught her left leg in nine foot of clay  
A lot of little frogs came hopping about  
They had to go and get a spade to dig the old gal out

Now the doctor came and he had a good look  
And he wrote it all down in his little big book  
He says, "Well, Bigger, you must begin  
To rub the old Gal's leg well with gin"

Now old Johnny bigger well he thought it was a sin  
To rub the old gal's leg well with the gin  
So he put the gin down his long throttle  
And he rubbed the old gal's leg well with the bottle

Now God made man and man made money  
God made the bees and the bees made honey  
God made the Devil and the Devil made sin  
And he made the hole to put old Bigger in

This song, definitely non-PC in today's climate, may, or may not, have started life as the Minstrel song Johnny Boker, or, De Broken Yoke in de Coaling Ground, which was printed on a music sheet in Boston in 1840 and performed by J W Sweeny. Over the years it became known under a number of different titles, such as Old Johnny Booker or Old Johnny Bucker, and sometimes carried a chorus similar to that found in Percy Bridges' song. Interestingly, Old Johnny Bigger is a song that the Bampton Morris Dancers continue to sing - but without the N-word.

Other recordings: Jack Elliott (Co Durham) - TSCD664. Bill Smith (Shropshire) - MTCD351. Mrs Hewett (Sussex) - TSCD671. Lee Hammons, a West Virginia musician, plays the tune to Old Johnny Booker on a Rounder CD (1504/05).

**19. Coming Home Late** (Roud 114)  
(Sung by Alfred 'Fred' Welfare at his farm in North Chai-  
ley, Lewes, Sussex. 1977)

I came home late one Saturday night  
Home my lads came I  
Straight to the backyard I did go  
And a fresh dog I did spy  
"Whose dog is this? Whose dog is that?  
Whose dog now can it be?"  
"Why don't you know it's a nanny goat  
Your mother sent to me?"  
Many miles have I travelled

Ten thousand miles or more  
But a nanny goat that goes "bow-wow"  
I've never seen before

I came home late one Sunday night  
Home my lads came I  
Straight to the back door I did go  
And a fresh coat I did spy  
"Whose coat is this? Whose coat is that?  
Whose coat now can it be?"  
"Why don't you know it's a rolling pin  
Your mother sent to me?"  
Many miles have I travelled  
Ten thousand miles or more  
But a rolling pin with armholes in  
I've never seen before

I came home late one Monday night  
Home my lads came I  
Straight to the bedroom I did go  
And a fresh hat I did spy  
"Whose hat is this? Whose hat is that?  
Whose hat now can it be?"  
"Why don't you know it's a chamber pot  
Your mother sent to me?"  
Many miles have I travelled  
Ten thousand miles or more  
But a chamber pot with a lining in  
I've never seen before

I came home late one Tuesday night  
Home my lads came I  
Straight to the bedroom I did go  
And a fresh face I did spy  
"Whose face is this? Whose face is that?  
Whose face now can it be?"  
"Why don't you know it's a new-born babe  
Your mother sent to me?"  
Many miles have I travelled  
Ten thousand miles or more  
But a baby's face with whiskers on  
I've never seen before

Versions of this well-known ballad are found all over Europe. The story seems simple enough. A man returns home to find another man's horse, dog, boots etc, where his own should be. There follows a formulaic exchange between the man and his wife, who explains that her husband's eyes are deceiving him, and the story ends without rancour, revenge or remorse. It's a bit of a joke, to be sung in the pub on a Saturday night, although George Spicer's version ends with the spoken comment, "I stayed home Saturday night!" And yet, there seems to be something unsaid. A L Lloyd, quoting the Hungarian folklorist Lajos Vargyas, mentions a possible connection between this ballad and one from Hungary, *Barcsai* (which has parallel versions in the Balkans, France and Spain). Here a couple are caught in an adulterous act by a returning husband, who promptly kills both his rival and his wife. There are even Mongol versions of *Barcsai*, so who can say where the story really come from?

The rolling pin, mentioned in verse 2, usually occurs in the final verse of bawdy versions of this song ("a rolling pin with bollocks on I've never seen before") and it may be that Fred Welfare had softened the song for the recording.

Other recordings: Alice Francombe (Gloucestershire ) - MTCD331. George Spicer (Sussex) - TSCD663. Mabs Hall (Sussex) - VT115CD. Harry Cox (Norfolk), Mary O'Connors (Belfast) & Colm Keane (Galway) - Rounder CD 1776. Dr David Rosenbaum (Indiana) - Dust-to-Digital DTD 08. Vern Smelser (Indiana) - Dust-to-Digital DTD 12. Mainer Family (North Carolina) - Rounder CD 1701. Blind Boy Fuller (North Carolina) - Document DOCD 5091 & 5092. Blind Lemon Jefferson (Texas) - JSP 7706D.

**20. The Farmer's Wife** (Roud 160)  
(Recited by Alfred 'Fred' Welfare at his farm in North Chailey, Lewes, Sussex. 1977)

There was an old farmer in Sussex did dwell  
And he had a bad wife as many knew well  
Old Satan came to the old man at the plough  
Saying, "One of your family I must have now

'Tis not your eldest son I crave  
But t'is your old wife and she I will have"  
"O welcome, dear Satan, will all my heart  
I hope you and she never more may part"

Now Satan had got the old wife on his back  
And he lugged her away like a pedlar's pack  
He trudged along till he came to his gate  
"I must take in an old Sussex man's mate"  
Oh then did she knock the young imps about  
Says one to the other, "Turn the old bag out"  
She spied thirteen imps all dancing in chains  
She up with a pillow and bashed out their brains  
She kicked poor old Satan against a hard wall  
"Turn the old bag out, or she'll murder us all"

Then he bundled her up on his back again  
And to the old husband he took her again  
"I've been a tormentor the whole of my life  
But I've ne'er been tormented except by your wife"

*Epitaph:*

My spouse and I for many a year  
Lived man and wife together  
I could no longer keep her here  
She's gone, I know not whither  
In love she was exceeding free  
I purpose not to flatter  
Of all the wives I e'er did see  
There's none like her could chatter

Her body is disposed of well  
A crusty grave doth hide her  
Her soul I know not, but can tell  
Old Nick could not abide her  
Which makes me think she's gone aloft  
For in that last great thunder  
Methought I heard her well-known voice  
Renting the clouds asunder

A L Lloyd traced this ancient piece to the 6th century collection of fables, The Panchatantra and suggested that this tale of the shrewish wife who terrified the Devil spread to Europe via what was then the Persian Empire. Fred Welfare's father had written the text out on a piece of

paper, together with the additional 'Epitaph', and Fred had always known the piece as a poem, rather than as a song. Some singers, including old Henry Burstow of Horsham in Sussex, would whistle a refrain, while others stamped their feet, these actions being used to scare away the Devil, should he be listening in on the song. (In other ballads, singers would list magical herbs in the refrain - Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme, for example - as another way of protecting the singer and his/her audience from evil.)

Other recordings: Walter Pardon (Norfolk) - TSCD514. Texas Gladden (Virginia) - Rounder CD 1800. Nimrod Workman (West Virginia) - MTCD512. Hobart Stallard (Kentucky) - MTCD505-6. Bobby McMillon ((North Carolina) - Dust-to-Digital DTD-12. Estil C. Ball (Virginia) - Atlantic 7 82496 - 2.

**21. Wonderfully Curious** (Roud 23528)  
(Sung by Cyril Nunn at his home in Witney, Oxon. 1975)

The wondrous globe on which we live  
Is quite surrounded everywhere  
With something quite invisible  
It's called the atmospheric air  
The air is fluid light and thin  
Which forms a gas it does combine  
It carries sound in order well  
When put in motion it is wind

*Chorus:*

Oh! How curious, wonderfully curious,  
The laws of nature are indeed  
Most wonderfully curious

The wondrous globe on which we live  
The seaman spreads his canvas sail  
And as it moves on quick or slow  
He calls it breeze, or storm, or gale  
But when it blows with so much power  
Till all resistance is in vain  
Blowing at eighty miles an hour  
He calls it then an hurricane

The winds, the seas, the tempest blow  
Are very changeable indeed ...  
But in the torrents they are known  
One way for six months doth proceed  
Oft does the wind make ruins lie  
But their usefulness has been understood,  
For in the Bible we are told  
God guides the wind and rules the flood

*Spoken:* Wonderful and curious...

Wool has been one of the main industries of the Cotswolds and West Oxfordshire for generations. Once cloth had been woven by master weavers it would be hung outside to dry. These lengths of fulled cloth were hung on large racks (the process being known as 'tenting') by groups of men known as 'Tuckers'.

Twice a year the Tuckers would hold a feast for the master weavers who, at the end of the meal, would pay the Tuckers for their work. Over the years, however, the feasts disappeared as the master weavers began to build their own factories where all the various stages of production

could be carried out by regularly paid staff. But, the mill owners, no doubt remembering the friendship and conviviality of the old feasts, began to lay on an annual feast for their own Tuckers. The Early family, who owned Witney Mill, held their Tucker's Feast on Shrove Tuesday. The Tucker's were given gifts, often in the form of clay pipes, and any Tucker who was in financial difficulty would be awarded a small sum of money.

Originally, the Tuckers worked outdoors, and there must have been something almost magical in seeing so much material drying and flapping in the breeze. One Tucker, a man called Joseph Fowler, who was born c.1815, composed a song about the breeze. This was *Wonderfully Curious* and the song was sung regularly at the Feasts. At the end of each verse the singer would sing the chorus, before everyone else joined in for a second singing of the chorus. When Joseph retired the song was sung by John Seacole, then by Fred Middleton and, from 1947 onwards, Jack Tooley. Cyril Nunn was the last person to sing the song annually and he did so into the 1980s, when the Feast eventually stopped.

Occasionally there would be Mill events when Richard Early, whose great-great-great-great-great-grandfather Thomas Early was the founder of the Early blanket makers in Witney, would sing the song. The day that I met Cyril Nunn, to make this recording, I found that Richard Early was also at Cyril's home and it is Richard who can be heard joining in the chorus.

## 22. **The Mermaid** (Roud 124)

(Sung by Johnny Doughty at his home in Camber Sands, Sussex.1976)

One Friday morn when we set sail  
And our ship was nigh on the land  
We there did espy a fair mermaid  
With a comb and a glass in her hand

*Chorus:*

While the raging seas did roar  
And the stormy winds they did blow  
And we jolly sailor boys was up, up aloft  
And the landlubbers lying down below, below, below  
And the landlubbers lying down below

Then up spake the captain of our gallant ship  
And a good old skipper was he  
"I have married a wife in fair London Town  
But this night she shall weep for me, for me, for me  
And this night she shall weep for me"

Then up spake the cabin boy of our gallant ship  
And a fair-haired boy was he  
"I've a father and mother in fair Portsmouth Town  
But tonight they shall weep for me, for me, for me  
But this night they shall weep for me"

Then three times around went our gallant, gallant ship  
And three times round went she  
Then three times around went our gallant, gallant ship  
And she sank to the bottom of the sea, the sea, the sea  
And she sank to the bottom of the sea

There is an old belief among sailors that the sighting of a mermaid is an omen of impending doom. However, our

present song has not been traced prior to the mid-18th century when it was printed as *The Seamen's Distress* in The Glasgow Lasses Garland, a Newcastle chapbook of c.1765. Later broadsides often used the title *The Sailor's Caution*. In North America the song appeared on at least three commercial 78 rpm records during the 1920s and '30s. The Carter Family sang it for Bluebird as *The Wave on the Sea* (reissued on JSP7708) whilst Ernest Stoneman recorded it as *The Sailor's Song* and, with his Blue Ridge Corn Shuckers, as *The Raging Sea, How it Roars* (reissued on 5 String CD 5SPH001).

Other recordings: Bob Hart (Suffolk) - MTCD301-2. Dan Tate (Virginia) - MTCD501-2. William Howell (Pembrokeshire) - Rounder CD 1776. Bascom Lamar Lunsford (North Carolina) - Smithsonian-Folkways SF CD 40082.

## 23. **Go and Leave Me** (Roud 459)

(Sung by Fred Jordan at his home on Wenlock Edge, Shropshire. 1964)

So it's go and leave me if you wish it  
And never let me cross your mind  
For if you think I'm so unworthy  
Go and leave me, never mind

For many a night with you I've rambled  
Many an hour with you I've spent  
I thought your heart was mine forever  
Till love, I found, was only lent

And many a night when you are sleeping  
Sleeping of your sweet repose  
Whilst I, poor girl, lies broken hearted  
A-listening to the wind that blows

So it's farewell friends and kind relations  
Farewell to you false young man  
For it's you that's caused me pain and sorrow  
Gone ne'er to return again

He loves another and I'll tell you why  
Because she has more gold than I  
But her love will fade, her beauty will blast  
And she'll become like me at last

For when my apron strings were low  
He'd follow me through frost and snow  
But now it's high, up to my chin  
He'll pass me by and say nothing  
So it's go and leave me if you wish it  
And never let me cross your mind  
For if you think I'm so unworthy  
Go and leave me and never mind

There are a number of closely related songs, in this case the songs *Go and Leave Me*, *Fond Affection* and *Dear Companion*, which comprise a selection of what we call 'floating' verses and they are quite well-known throughout England and Scotland. Gavin Greig found that *Go and Leave Me* was popular in Aberdeenshire at the turn of the century and Superintendent Ord of the Glasgow City Police included a set in his noted collection of Bothy Songs and Ballads. According to the distinguished Missouri folklorist H M Belden, this song was 'a favourite among songs of



disappointed love' and there are many collected sets from North America.

Other recordings: Caroline Hughes (Dorset) - MTCD365-6. Percy Webb (Suffolk) MTCD 356-7. Darby & Tarlton (USA) - Nehi NEH3X1 (as Columbus Stockade Blues). Listeners should also listen to Caroline Hughes's recording of the song *Died for Love* (Roud 60), which is also included on MTCD365-6, because this song also shares several verses with Fred Jordan's song.

#### 24. **The Ringers** (Roud 25788) (Sung by Mrs Alice Green. Bampton, Oxon. 1973)

Now if any young maiden that wants to get married  
And don't want to make a great lot of fuss  
She's only to come on a fine Sunday morning  
And climb to the belfry and take a look at us  
There's Old Tom and Young Tom  
and William, well he's handsome  
And the same don't apply to your humble, that's me

I have no idea if this piece is complete in itself, or if it is part of a longer song or poem. Mrs Green had heard it sung at a Harvest Supper and, so far as she knew, this was the entire song.

#### 25. **I'm a Gypsy Rider** (Roud 730) (Sung by Ruth and Clare Pinner at their home in East London. 1975)

I'm a gypsy rider, rider, rider  
I'm a gypsy rider, hom-pom-push

What you coming here for, here for, here for?  
What you coming here for? hom-pom - push

I'm coming here to marry, marry, marry  
I'm coming here to marry, hom-pom, push

Who're you going to marry, marry, marry?  
Who're you going to marry? hom-pom-push

Going to marry White shoes, White shoes, White shoes  
Going to marry White shoes, hom-pom-push

Who is White shoes, White shoes, White shoes?  
Who is White shoes? Hom-pom-push

Ruth is White shoes, White shoes, White shoes?  
Ruth is White shoes, hom-pom-push

This is actually a version of a quite popular song called Three Dukes Come a-Riding, which has 150 Roud entries, and has been collected in most anglophone countries.

I have included this song because of its connection to the following song, When Shall We Get Married John?

#### 26. **When Shall We Get Married, John?** (Roud 313) (Sung by Mrs Alice Green at her home in Bampton, Oxon. 1973)

"Oh, when shall we get married, John? (x3)  
Johnny, my own true love"

"We'll get married next Sunday morning (x3)  
And doesn't thee think it'll do?"

"Can't we get married before, John (x3)  
Johnny, my own true love?"

"Why, does't want to get married by moonlight (x3)  
Surely the wench is mad"

"Who shall we ask to the wedding, John (x3)  
Johnny, my own true love"

"Why ask your father and mother (x3)  
And doesn't thee think it'll do?"

"Can't we ask anyone else, John (x3)  
Johnny, my own true love?"

"Why, does't want the king and the queen, then? (x3)  
Surely the wench is mad"

"What shall we have for dinner, John (x3)  
Johnny, my own true love?"

"We'll have some broad beans and fat bacon (x3)  
And don't you think it will do?"

"Can't we have anything else, John (x3)  
Johnny, my own true love?"  
"Why does't want roast duck and green peas? (x3)  
Surely the wench is mad"

"What shall we do in bed, John (x3)  
Johnny me own true love"

"Why, go to sleep to be sure (x3)  
Surely the wench is mad"

According to Iona and Peter Opie (*The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, 1977, p.75) this song can be dated to broadside texts from 1776, although the tune is mentioned as early as 1683. The Opie's date of 1776 actually comes from a manuscript version of a blackletter broadside text (of a song titled *Nicol o' Cod*) which was actually registered by the broadside printers J Wright, J Grismond, C Wright, E Wright, J Gosson and F Coles on June 1st, 1629. The manuscript text was later reprinted in 1904 in Hans Hecht's *Songs from David Herd's Manuscripts* and is very similar to Mrs Green's version. The text is as follows:

*"Whan'll we be marry'd,  
My ain dear Nicol o' Cod?"  
"We'll be marry'd o' Monday,  
An' is na the reason gude?"  
"Will we be marry'd nae sooner,  
My own sweet Nicol o' Cod?"  
"Wad ye be marry'd o' Sunday?  
I think the auld runt be gane mad."*

*"Whae'll we hae at the wadding,  
My own dear Nicol o' Cod?"  
"We'll hae father and mother,  
An' is na the reason gude?"  
"Will we na hae nae mae,  
My ain dear Nico o' Cod?"*

"Wad ye hae a' the hail warld?  
I think the auld runt be gane mad."

"What'll we hae to the wadding,  
My ain dear Nicol o' Cod?"

"We'll hae cheese and bread,  
An' is na the reason gude?"

"Will we na hae na mae,  
My ain dear Nicol o' Cod?"

"Wad ye hae nae sack and canary?  
I think the auld runt be gane mad."

"Whan'll we gang to our bed,  
My ain dear Nicol o' Cod?"

"We'll gang whan other folk gang,  
An' is na the reason gude?"

"Will we na gang nae sooner,  
My ain dear Nicol o' Cod?"

"Wad ye gang at the sunseting?  
I think the auld runt be gane mad."

"What will we do i' our bed,  
My ain dear Nicol o' Cod?"

"We will kiss and clap,  
An' is na the reason gude?"

"Will we nae do nae mae,  
My ain dear Nicol o' Cod?"

"Wad ye do't a' the night over?  
I think the auld runt be gane mad."

According to song collector Alfred Williams the song was once highly popular in the Thames Valley. 'My first hearing of this was when the military manoeuvres were being held on the Wiltshire Downs about the year 1893. Then I heard it sung, or rather chanted, by a large crowd of soldiers sitting on the ground, at Coate, near Swindon. The copy (given in Folk Songs of the Upper Thames, 1923) I obtained from Mrs Russell, Tetbury. In America the song often goes under the title Buffalo Boy or else The Mountaineer's Courtship.'

Other recordings: Ernest Stoneman & Irma Frost (Virginia) - JSP77156B & 5String 5SPH 001.

## 27. **While Shepherds Watched** (Roud 16898) (Sung by William Harding, Urchfont, Wiltshire.1978)

While shepherds watched their flocks by night  
All seated on the ground  
All seated on the ground  
The angel of the Lord came down  
And glory shone around  
And glory shone around  
And glory shone around

"Fear not," said he, said he,  
For mighty, mighty dread  
Had seized their troubled mind  
Had seized their troubled mind  
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring  
To you and all mankind  
To you and all mankind  
To you and all mankind"

"To you, in David's town this day  
Is born of David's line  
Is born of David's line  
Our Saviour who is Christ the Lord  
And this shall be the sign

And this shall be the sign  
And this shall be the sign"

The Heavenly Babe you there shall find  
To human view displayed  
To human view displayed  
All meanly wrapped in swaddling bands  
And in a manger laid  
And in a manger laid  
And in a manger laid

Thus spake the seraph and forthwith  
Appeared a shining throng  
Appeared a shining throng  
Of angels praising God who thus  
Addressed their joyful song  
Addressed their joyful song  
Addressed their joyful song

"All glory be to God on high  
And to the earth bring peace  
And to the earth bring peace  
Goodwill henceforth from Heaven to men  
Begin and never cease  
Begin and never cease  
Begin and never cease"

M.Y. Did they used to sing that in harmonies?

W.H. Oh they did, yes ... at one time I could get a quartet that would have done it... you can make harmonies from that quite easily ... It's an unusual tune, I've never heard it before anywhere ... it may be about ... I don't know how it got here ... but it's been sung over there for at least the last hundred years anyway

M.Y. Did they sing it in the church ... or the pubs?

W.H. Oh in pubs anywhere...the more beer they had the louder they sang it!

The words to *While Shepherds Watched* were written by Nathan Tate (1652-1715), the son of an Irish clergyman who rose to become Poet Laureate during the reign of Queen Ann. The words first appeared in the 1700 supplement to Tate & Brady's *New Versions of the Psalms of David* and they are usually sung in church to the tune *Winchester Old*, which first appeared in Este's psalter, *The Whole Book of Psalmes*, (1592). However, a number of other tunes were written for the hymn and many of these entered the folk tradition. Other 'folk' versions can be heard on three Musical Traditions CDs. These are sung by Bob Hart of Suffolk (MTCD 301-2), Walter Pardon of Norfolk (MTCD 305-6) and George Dunn of Warwickshire (MTCD 317-8). An American set, with a tune titled *Sherburne*, can be heard on a Rounder CD *The Alan Lomax Collection. Southern Journey - Volume 9. Harp of a Thousand Strings* (Rounder CD1709). Interestingly, the tune to Walter Pardon's version appears to be a combination of the tune and the first harmony part, and this, I suppose, could suggest just how tunes become changed over the years by oral transmission.

## 28. **Horse's Tails** (Spoken by William Harding, Urchfont, Wiltshire.1978)

"A mind few years ago znows yus" zed Grampar Jim one day  
Tom Brown, a dairy farmer, had zum fields out Bromham way

One year he had a lot more grass than ever hee'd need  
Zo he puts up a noticeboard bout letting out zun veed

Bill Snooks one Zunday momin' along that wey did pass  
When he stopped an gaap'd at notice "Hosses taken in to grass"  
Short-tailed hosses one and zix, long tailed uns half-a-crown  
(Bill said "Wo that be a air be-at I?) zo I looks up varmer Brown

I zed, em, this notice you put up bout veed, I can't think  
The varmer said, "Oh, oh, come on in an ave a drop to drink  
Zo in the varmer's house they went a-settin down the-gether  
Had a pint or two apiece, discussin times and weather

A'ter a bit, the varmer zed "Wo let's get to business, boss  
Well Bill zed, "Well, 'tis about the price o veed, per week, per hoss  
Now I can't zee no difference, tho' course I may be wrong  
Bout hosses that've got short tails and them as got 'em long

Yet on the notice you put up, a shillin **more** \*  
    you 'zire for every short-tailed hoss  
Long-taile hoss, though, (?) the owner got to pay  
"Well, 'tis like this yer" the varmer zed, "the explanation lies  
That long-tailed hosses be'int so much tormented be horse flies  
Alus they has got to do is just to vill and stuff  
And then lie down contended like when they have y'ate enough

Now, hosses that have got short tails can't keep the vlies away  
An, be'ent tormented, they don't ate much, an so there's less to pay  
Now, what be you a-gonna bring? Be old Snooks (a whily turn?)  
He said, "Lord, I ain't got no horse, but I likes to live and learn!"

\* This ought to have been 'less'.

We have been unable to trace this poem, set near the village of Bromham, a few miles to the east of Melksham, to any specific poet. Various possible writers have been suggested, including Edward Slow (1841-1925), best known for his poem *The Wiltshire Moonrakers*, and Will Meads, another Wiltshire dialect poet, although we have not found this poem in their published works. Another possible, suggested by Mervyn Grist, is the Victorian poet Joseph Stokes who lived in St. Edith's Marsh, Bromham. Apparently Stokes wrote regularly in dialect for the *Wiltshire Gazette and Herald*, using a variety of names; while Dennis Powney of Bromham, thought that it could be the work of another Bromham writer, Edmund Dearmer Butler (1878-1955), who wrote using the pennamee 'The Bromham Owl'. Again, though, we are unable to find the poem in the works of these two local poets. (It should be noted that the above transcription is provisional. If any listener can offer an improved version then please let us know at Musical Traditions. Thank you.)

## 29. The Cunning Cobbler (Roud 174)

(Sung by George Spicer at his home in Selsfield, Sussex. 1973)

This is just a little story but the truth to you I'll tell  
It does concern a butcher who in Dover Town did dwell  
This butcher was possessed of a beautiful wife  
But the cobbler he loved her dearly as his life

*Chorus:*

Singing fol the riddle-i-do, fol the riddle-ay

Now the butcher went to market for to buy an ox  
And then the little cobbler, sly as any fox

He put on his Sunday coat and courting he did go  
To the jolly butcher's wife because he loved her so

Now when the little cobbler stepped  
    into the butcher's shop  
The butcher's wife knew what he meant  
    and bade him for to stop  
"Oh" says he "My darling, have you got a job for me?"  
The butcher's wife, so cunning says "I'll go up and see"

Now she went to the bedroom door and gave the snob a call  
"I have got an easy job if you have brought your awl  
And if you do it workman-like some cash to you I'll pay"  
"Oh thank you" said the cobbler and began to stitch away

But as the cobbler was at work a knock came at the door  
The cobbler scrambled out of bed and laid upon the floor  
"Oh" said she "My darling, what will my husband say?"  
But then she let the policeman in along with her to play

Now the cobbler laid a-shivering and a-frightened to move  
The policeman said "Me dear, oh me darling, oh me love"  
The cobbler thought within himself "Oh how he treats his wife"  
He really thought the bed would fall - he did, upon his life

But the butcher came from market in the middle of the night  
The policeman scrambled out of bed and soon got out of sight  
The butcher's wife so nimbly locked the bedroom door  
But in her fright she quite forgot the cobbler on the floor

But the butcher soon found out when he lay down in bed  
"Something here is very hard" the butcher smiled and said  
She said "It is me rolling pin." The butcher he did laugh  
"How came you for to roll your dough  
    with a policeman's staff?"

Now the butcher threw the truncheon underneath the bed  
There it cracked the bedpost across the cobbler's head  
The cobbler cried out, "Murder!" Said the butcher  
    "Who are you?"  
"I am the little cobbler who goes mending ladies' shoes"

"If you are the little cobbler, come along with me  
I'll pay you for your mending, before I've done with thee"  
He shut him in the bull-pen, the bull began to roar  
The butcher laughed to see the bull  
    a-roll him o'er and o'er

Now, early in the morning  
    just as people got about  
The butcher mopped his face with blood  
    and then he turned him out  
He pinned a ticket to his back and on it was the news  
'This cobbler to the bedroom goes, mending ladies' shoes'

But the people all got frightened  
    when they saw the cobbler run  
His coat and breeches were so tore  
    he nearly showed his bum  
He rushed up to his wife and he kicked her on the floor  
Says he "You brute, I'll never go out mending anymore"

*Spoken:* The Cunning Cobbler.

George's last lines would make more sense had he sung:

His wife, she rushed up to him,

and kicked him on the floor  
Says she "You brute, you'll never go out  
mending anymore"

Although collected by a number of Edwardian song-collectors, *The Cunning Cobbler* was seldom printed in full by these collectors. According to Ralph Vaughan Williams, who printed the tune and first verse, 'the rest of the words are not suitable for publication and have little interest except, perhaps, in giving a modern example of the kind of rough fun which we find in Chaucer ... The words are evidently modern, or modernised, since a policeman is one of the characters introduced.' George Spicer learned the song from Ike Harvey, landlord of *The Rose*, West Langdon, who "had the words on a broadsheet". In fact, several Victorian printers produced the words on broadsides, the earliest possibly being James Catnach, whose sheet *The Cunning Cobler* (sic) *Done Over* appeared in the early 1830s, shortly after the formation of the Metropolitan Police Force - which may explain why the policeman appears in the song. It is of interest to note how George Spicer begins the song by speaking the words before he actually begins to sing.

Other recordings: George Spicer (Sussex) MTCD309-0 (a different performance, recorded by Brian Matthews). Walter Pardon (Norfolk) - TSCD514. Tom Smith (Suffolk) - VTC10CD. Alec Bloomfield (Suffolk) - VT154CD.

**30. The Banks of the Nile** (More Trouble in Our Native Land) (Roud 5386)  
(Sung by George Spicer at his home in Selsfield, Sussex. 1973)

Far, far away, on the banks of the Nile  
Thousands of miles from his own green isle  
A brave Irish soldier, a gallant dragoon,  
Read his mother's letter by the light of the moon  
He stole from his camp, this message to read  
The words that were in it made his stout heart bleed  
For while Pat was fighting with the rest of his band  
His mother was evicted by the laws of the land

*Chorus:*  
And the tears rolled down his sunburnt cheeks  
Dropped upon/on the letter in his hand  
"Is it true, too true?  
There's more trouble in our native land?"

It told how a widow who couldn't pay her way  
Was turned in the street on a cold winter's day  
It told how another, a true friend in need  
Offered her a shelter she surely did need  
"I know I'm doing wrong" this poor old creature said  
"By finding you a shelter in this poor old humble shed  
It's against the laws of Ireland, such laws as those I spurn  
My home shall be your home 'til your son shall return"

*Chorus*

This song, under the title *Trouble in Your Native Land*, was written by an Irishman called Tom McGuire and popularised on the Music Hall stage by Dan Crawley (1872-1912). It is interesting to see how popular this song became with English singers, who often called it *The Banks of the Nile* or else *The Gallant Dragoon*, especially at a time when

Irish emigrants to England were struggling to find accommodation ('No Irish Need Apply') and work. I don't know whether or not the song's popularity indicates a feeling of understanding (and sympathy?) between working class people from Ireland and England, or whether it simply suggests that sentimental songs, no matter what the subject, were highly popular in the latter half of the 19th century.

Although the words were published by *The Derry Journal* in a set of *Old Come-all-Ye's*, (issued in four editions between the 1930s and the 1950s), the song appears to be little known in Ireland itself. George learnt the song from his mother ("who had it from her mother") and it was one of his favourite songs.

*Other recordings:* George Dunn (Staffordshire) - MTCD317-8. Sophie Legg (Cornwall) - VT119CD.

**31. The Faithful Sailor Boy** (Roud 376)  
Sung by George Attrill at his home in Fittleworth, Sussex. 1964.

Was on a stormy winter's night  
The snow laid on the ground  
A sailor boy stood on the quay  
His ship was outward bound  
His sweetheart standing by his side  
Shed many a silent tear  
And as he pressed her to his heart  
He whispered in her ear

*Chorus:*  
"Farewell, farewell my own true love  
This parting gives me pain  
I'll be your own true guiding star  
When I return again  
My thoughts shall be of you, my love  
When the storm is raging high  
Farewell, my love, remember me  
Your faithful sailor boy"

All in that gale that ship set sail  
He kissed his love goodbye  
She watched the craft 'til out of sight  
Then tears bedimmed her eye  
She prayed to Him in Heaven above  
To guide him on his way  
Those loving parting words that night  
Re-echoed o'er the bay

*Chorus*

But sad to say that ship returned  
Without the sailor boy  
He died while on the voyage home  
And his flag was half-mast high  
And when his comrades came on shore  
And told her he was dead  
The letter that he sent to her  
The last lines sadly read

*Final Chorus:*  
"Farewell, farewell my own true love  
On earth we meet no more  
I soon shall be from storm and sea  
On that eternal shore  
I hope to meet you in that land



That land of peace and joy  
Where you shall ne'er be parted from  
Your faithful sailor boy"

*The Faithful Sailor Boy* is believed to have been written by Thomas Payne Westendorf (1848-1923) and G. W. Persley (1837-1894), although no original sheet music has, so far, been discovered. There are a couple of late-19th century broadside texts however.

Few songs have achieved such widespread popularity among country singers and their audiences. Gavin Greig described it as being 'Very popular in Aberdeenshire in the early years of the 20th century' and there are sets from all over England, Ireland, North America, Australia and even Tristan da Cuna! At least two American Old-Timey singers, Vernon Dalhart, on Okeh 40487, and Flora Noles, on Okeh 45037, recorded the song, as *The Sailor Boy's Farewell*, in the 1920s.

Other recordings: Cyril Poacher (Suffolk) - MTCD303. Walter Pardon (Norfolk) - MTCD305-6. Daisy Chapman (Aberdeenshire) - MTCD308. Percy Webb (Suffolk) - MTCD356-7). Fred Whiting (Suffolk) - VTC2CD. Charlie Carver & Stan Steggles (both of Suffolk) - VTDC8CD. Fred Jordan (Shropshire) - VTD148CD.

#### Dedication:

This CD is dedicated to the memory of Fred McCormick (1946-2015), singer, activist and all-round good guy, who would have loved to have heard it.

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George Spicer Mike Yates



Johnny Doughty



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