

The Willett family

“Adieu to Old England”

Introduction:

When, in 1963, Topic Records released their first ever LP of English traditional singers, it was The Willett Family whose songs were presented. On the front page of the inserted booklet, it stated: *Topic Records Ltd acknowledges the help of Ken Stubbs, of Lingfield, Surrey, who first located and recorded the Willetts.* Musical Traditions Records is now - 50 years later - very pleased to be able to present those first Ken Stubbs recordings, with thanks to Reg Hall for making them available, and to Jim Ward for noise reduction on the old tapes. Rather strangely, the order in which Ken seems to have recorded the songs happens to make a perfectly acceptable running order, so we have decided to retain that arrangement. CD One is all Tom Willett songs while CD Two has Chris and Ben and a couple where Tom and Chris sing together, plus a few more from Tom alone.

In addition, for the sake of presenting the Willett Family's complete recorded repertoire, we have added four songs not found amongst these recordings. With thanks to Topic Records we're pleased to be able to add recordings of Tom Willett singing *Died for Love*, made by Paul Carter in 1962; and Chris Willett singing *Once I Was A Servant* and *The American Stranger*, made by Mike Yates in 1978. We have also added Mike's other 1978 recording of Chris singing *A-Swinging Down the Lane* from MT320.

It is only fair to say that these Ken Stubbs recordings were made on equipment far inferior to that used by Topic, and that Ken hand-held his microphone - causing some noises which are impossible to remove. That said, I think that some of these *performances* are superior to the Topic ones, and that we can present 35 songs here, as compared to just 11 on the LP.

When these songs were recorded by Ken Stubbs, Tom Willett was 82 (born 1878) but he carried his years lightly, and was still a great singer. He spent much of his early life in and around Copthorne, on the Surrey-Sussex border. His main trade was as a horse dealer. His wife came of the well known show family, the Smarts ... Tom also worked as an animal trainer in their circus. A sideline was training dogs for poaching and cocks for fighting.

Tom learnt most of his songs from his father but, with the quick ear of the singer in the oral tradition, he picked up others in the pub and the circus. He was always glad of an opportunity to sing, and Chris recalls that his father never needed beer to start him singing around the camp fire. He was a close friend of George 'Pop' Maynard.

Chris Willett was 42 when his songs were recorded (born 1918) and gave the occupation of himself and his brother Ben as 'trader' - they bought and sold cars and scrap materials. With his family, he lived in a trailer caravan in Kent. He learnt his songs from his father.

Ben Willett was in his thirties; he was a bachelor and usually camped with his father. He also knew many of his father's songs, but was shy about singing.

Alice Gillington may have collected songs from members of the Willett family then living in the New Forest (c.1905-10), though, sadly, we don't have their names. She mentions knowing them in her correspondence.

The Willetts' songs come from the aural tradition, from the singing of relatives or of people in common meeting places, at pubs, fairs and markets. Perhaps it may be thought surprising that many of the songs included here closely follow the texts collected by, for example, Cecil Sharp some forty years earlier. At the time, Sharp was of the opinion that English folk song would die out within a few years!

When the Willett Family were recorded, both by Bill Leader and by Mike Yates, they asked that no photographs should be taken to be used on the covers of the records. This was because they had had such hard times in earlier years through being known as Gypsies, that they didn't want their children and grandchildren to have to put up with the same treatment. This is why we have no photos to use on the cover of these CDs or their accompanying booklet - as is usual with MT CDs. Accordingly, I've used the photo of three willow trees, which graced the front of the Topic LP, and a Kentish landscape picture on the booklet, to illustrate the sort of England we may soon be saying "adieu" to as the 21st century progresses!

The Songs:

Roud numbers quoted are from the databases, *The Folk Song Index* and *The Broadside Index*, continually updated, compiled by Steve Roud. Currently containing almost 388,500 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 Ceol Duchais Eireann*, Dublin; and *The School of Scottish Studies*, Edinburgh. *The Folk Song Index* is also accessible on-line at: <http://library.efds.org> 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 Broadside* 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. VTxxx). 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.

CD 1:

1 - 1 **I'm a Romany Rai** (Roud 4844)
Sung by Tom Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

I was borned in an old Gypsy's wagon
Contented although I was poor.
When first I thought of being married
Take a wage and a wife of my own.

I'm a Romany Rai, I'm a real diddikai
I'm building castles beneath the blue sky
I live in a tent and I don't pay no rent
And that's why they call me a Romany Rai

Roaming all round the country
That life would just suit me.
It's give to me the open sky
The song of the lark and it flies so high

Roaming all round the country
That life would just suit me.
For I am a Romany everyone knows
A Romany I'll remain.

The word *Rai* (often rendered as Rye) and meaning 'gent', is interesting in this context, since it's generally not one which a Gypsy would use of himself - a *Romani Mush* (man or chap) would be more usual. The word is derived from the same root as *Rajah* and *Raj*, meaning Lord or its equivalent, and was first used to describe those educated men - gents - who became interested and learned in the Romani culture, and of whom George Borrow is probably the best-known example (Borrow's first book uses this term as its title). The song was originally written for the turn-of-the-century music halls by C Bellamy and G Weeks and - unusually - has been hijacked by Gypsies as a sort of an anthem.

Other CD recordings: Wiggy Smith (MTCD307)

1 - 2 **Lord Bateman** (Roud 40)
Sung by Tom Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

*Now the turnkey had but one only daughter
The finest young girl that ever was seen
She stole the keys of her father's prison
And swore Lord Bateman,
oh, she would go and see.*

Spoken: I can't get up there. Go on ...

"Now it's I've got houses and I've got land
And half of Northumberland belongs to me
I'll gave it all to you, fair young lady
Then if out of prison you will let me free."

"Now it's seven long years
I will wait for you
And two more years, oh, to make up nine
Oh, if you don't wed with no other woman
Then it's I won't wed with no other man."

Now the seven long years then
was gone and passed
Spoken: I can't sing ...
And the two more years,
oh, to make up nine
She took a ship, sailed across the ocean
Until she met, oh, to Northumberland.

"Oh is this now Lord Bateman's castle
Oh or is his lordship with now in?"
"Oh yes, oh yes," cries this
proud young porter
"I've just now taken, oh, his new bride in."

"Go and ask him for a slice of bread
And a bottle of, oh, his very best wine
Tell him not to forget, oh,
that fair young lady
Oh, that out of prison did let him free."

*Then away, away, goes this
proud young porter
And away, away, and away goes him
And when he got to
Lord Bateman's chamber
Down on his bended knees fell him.*

"What news, what news,
my proud young porter
What news, what news
have you brought to me?"
"Oh there is the fairest
of all young creatures
Oh, that ever my two eyes have seen."
"For she has got rings on every finger
On some of them, oh, she has got three
And as much gay gold
hanging round her middle
That would buy half of Northumberland."

*"Now she's asked you for a slice of bread
And a bottle of your very best wine
And you're not to forget that fair young lady
That out of prison did let you free."*

Now Lord Bateman flew all in a passion
His sword he broke in three pieces three
"I'll seek no more for no other fortune
Then it's since Sophia now
have crossed the sea."

Spoken: That's Lord Bateman.

This old ballad is the second most popular song I've encountered while surfing the Roud databases - with 630 entries. Its earliest publication is shown as 1792 when it appeared in Buchan's *Scottish Ballad Book* pp.29-33, from the singing of Mrs Anna Brown, who called it *Young Bekie* (the alternative, perhaps older? title of the ballad is *Young Beichan*). Since that time it has been popular right across the English-speaking world and has been recorded on around 90 occasions, the earliest being Percy Grainger's of Joseph Taylor (1908), the most recent, possibly, being the one of Wiggy Smith (see below), recorded in June 1998. I'm also pretty certain that, if one knew where to go, it could still be recorded in this new millennium.

Child prints 15 versions, all but one from Scotland. He also cites a number of European examples from Spain to Scandinavia, and mentions the story of Gilbert Becket, father of St Thomas, whose biography is similar to part of the ballad.

Tom Willett's text is very similar to many published versions of this most popular ballad, though he has lost the verses which introduce Lord Bateman and place him in Turkey - indeed the Turk has become a 'turnkey' - and the final verses in which Bateman dismisses his new bride and her mother are also missing. His tune is very similar to that used by Mark Stevens, of Bristol, for the splendid *Fields of Hunting*, a version of *The Brake of Briars*, a.k.a. *Bruton Town*.

Other CD recordings: Danny Brazil (MTCD345-7); Wiggy Smith (MTCD307); Denny Smith (MTCD307); Alice Penfold (MTCD320); Nimrod Workman (MTCD512); Eunice Yeatts MacAlexander (MTCD501-2); John Reilly (TSCD667); Joseph Taylor (TSCD600); Roby Monroe Hicks (Appleseed CD 1035); Campbell MacLean & Bella Higgins (Greentrax CD 9005).

1 - 3 **Riding Down to Portsmouth** (Roud 1534)
Sung by Tom Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

Now as I was a-riding along
In the height of my glory
Now as I was a-riding along,
You shall hear of my story
Then I fell in love with a fair pretty maid
And I asked her if she'd go along with me
Some pleasure and some pastimes to see
We're a-riding down to Portsmouth.

"Now sailor if I go along with you
Then it's I must be carried.
Now sailor if I go along with you
Then it's I must be married."
Then she slept all in my arms all that night
And she gave me what was ten times worse
She left me all the reckonings to pay
We're a-riding down to Portsmouth.

"Oh Landlord tell me what there is to pay
Oh, for I might be missing
Oh Landlord tell me what there is to pay
Oh, for I might be a-jogging
For she's robbed me of my
gold watch and purse
And she gave me what was ten times worse
She left me all the reckonings to pay
We're a-riding down to Portsmouth."

*Saying "Damn me to myself
Now I've paid for my kissing?"
Spying "Damn me to myself
Now I've paid for my learning?"
Now my horse I shall leave you in pawn
And I'll bet you through the wars I'll return
And all gallus girls I will shun
And I'll ride no more to Portsmouth."*

Spoken: That's it.

Cecil Sharp, Percy Grainger and Ralph Vaughan Williams collected versions of this song during the early days of the 20th century. The only known broadside is a Victorian sheet, without printer's imprint, in the Harris Library collection in Preston. Although this song is rare, its theme is, of course, a common one.

Other CD recordings: Mary Ann Haynes (MTCD320)

1 - 4 **The Rose of Ardene** (Roud 2816)
Sung by Tom Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

I was first in this country a stranger I came.
I placed my a-refection on
a comely 'n fair maid.
She was neat, tall and handsome,
oh, in every degree.
She's the flower of this country
and the rose of Ardene.

Now, I courted me lovely angel
at the age of sixteen.
Her waist it was slender
and her carriage genteel,
'Til at length a young weaver
came here for to stay.
Stole the flower of this country
and the rose of Ardene.

Now, I cursed my light on him
by night and by day.
He fled with my true love
far out of my sight,
Then he's left me to wander
in strange country.
So the flower of this country
and the rose of Ardene.

"It come off my father. He learned it off his wife - a Gypsy; she was a true Romany. She used to go harvesting to a farm at Penhurst, and he (Tom's father, who was a farm labourer there) fell in love with her. Then they got married and he had to leave the farm and go to Brighton. He lived in Brighton and is buried there." When Peter Kennedy asked Tom what he did for a living, he laughed and said, "I ain't done nothing since I been married, to tell you the truth!" But when his wife prompted him he admitted to hawking and general dealing. Tom's wife was from Copthorne, where Tom's close friend 'Pop' Maynard lived, and her father "had fields there".

Although Roud lists 58 instances, almost all are of broadside printings. The only singer listed is Dan McGonigle (Inishowen Trad Singers Circle ITSC 002).

1 - 5 While Gamekeepers Lie

Sleeping (Roud 363)

Sung by Tom Willett

Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

I've got a dog, and rare dog too,
I got him in my keeping.
For he'll catch those hares that run by night
Whilst the gamekeepers lay sleeping

My dog and me went out last night
For to view this habitation
Up jumps a hare, and away she run
'Til she run into my plantation.

She hollered and she squealed
and she made a noise
But something stopped her hollering
"Lay still, lay still, you pretty little puss
For your uncle's just a-coming."

I picked her up and cracked her neck
And put her in my pocket
Saying I to me dog, "Time we were gone
For the gamekeepers are coming."

I'll go unto some labourer's house
I'll ask what they will gave me.
"One crownd a brace I will give to you;
Brave boys, if you will bring fifty."

Now I'll go unto some public house
And there I will get merrilye
I will spend this crown
and another one down
Ain't I a hearty good fellow.

The song *Hares on the Old Plantation* probably comes from the early 1800s, when the newly introduced game laws and enclosure acts were beginning to deeply affect the lower classes.

Knowing the extent to which poaching was practised, even in recent years, it's not surprising to find songs on the subject still popular among country singers. In the case of this song, approaching half the 49 examples in Roud are sound recordings - an unusual proportion, but unsurprising in the light of the above. What might surprise us is that there are no broadside versions listed, since other such songs (*Van Diemen's Land*, for example) were well supported by these publications.

It's also unusual that the song is only found in England, as is the case with *The Oakham Poachers*. Somewhat surprised by this, I tried a search on songs with Poacher in the title and found 130 instances in Roud - only three of which could be identified as not being English! Are we the only thieves in these islands - or just the only ones who enjoy singing about it? It could, of course, have something to do with the way in which the English, alone in Europe if not the world, have accorded landowners rights of ownership to the wild animals which happen to be on their domains at any particular time.

Although this song has a common theme, it's unusual in that the poaching operation is completely successful.

Other CD recordings: Wiggy Smith (MTCD307); George 'Pop' Maynard (MTCD401-2)

1 - 6 The Game of Cards (Roud 232)

Sung by Tom Willett

Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

Now as I was a-walking
one fine summer's morning
As I was walking along the highway
Oh and there did I spy
such a fair pretty maiden
And unto her then I quicklye did say.

"Now where are you going to
my pretty fair maid?
Oh, it's where are you going
along the highway?"
Then she turned herself round
and she lookèd upon me
"I'm going to Windsor,
kind sir", she did say."

"May I go along with you
it's my pretty fair maid
To bear up your company
along the highway?"
Then she turned herself round
and she lookèd upon me
She says "Kind sir, you can
walk if you please."

As we was a-walking and talking together
Those sweet pleasant banks
I set myself down
Then I says "My pretty fair maid
Would you sit yourself beside of me?
And then I will show you
a sweet pleasant game."

"I'm not given to gaming,
I'm not given to gaming
I'm not given to gaming,
kind sir," she did say
"But if I do play you,
then it must be All Fours
And then I will gave you
two chawks to my one."

He shuffles up those cards,
it was her time to cut them
He happened to chuck the Jack at the Piece
Oh, well she throwed the Ace,
oh, which took the Jack from him
Which is commonly called
the best card in the pack.
Now look how he blushes
and see how he trembles
To think that a woman
should conquer a man
But he says "My pretty fair maid,
if you're this way tomorrow
And then I will play this game over again."

On the surface we are dealing with card play, and Hoyle's *Rules of Games* (1955) indeed lists *All Fours*. It's usually a two-handed card game and is sometimes called *Seven Up*. Four items count towards the score; High (the highest trump out); Low (the lowest trump out); Jack (the knave of trumps); and Game (scoring an extra point to the ultimate holder of the more valuable tricks).

In her edition of *Cecil Sharp's Collection of English Folk Songs* (1974), Maud Karpeles places in the section devoted to sports and pastimes *The Game of Cards*, a version of the song Hoyle noted in 1908. Yet this is a transparently erotic piece which had to wait until 1960 to appear in respectable print, in James Reeves's anthology of English traditional verse, *The Everlasting Circle*. That it was well known a century earlier is attested by the broadside issued by Henry Disley of London, a political adaptation or parody dealing with Garibaldi's struggle for Italian unity under the title of *The Game of All Fours*. At much the same time, the catalogue of the Manchester ballad printer, T Pearson, included the original *Game of All Fours*, twinned with *The Steam Loom Weaver*.

A fairly widely collected song, found only in the southern half of England, with 58 Roud entries, the most northerly being from Staffordshire and Norfolk. It seems to be very popular amongst Travellers and George Dunn, Charlie Wills and Sam Lerner are about the only Gorgios amongst the singers named. Vic Legg informs us that *All Fours* is still played in a number of pubs in the china-clay areas near St Austell in Cornwall; indeed, they have a League - for the card game, that is.

Other CD recordings: Sarah Porter (MTCD309-0); George Dunn (MTCD317-8); Phoebe Smith (MTCD356-7); Levi Smith (TSCD 661); Sam Lerner (TSCD511).

1 - 7 **A-Swinging Down the Lane** (Roud 2870)

Sung by Tom Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

Now, boys and girls would oft-times go,
A-fishing in the brooks.
With bits of thread for fishing line,
And bented pins for hooks.
I've oft-times wished,
And thought of things.
But I only wished in vain.
I'd rather go with Rosy Nell,
A-swinging down the lane.

But yet I'd gave the world to see,
Those bright days again.
Upon each other's violet-tops,
To pass the time away.
I oft-times wished,
And thought of things.
But I only wished in vain.
I'd rather go with Rosy Nell,
A-swinging in the lane.

Now boys and girls, take my advice,
And keep it while you can.
Oh, never run the streets at night,
Or else you'll be like me.
For the girls they are deceitful,
And the boys they are so gay.
They'll serve you as they served me,
While swinging down the lane.

An American song, originally titled *Swinging in the Lane*, written in 1864 by one Charles Carroll Sawyer (although it was also assigned to 'White and Kamplain' in 1868). It was recorded by a number of American stringbands in the 1920s and '30s, though only the version recorded in 1930 by Vernon Dalhart, using the alias 'Mack Allen', was issued in Britain (Regal MR23). Chris Willett's version can be heard at track 2 - 13.

Other CD recordings: Chris Willett (MTCD320); Edgar Button (Helions Bumpstead NLCD 14) - these are the only two examples, among Roud's 37 instances, of it appearing in the British oral tradition.

1 - 8 **The Captain Called All Hands**

(*A Blacksmith Courted Me*) (Roud 816)

Sung by Tom Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

Oh, the captain called all hands
Just await 'til morrow
Leaving all young girls behind
Oh, with grief and sorrow,
Saying "You courted me a while
Only done it to deceive me
Now my poor heart you have broke
You're gwine to leave me."

"Don't talk of going abroad
Fighting for strangers
You had better stay at home
Free from all any dangers."
Saying "You courted me a while
Only done it to deceive me
Now my poor heart you have broke
You're gwine to leave me."

Down on her bended knees
Syphing and wailing
"You had better stay at home
Free from all any danger.
I could roll you in my arms
My dearest jewel,
So stay at home with me
And don't prove cruel."

Spoken: That's all I know of that.

Ken Stubbs noted this song as *The Captain Called All Hands*, from its first line, though it's clearly a fragment of *A Blacksmith Courted Me*, which Tom sings in a more usual version on track 14. More detailed Notes on this song can be found there.

The word 'syphing' (obviously meaning 'sighing') in Tom's final verse is interesting - and it also occurs in several of the Brazil Family songs. We may assume that somewhere in the line of transmission a semiliterate singer saw a printed text of the song, and knew that the 'gh' in sighing is often pronounced as an 'f' - thus creating the word 'syphing'. This is by no means the only example of common words being mispronounced, and passed on as such, in the oral tradition - Gorgio as well as Gypsy.

1 - 9 **The Rambling Sailor** (Roud 518)

Sung by Tom Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

I am a sailor stout and bold.
Many times I have ploughed the ocean
Now I says: "Brother sailors,
now I'll bid you all adieu
No more to the sea I will go with you
I'll travel this country far and near
Oh, and still be the rambling sailor."

Oh, and then to a village town I went
Oh, where I saw lasses plenty
I boldlye stepped up to one of them
For to court her for her money
Now I says: "My girl,
oh, what do you choose?
Ale or wine or the rum-punch too,
Oh, besides a fine pair of silken shoes
For to travel with your rambling sailor."

Oh, it's when I woke it was in the morn,
Then I left my girl a-sleeping
I left her for an hour or two
While some other girl I went a-courting
Then if she stays there, oh, 'til I return
She might stop there 'til the day of doom
I'll court some other girl in her room
Oh, and still be the rambling sailor.

*Then it's on to a village town I went
Where I saw lasses plenty
I boldly stepped up to one of them
For to court her for her beauty
I says: "My girl, be with all good cheer
I'll leave you not, so you need not fear
I will travel the country both far and near
And still be the rambling sailor."*

Now it's if you want to know my name,
Oh, my name it is Young Johnson
I've got commission from the King
For to court all girls that's handsome
Oh, with my false heart,
oh, and flattering tongue
I'll court them all both old and young.
I'll court them all and I'll marry none
Oh, and still be the rambling sailor.

A fairly popular song, with 128 Roud entries, mostly from books and broadsides - there are only 27 singers named - and just three sound recordings.

Chris Willett learnt all his songs from his father. The text here is a little jumbled but surely of broadside origin - whether old Mr Willett got it directly from a broadside or obtained it from a singer who had learnt the song from print is not clear. A similar text, noted by Baring Gould at Widdecombe, Devon, is in James Reeves' *Everlasting Circle*.

The tune used here is practically identical with that collected by Cecil Sharp from George Wyatt of West Harptree, Somerset. The song has several tunes, nearly all of them Mixolydian, like this one, and mostly excellent. According to Baring Gould, this melody was used as a West Country hornpipe. An Irish variant of it, called *The Spying Sailor*, is in Joyce's *Old Irish Folk Music and Songs* (1909).

Other CD recordings: Peter Verrall (EFDSS CD 002); Sally Sloane (Larrikin LRF 136 and the double CD *Sharing the Harvest* (National Library of Australia CD 1).

1 - 10 **The Bold Deserter** (Roud 1655)

Sung by Tom Willett

Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

From a child I had a notion
To follow a fife and band
'Til I courted a pretty handsome gel
How soon she gained my heart.
Then she first enticed me to a glass
And the second to desert.
And then I thought I never should of been
Oh, in this dejected state.

Now old Brighton Town I'll bid adieu
Which once was my delight
Then its cursèd liquor causes me astray
Oh, in from my colours blue.

Now old Brighton Town I'll bid adieu
Which once was my delight
Then it's on my journey I will pursue
And I'll travel on by night.

My brother he came riding by,
Oh, not knowing I were there
Now my cries(?) from me
he could not hear
Nor I could not make him know,
So it's on my journey I will pursue
And I'll travel on by night.

This is a fragment of a fairly rare song, with only 19 instances in Roud, mostly from southern England - though P W Joyce and Hugh Shields noted three Irish ones. Its popularity does not seem to have extended into recent times, since this is the only known sound recording.

It is sometimes titled *The 'New' Deserter* (and was printed by Such in the 1850s under that name) to distinguish it from an older and far more widespread ballad in which a soldier repeatedly deserts from the army until finally he is pardoned by the King and released.

1 - 11 **There is an Alehouse**

(Roud 60, Laws P25)

Sung by Tom Willett

Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

There is an alehouse where my love goes,
Where my love goes and sits himself down.
He takes a strange girl on his knee
Now don't you think that's a grief to me?

A grief, 'tis of grief, I'll tell you for why
Because she has got more gold than I
But her gold will glitter, her silver will fly
And in a short time she'll be as poor as I.

Oh dig my grave both wide and deep
A marble stone both head and feet
And in the middle a turtle dove
To show the wide world I died for love.

I wish to God that's all in vain,
I wish that I was a maid again,
But a maid again I never shall be
'Til the apples grow on an orange tree.

A song everyone knows - even today in the right company - so it's no surprise that there are 249 Roud entries, or that 46 of these are sound recordings, encompassing almost every singer you can think of. Closer to the truth is that everyone knows a *version* of it, because it's one of those songs which attracts 'floating verses' like a magnet, while being alarmingly close to countless other songs which musicologists tell us are actually different. Who cares - it's a great wallow in almost any circumstances! Another recording of it can be heard on track 2 - 11, as *Died for Love*.

Other CD recordings: Sarah Porter (MTCD309-10); Jasper Smith, Amy Birch (TSCD661); Emma Vickers (EFDSS CD 002); May Bradley (MTCD349); 'Pop's' Johnny Connors (MTCD325-6); Jean Orchard (VT151CD); Viv Legg (VT153CD); Geoff Ling (VT104); Son Townsend (VT108).

1 - 12 **Adieu to Old England**

(Roud 1703)

Sung by Tom Willett

Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

Now it's once I had a very good bed
Was made of the best of the feather
But now I am glad
of a clean truss of straw
All scattered about on the floor.

Chorus:

There's adieu to old England, adieu,
There's adieu to ten thousand times more.
Then if I had've died,
oh, when I had been young
My troubles I never should know.
Then it's once I'd a very good
loaf of bread
Was made of the best of the flour
But now I am glad of a mouldy old crust
That's been knocking about on the floor.

Chorus

Then it's once I'd a very good coat
Was made of the best of the cloth
But now I am glad now of any old coat
That's torèd from rim to rim.

Chorus

Then it's once I'd a carriage and pair
Used to take me wherever I go.
Oh, but now I'm locked up
in a cold prison cell
And the Lord knows when
I shall come out.

Chorus

Not a well-known song in the oral tradition - it has only 28 Roud entries, all of which are from England except for two Scottish ones in the Greig-Duncan collection. But a couple of generations ago it was widely known amongst the general population, and may have been taught in schools. Mike Yates is sure that this has turned up a few times in Australia.

Other CD recordings: Harry Cox (TSCD512D); Caroline Hughes (TSCD672D)

1 - 13 **The Honest Irish Lad**

(Roud 4522)

Sung by Tom Willett

Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

Our little farm is small
And it would not hold us all,
I thought I'd take a trip all on my own.
Then I walked from place to place
With starvation in my face,
I asked for work, "No help"
they cried for me.

I'm a working honest lad
And to work I'm not afraid
And to please you all
I'll either sing or dance.
I'll do anything you say
If you'll only name the day
If you'll give an honest Irish lad a chance.

Spoken: I don't know that much of it, but that some of it.

Seemingly a song from the eastern seaboard of North American - or, all but one of Roud's 14 entries come from there - and with the large Irish population of Eastern States/Canada there were many Irish song books in circulation for them. It was sung by Dan McCarthy, with music by T F Kerrigan (copyright 1879). Kerrigan & McCarthy performed on stage c.1880 as *The Irish Pipers and Dancers*.

The only English singer cited is Alec Bloomfield, recorded by Keith Summers, and there appear to be no CD recordings.

1 - 14 **A Blacksmith Courted Me** (Roud 816)

Sung by Tom Willett

Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

Oh, the blacksmith courted me
Oh, for six months and better
Oh, when he first gained my heart
He wrote to me a letter
With his hammer all in his hand
And he strikes so mighty and clever
Then if I was with my love
I should do my duty.

Oh, my love is gone across those fields
With his cheeks like the roses
I'm afraid the burning sun
Oh, will scorch and spoil, oh, his beauty
Then if I was with my love
I should live for ever.
Now bad news have come to town
That my love is married
But I wish him all most joy
Oh, but he's not here for to hear me
I shall never die for love
Young man believe me.
"Do you know what you promised me
Oh, when you first knewed me
Oh, you promised that you'd marry me
You only done it to deceive me
My face looks pale and white
Causes my poor heart for to wander
I shall never die for love
Young man believe me."

This is a song much loved by English Gypsies; all of Roud's 72 entries are from England and the majority of the named singers have Gypsy surnames. It appears only to be found in the southern half of the country - although that may just be the result of where collectors were active - and to have been rarely printed as a broadside; otherwise, I'm sure it would have been more widely known. This lack of broadsides may be the reason that this song has so many different textual forms - the oral tradition allowing for a wide range of versions.

Tom sings verses 2 and 3 as three line stanzas. This practice of omitting a second line is fairly common amongst country singers.

Other CD recordings: Danny, Harry and Tom Brazil (MTCD345-7, Lemmie and Hiram also sang it); Phoebe Smith (VT136CD)

1 - 15 **The Roaming Journeyman** (Roud 360)

Sung by Tom Willett

Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

I am a roaming journeyman
I roam from town to town
I never had any false heart
To any young female kind
I never had any false heart
To any young female kind
But I always went a roaming
For to leave my girl behind.

It's when I get to Brighton Town
The girls they jump for joy
Saying one unto the other
"Why, there comes the roaming boy."
One hands to me the bottle
And the other holds the glass
And the toast goes round the table
"Here's good luck to the journeyman."

I cannot think the reason why
My love she looks so sly
I never had any false heart
To any young female kind
I never had any false heart
To any young female kind
But I always went a roaming
For to leave my girl behind.

Roud has 84 instances of this song, of which 21 are sound recordings. Many of the named singers have Gypsy or Traveller surnames.

Tom Willett's version is obviously somewhat degraded and shortened. The bottle and glass motif is common, and usually appears in Irish versions. The song was considered to be Irish in origin and often the text refers to the locality of Carlow, though only seven of Roud's singers are from Ireland. The Mixolydian tune used by the Willetts is not the one generally employed for the song in Ireland.

Other CD recordings: Danny Brazil (MTCD345-7); Paddy Doran (Saydisc CD-SDL 407)

1 - 16 **The Folkestone Murder** (Roud 897)

Sung by Tom Willett

Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

It was near a town called Folkestone
That shocking deed was done
And Maria and sweet Caroline
Got murdered by Switzerland John.
The mother to the daughter
"You'd better stay at home,
I don't think it is safe for you
To walk with that man alone.
You had better ask your sister
To take a walk with you."
And Maria and sweet Caroline
Was murdered by Switzerland John.
Come all you feeling people
Come listen to my song,
I'll tell you of a murder
And it won't contain you long.
It was near a town called Folkestone
That shocking deed was done
And Maria and sweet Caroline
Was murdered by Switzerland John.

Spoken: I don't know more of that.

This was also sung by Lemmie and Danny Brazil, and it has seemed to be well known, certainly among Travellers. Something of a surprise, then, to find only 22 instances noted in Roud ... and 6 of these refer to George Spicer! Other known singers have been Mrs Coomber of Sussex, Charlie Bridger and Phoebe Smith's brother Charlie Scamp (both of Kent). George Spicer's son Ron also recorded it, in 1994, on the cassette *Steel Carpet* (MATS 0010), and I remember Jack Smith, the Milford, Surrey based Gypsy, singing it in the mid-sixties.

'Switzerland John' was Dede Redaines, born in the 1830s in Belgrade. He came to England in 1855 and was enlisted into the British Swiss Legion stationed at Dover Castle. He became acquainted with a laundry worker, Mrs Back, whose husband was a dredger in Dover harbour.

During the summer of 1856, Redaines was courting the elder Back daughter, Caroline. On August 2nd he accused her of receiving attentions from a sergeant in his unit. She denied this and he appeared satisfied. He proposed a walk over the downs to Shorncliffe Camp the following day. Mrs Back insisted that they be chaperoned by Caroline's younger sister Maria. At Steddy's Hole, some five miles out, he killed them both.

Redaines was captured the following day at Milton Chapel Farm, Chartham, near Canterbury, after having tried to commit suicide. He was tried, found guilty and hanged at Maidstone on New Year's Day 1857.

Other CD recordings: Danny Brazil (MTCD345-7); George Spicer (MTCD309-0); Charlie Bridger (VTC6CD).

1 - 17 **The American Stranger** (Roud 1081)

Sung by Tom Willett

Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

I'm a stranger in this country,
from America I came
Oh and no-one don't know me,
oh nor can tell my name
Just to prove myself royal,
if you'll go along with me
I will take you to America,
my own darling to see.

Now the moon shall be in darkness
and stars shall give no light,
Oh, if ever I prove false to,
oh, my own heart's delight

Just to prove myself royal,
if you'll go along with me
I will take you to America,
my own darling to see.

Give me love to Pretty Polly,
she's me own heart's delight
Likewise my dearest Susan,
although she is poor
Just to prove myself royal,
if you'll go along with me
I will take you to America,
my own darling to see.

Now some says I am rakish,
while another says I am wild.
Oh, and some says I am guilty
pretty maids to reguile (beguile)
In the middle of the ocean
there should grow a myrtle tree
To maintain my own darling
that's a long way from home.

For some reason, the phrase "Just to prove myself royal", occurs in dozens of English Gypsy songs, and one may presume that royal means loyal in this instance. At first glance, this looks like a fairly popular song, with 144 Roud entries - but 100 of these relate to books or broadsides, and only about 40 singers are named. There are only 11 sound recordings, and only those by Tom's son Chris (TSCD661 and also here on track 2 - 14) and by Jean Mathew (TSCD673T) are available on CD

1 - 18 My Donkey (Jerusalem Cuckoo) (Roud 1147)
Sung by Tom Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

Now I thought me donkey good enough
To run in any race
I took him to Epsom races
And I backed him for a place.
The signal then was given
And away me donkey flew
And on the top of the hill
Played Jerusalem cuckoo.

Repeat this verse.

This song usually has four or five verses, and was published as *Jerusalem Cuckoo* on a broadside in Manchester by Pearson, and was sung on the Halls by Harry Lynn. Here's the text of that:

*I am a donkey driver.
I'm the best that's in the line.
There's no donkey on the road
that can come up to mine.
Talk about Kafusalem
and other donkeys too,
No donkey on the road can beat
Jerusalem Cuckoo.*

Chorus:
*Shout, boys, Hurrah!
My troubles they are few.
No donkey on the road can beat
Jerusalem Cuckoo.*

*My donkey 'tis a beauty,
his colour rather pale.
His ears are long and graceful
with a beautiful curly tail.
You have only got to whistle
and he knows what he's to do.
A stunning ear for music
has Jerusalem Cuckoo.*

*One day I took my donkey
across to Brighton sand.
A lady she got on his back as they
passed a German band.
The donkey he got frightened.
The lady off he threw,
While loud above the band was heard
the voice of my Cuckoo.*

*I thought my donkey smart enough
to run in any race.*

*I took him to the Derby,
and backed him for a place.
The signal it was given
and off the horses flew.
First horse at the latter end was
Jerusalem Cuckoo.*

*I always am contented,
not a cross word do I say.
I always get a bit of meat
and the donkey gives the bray.
And if he kicks the bucket,
I'll tell you what I'll do:
I'll lay me down and die beside
Jerusalem Cuckoo.*

It has not often been recorded in the oral tradition - Roud has 14 entries, with six named singers. Peter Kennedy recorded Derek Cripps singing in 1957. He was the landlord of the Farmer's Arms in St Merryn, which is probably where Charlie Pitman got the song, and the mention of Harlyn (the nearest beach to St Merryn) shows the song had been localised. The only other recordings are from Sussex singers George Belton and Harry Upton who both have Brighton as the beach location.

Other CD recordings: Harry Upton (TSCD664); Charlie Pitman (VTC9CD)

1 - 19 The Green Mossy Banks of the Lea (Roud 987)
Sung by Tom Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

Now if this is your unfortune daughter
She's the beautifullest girl I redore (adore)
For five hundred a year is my fortune
And a lady your daughter shall be
She shall ride in a carriage and horses
On the green mossy banks of the Lea.

Then I waited 'til up stepped her father
And I sprung up my spirit once more
Saying "If this is your unfortune daughter
She's the beautifull'st girl I redore (adore)"

Spoken: I don't know no more of that.

Except for two Irish and a handful of North American sightings, this is an English song with 153 Roud entries, including 30 sound recordings. There seems to be a difference of opinion among scholars as to whether the song is Irish or English in origin, and to whether the river is the Lea or Lee. It has certainly been sung in both countries; Lucy Broadwood described it as 'astonishingly popular among country singers'. One Canadian version titles it *The American Stranger*, from its first line - but that's a different song (Roud 1081).

Other CD recordings: Frank Hinchliffe (MTCD311-2); Danny Brazil, Harry Brazil (MTCD345-7); Harry Cox (TSCD 512D).

1 - 20 The Lincolnshire Poacher (Roud 299)
Sung by Tom Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

Oh, it's me and my companion
were setting up a snare
The gamekeepers was coming home,
for him we did not care
For it's my delight on a moonshine night
in the season of the year.

Spoken: I forget ...

Roud has 102 entries for this song, but almost all refer to broadsides or books. Despite it having appeared in so many 'National' song books in the 20th century, it seems to have been not much taken up in the oral tradition, if Roud's total 18 named singers is accurate - and none of them came from Lincolnshire! Only four sound recordings are known - by Jim Baldry, Billy List and George Ling in Suffolk, and a far later Gloucestershire one by Harry Brazil.

I think the song is well enough known that there is no need to include a full version of the text from another source here.

Other CD recordings: Harry Brazil (MTCD345-7); Billy List (MTCD309-0) Never change that old love for the new.

1 - 21 The False Young Man
(Roud 1414)
Sung by Tom Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

Now as Johnny was a-walking
Down by the river side
He saw his own dear Polly dear
Go a-floating with the tide.

With a-pulling off of his fine clothes
For to swim across the clear
When he cetch'd hold of his Polly
When she then was frightened in.

May the Lord have mercy upon my soul
I have prov'd a false young man
So all night on these cold Claudy Banks
I'll sleep with my Polly.

Spoken: I don't know more ...

This appears to be a fragment of *Floating Down the Tide* (aka *Camden Town* etc.) Tom's words are very close to those in the version collected by Sharp from Mrs Tremlett in Bagborough, Somerset, in 1908. This ballad was noted several times in England: in Somerset, Oxfordshire, Suffolk and Dorset; in Scotland in Aberdeenshire; and in Ireland in Co Fermanagh.

The English texts locate the events as taking place in Camden, Brighton or Cambridge, while in Scotland it is set in Kilmarnock, Dumbarton or Marno (Marnock, Banffshire?). One English version gives the unfaithful lover as a farmer's son, while the three complete Scots texts make him a collier; otherwise he is, as here, 'a false young man'.

Other CD recordings: Sarah Porter (MTCD309-0); Mary Delaney (MTCD325-6).

CD 2:

2 - 1 Never Change the Old Love for New (*The Willow Tree*) (Roud 18831)
Sung by Tom and Chris Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

My love is but a sailor bold, sailor bold,
Who sails across the deep blue sea;
He wears my name all on his arm, on his arm
Which brings his memory back to me.

Chorus:
So bring me back that one I love
And bring and give him back to me
If I only had that one I love
How happy, happy should I be.

I wish my heart was made of glass
So he might stand and view me through
And read the secrets of my heart
For if you love one you can't love two.

Chorus
Oh think of me and bear in mind, in mind
That I'm the girl that you passed by
And when you find one fond and true,
fond and true
Never change that old love for the new.

Chorus
My love is like a little bird
That flies across from tree to tree
And when he gets so far away, far away,
I know he thinks no more of me.

Now think of me and bear in mind,
in mind
A constant heart is hard to find
And when you find one fond and true,
fond and true

I wish to God my baby was born
Sat smiling on his dad'da's knee
But maid again I never shall be
'Til the apples grows on an orange tree

I wish to God my baby was born
Sat smiling on his dad'da's knee

Having tried to include all the possible verses of this song, plus a couple of floaters not usually associated with it, the recording deteriorates into false starts and discussions from all the participants - so I've just faded it out. A couple of points worth noticing are the wonderful way Tom treats the tune of the third line of the chorus at the beginning of the song, and the fact that they both suddenly change tune on the penultimate verse, segueing perfectly into the one they use for *There is an Alehouse* a.k.a. *Died for Love*.

Roud has 15 versions of this lovely song, five of which are from North America. The others are from May Bradley and Bill Smith, of Shropshire, plus Sam Richards collected it from Bill 'Pop' Hingston, of Dittisham, Devon, as did Gavin Greig from a Miss Ross, in Scotland, and Lucy Broadwood from both Mr and Mrs Petulengro in Westmorland.

Other CD recordings: May Bradley (MTCD349); Bill Smith (MTCD351)

2 - 2 As I was Going to Salisbury (Roud 364)
Sung by Chris Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

As I was going to Salisbury
upon a market day
I met a fair young lady
and she was going my way
She were going my way, sir,
butter and eggs to sell
So we jogged along together,
with me tit-i-fo-ol-or-al-ay.

As we were a-walking side by side
There came a serious accident,
her garter came untied
Her garter came untied, sir,
and slipped below her knee
So we jogged along together, with me etc.

"Would you be so kind, sir,
would you be so free
Just to tie my garter
an inch above my knee."
"Yes I will, I know I will,
'til we get to yonders hill."
So we jogged along together, with me etc.

Although the song is rather inconclusive, its meaning is obvious. It is perhaps best regarded as a fragment of a longer song such as *The Aylesbury Girl* / *The Ups and Downs*, sung by the noted Sussex singer George 'Pop' Maynard among others. There are no generally published versions, but the song is extremely common and appears in the collections of almost every English collector of importance. The continuation of the above text can be inferred from these verses from Pop Maynard's *The Aylesbury Girl*.

"Now since you've been so kind to me,
so frisky and so free
If you'll come with me to yonders grove,
you shall tie it up for me."
"Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes, I will
go to yonders grove."
So we both jogged on together etc,

When we came to yonders grove,
the grass was growing high
I laid this little damsel down,
her garter for to tie
And in tying up her garter,
such sights I never did see
So we etc.

"Now since you've had your will of me,
pray tell to me your name
Likewise your occupation,
from whence and where you came."

*"My name is Johnny the Rover,
from Dublin Town I came
And I live alongside of the Ups and Downs,
sing etc."*

Since Tom Willett knew Pop Maynard, he may well have had this song in its entirety at one time.

Other CD recordings: Jack Goodban (MTCD311-2); Bob Hart (MTCD301-2); Pop Maynard (MTCD401-2 & TSCD665); Aileen Stollery (MTCD339-0); George Dunn (MTCD317-8); Fred Whiting (VT154CD).

2 - 3 **The Strawberry Roan**

(Roud 3239)

Sung by Ben Willett

Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

I will tell you a tale of a good one I know
Of a bucking old bronc,
 that strawberry roan
I were out of a job, not earning a dime
Walking round town and
 spending my time.
When a stranger walked up
and he said, "I suppose
You're a bronc busting man,
 by the look of your clothes."
I said "I said I guess you are right,
 there's none I can't tame,
If it's riding wild ponies,
 that's my middle name."

Chorus:

Oh that strawberry roan
Oh that strawberry roan
I'll ride him until he lies down with a groan
There's ne'er a bronc that
 I couldn't bring home
Bring on that strawberry roan

Oh, and there in the corner,
 there stood all alone
Was a sleepy old nag, that strawberry roan;
He had old spavined legs, a pair of pig eyes
Small pigeon toes and a long Roman nose.
He had little thin ears
 they're all split at the tips
In the middle he's lean,
 but wide at the hips.
I put on my spurs and pulled up my twine
Then I said to the stranger
 "That ten spot is mine."

Chorus

Now I'm saying, no fooling,
 this pony could step.
I was just sitting tight, just earning a rep,
When my stirrup came loose
 and off came my hat
I were clinging to leather, as blind as a bat,
When he gave one more jump
 and he headed up high
Leave me sitting on air, way up in the sky.
I turned over twice and came back to earth
Then I started cursing the day of his birth.

Chorus:

Oh that strawberry roan
Oh that strawberry roan
There's some ??? that I wants leaving alone
There's ne'er a buster in Texas I know
Could ride that old strawberry roan

Although I've heard this sung by several Travellers, it was clearly not a song though worth recording by most British collectors, even recently - since all but one of Roud's 33 examples come from the USA, where it was written by Curley Fletcher in 1915 - with a full complement of *fifteen verses!* There were a handful of US sound recordings: The Beverly Hill Billies US recording of 1931 was issued in Britain on Panachord 25630 in the same year; The Ranch Boys US recording of 1934 was issued in Britain on Panachord 25970; and Frank Luther & Carson Robison's 1932 US recording was issued in Britain on Panachord 25230. Ben Willett may have

learned it from one of these, or from the radio - hearing it performed by Big Bill Campbell and his Hillbilly Band.

Other CD recordings: Wiggy Smith (MTCD307)

2 - 4 **The Tanyard Side**

(Roud 1021, Laws M28)

Sung by Tom and Chris Willett

Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

I stood at every station in a
 place you know fair well.
It was near the town called Brighton's land
There does live a fair young maid.
Then she's nigher and Diana bright,
She is free from lofty pride.
She's an only maid, she dwells in place
Down by the tanyard side.

For six long months I courted her,
And her parents they knew none.
'Til at length her cruel old father,
Oh, to me did prove unkind,
Which makes me sail across the sea
And leave my love behind.

*Now, adieu to all requitings
And tell 'em your disgrace.
Now I'm crossing the briny ocean,
Oh, just for the sake of you,
But if ever I should return again,
Oh, that girl I'd make my bride.
I'd roll her in my arms, my love,
Down by the tanyard side.*

Now, her hair it hung in ringlets
Hung over her snowy brow,
And the clearest glance of his eyes did shine,
Oh, would save a ship from wreck,
But if ever I should return again,
Oh, that girl I'd make my bride.
I would roll her in my arms, my love,
Down by the tanyard side.

Roud has 45 instances of this lovely song, mostly from England (I had always thought it was Irish), including 11 sound recordings. Neither this nor the Phoebe Smith version share much in the way of text or melody with Frank Quinn's Columbia 78. This recording by Tom and Chris is the only recent collection from outside East Anglia.

Other CD recordings: Phoebe Smith (TSCD661); Frank Quinn (TSCD660).

2 - 5 **The Old Miser** (Roud 3913)

Sung by Chris Willett

Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

There was an old miser,
 oh, in London did dwell
He had but one daughter
 that a sailor loved well
And when this old miser
 was out of the way
She was courting a sailor
 both night and by day.

And when this old miser,
 oh, became for to know
Straight away to the captain,
 straight away he did go
Saying "Captain, oh, Captain,
 good news I have to tell
I have got a young sailor
 here a transport to sell."

"Oh, what will you give me",
 this old miser did say.
"I will give you ten guineas,
 I will send him away
I will take him, I will send him
 straight over the main
That he will never come to England
 for to court her again."

But when this young damsel,
oh, became for to know
Straight away to the captain,
straight away she did go
Saying "Captain, oh, Captain,
bad news I have to tell
You have got my young sailor
here a transport to sell."

"Oh no", says the captain,
"oh, that never can be
For your father has sold him
as a transport to me
I have took him, I have sent him
straight over the main
That he will never come to England
for to court you again."

Put her hand in her pocket,
pulled out handfulls of gold
And down in the quarterdeck
ten hundred she told.
"I will give you this money
and twice as much more
If you will grant to me my sailor,
he's the lad I do adore."

"Oh no", says the captain,
"oh, that never will do
For your father has sold him
as a transport to me
I have took him, I have sent him
straight over the main
That he will never come to England
for to court you again."

"Put a curse on my parents
wheresomever may be
For I think in my own heart
they have quite a ruin of me
I'll go home to my cottage,
I'll set myself down
All night for my sailor,
all night I will mourn."

This song is almost certainly of broadside origin (about half of Roud's 27 entries); the theme of the rich man who has his daughter's humble suitor pressed to sea is one of the commonest of 18th century song subjects. The present text is paralleled by that of the well-known *Brisk Young Ploughing Boy*, except that that song ends happily.

I think that this wonderful performance by Chris Willett shows his as one of the foremost exponents of the mid-20th century Gypsy singing style, and quite as great a singer as his father was.

Despite being a good story, set to a gorgeous tune, it was not much taken-up by traditional singers, although the 13 named in Roud are spread right across the southern half of England. There is also one American sighting, and one from Tristan da Cunha.

Other CD recordings: Mary Ann Haynes (MTCD320)

2 - 6 The Little Ball of Yarn (Roud 1404)

Sung by Ben Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

Sure, in the merry month of May
When the men were making hay
When I strolled across my
grandfather's farm
There I spied a pretty maid and
to her I gently said
"May I wind up your little ball of yarn?"

"Oh no kind sir," said she,
"you're a stranger unto me
And no doubt you have
some other lady charm."
"Oh no my turtle dove,
you're the only girl I love,
May I wind up your little ball of yarn?"

Repeats this verse.

Sure, I took that pretty maid
and I laid her in the hay
Not intending to do her any harm
Sure, it was to my surprise
when I looked into her eyes
Then I wound up that little ball of yarn.

*Sure I pulled down all her clothes
and I slipped across that green
Not letting anyone know that I'd been there
It was nine months from that day,
when I met that pretty maid
And she had a little baby at her breast
There I said "My pretty miss,
now you did not expect this
When I wound up your little ball of yarn."*

Now its all you young maidens
that goes walking in the morning
When the blackbirds and the thrushes
They go warbling through the bushes
Keep your hand right on your
little ball of yarn.

This song had not appeared in printed collections until Hugill's *Shanties of the Seven Seas* was published in 1961. However, in bawdier forms the song is widely known, notably among servicemen and rugby players. It and the *Strawberry Roan* are the only songs that Ben Willett could be persuaded to sing in public. The melody here, a different one from Hugill's, is a 19th century music hall tune. It has been attached to a large number of texts, mostly ribald.

Other CD recordings: Mary Ann Haynes (MTCD320); May Bradley (MTCD349); Danny Brazil (MTCD345-7); Nora Cleary (MTCD331-2); Walter Pardon) MTCD305-6); The Southern Melody Boys (Odus & Woodrow) 1937 American recording is available on JSP box set (*Classic Field Recordings* JSP77131).

According to Steve Roud there are no known English broadside printings of the song, a fact which suggests a late date of composition. The song is also popular with singers in America and it was copyrighted there in 1884 to one Polly Holmes. Now it may be that, in the eyes of Ms Holmes, this was quite an innocent song, one without any hidden meanings (The Southern Melody Boys' version is probably from the Holmes sheet music). But traditional singers always seem to have treated it in an altogether different way, so much so that when the American collector Vance Randolph wanted to print the song he felt obliged to include it in his book *Roll Me in Your Arms - 'Unprintable' Ozark Folksongs* (University of Arkansas Press, 1992, pp.97-104), rather than in his 'printable' four-volume collection *Ozark Folksongs* (Missouri, 1946-50).

2 - 7 The Flower Girl (Roud 23920)

Sung by Chris Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

My Nell she were only flower girl
She never knew what love did mean
'Til she once fell in love with a top bloke
Straight off of my napper I went.
Then one night I caught them together
With tears in my eye, turned away
With an 'eartbreaking pain which was bitter
It caused me to go up and say:

"Why turn away from me now, Nell,
Since that top bloke have
give you the start?
For he cannot love you like I do,
Though I'm poor, I have an honest heart.
And haven't I always stood by you
Whenever you've been in a row?
For you once used to say
"Straight I love you, Bill"
Why can't you say so now?"

She would help anyone out of trouble
'Specially the aged and the grey
If a man thought he was losing an angel
Why don't he turn up and say:

"Why turn away from me now, Nell,

Since that top bloke have
give you the start?
For he cannot love you like I do,
Though I'm poor, I have an honest heart.
And haven't I always stood by you
Whenever you've been in a row?
For you once used to say
"Straight I love you, Bill"
Why can't you say so now?

Kilgarriff lists a music hall song of this title, written by R V Hitchcock, and sung by both Lucy Vestris and Rosie D'Alberg - but it seems unlikely that this is the same song, since I can't imagine Madame Vestris singing about a 'top bloke'. Steve Roud hadn't encountered it before, either, and so has allocated a new number to it.

2 - 8 The Oyster Girl
(Roud 875, Laws Q13)
Sung by Chris Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

As I were a walking
down fair London street
Now, such a pretty oyster girl
I chanced for to meet
Now, I asked her how she sold them
And "Three a penny" she said,
"And five I'll give to you,
If you'll bargain for me basket of oyslers."

"Oh landlord, oh landlord,
oh landlord" said he,
"Now have you got a private room
for the oyster girl and me?
So as we may sit down
and so merrilie, merrilie be,
"Til we bargain for the basket of oyslers."

Now I hadn't been in this private room
But half an hour or more,
When up she got and
down the stairs she flew.
She had digged in my pocket
of all my money
And she left me with a basket of oyslers.

"Oh landlord, oh landlord,
oh landlord" said he,
"Now have you seen that oyster girl
that came along with me?"
"Yes, she's paid all your reckonings
and now you may go free
And you toddle with your
basket of oyslers."

Now I've been through Ireland,
through Scotland, through Spain.
Now such a pretty oyster girl
I shall never meet again.
For to think an Englishwoman
Would take a Frenchman in by chance
And to learn him how buy English oyslers.

According to Gavin Greig (who noted no less than 13 versions of this song) '[it] is a lively ditty and very popular. The sum stolen from the gentleman varies in different copies from five hundred to ten thousand pounds'. The song appears to have been first printed in a Stirling chapbook of eight texts called *A New Patriotic Song*, by M Randall, c.1794-1812, under the title *The Eating of Oysters*. Caroline Hughes also calls them 'oyslers.'

Roud shows 75 entries, mostly from England (Essex to Northumberland) and Scotland, including 16 sound recordings.

Other CD recordings: Mary Ann Haynes (MTCD320); George Dunn (MTCD317-8); Phil Tanner (VT145CD)

2 - 9 Thorney Park (Roud 222)
Sung by Chris Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

In Thorny Park near Buckinghamshire,

Where the keepers' houses
they stand in three squares,
Their orders is to look after the game.
Right-fa-der-i-diddle-i-day.

Now, me and my dog went out one night
To kill a fat buck it was all our delight.
Well, my old dog come back to me
Smothered in blood I was sorry to see.
He was not able to follow the game.
Right-fa-der-i-diddle-i-day.

Now, I'll hunt this wood 'til I find that man.
I'll tan his old hide all if I can.
I'll tan his old hide all if I can.
Right-fa-der-i-diddle-i-day.

Now 'long come Jack a-nipping along
with a buck up his back.
It was just like a workman's
pack up his back.
Right-fa-der-i-diddle-i-day.

Now, that old woman where
we sold our game
That bleeding old cow she give us away,
And if they'd allowed her to speak that day,
Six long months would been my delay,
But they let me off with a fine to pay.
Right-fa-der-i-diddle-i-day.

The song is more commonly known as *Thornymoor Woods* in various collections, and placed in Nottinghamshire rather than Buckinghamshire. Thorney Wood Chase, once a part of Sherwood Forest, was enclosed sometime around 1790. Twenty years later John Pitts issued our present song on a broadside titled *The Lads of Thorney Moor Wood*, which was reprinted by several later printers. There are 79 instances in Roud, including 12 sound recordings - and as might be expected for a poaching song, all but one are from England, from Cornwall to Yorkshire, though none are from Nottinghamshire!

Other CD recordings: Walter Pardon (MTCD305-6); Jasper Smith (MTCD320); George Dunn (MTCD317-8)

2 - 10 Unknown
Sung by Tom Willett
Recorded by Ken Stubbs, c.1960.

Oh it's youth and folly
makes young girls merry
And once they're bound
then they must obey.
Oh fare thee well young man
it's the truth I'll tell you
I might have been married
for five years ago.

This fragment is particularly difficult to pin down because it could come from several songs and is not long enough to confidently assign to any particular Roud number.

The first two lines seem to come from the American song *Youth and Folly* (Roud 451), of which Stephen Dedalus's father sings a fragment in Chapter 2 of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The second two lines might come from the Scottish song *As I Went into Invernesshire*.

The tune Tom uses is the same as he has for *Lord Bateman* - which, in its turn, is one widely used for *The Brake of Briars* amongst southern English Gypsies.

2 - 11 Died for Love
(Roud 60, Laws P25)
Sung by Tom Willett
Recorded by Paul Carter, 1962.

Oh, it's down the green meadow
where the poor girls they roam
A-gathering flowers just as they grow
She gathered her flowers and way she came
But she left the sweetest rose behind.

Now, there is a flower that I've heard say

That never dies nor fades away
But if that flower I could only find
I'd ease my heart and torment his mind.

Now, there is an alehouse
where my love goes
Where my love goes and sits himself down
He takes a strange girl on his knee
Now, don't you think that's a grief to me.

Now, a grief an' old grief,
I'll tell you for why
Because she's got more gold than I
But her gold will glitter, her silver will fly
And in a short time she'll be as poor as I.

Now, my love he is tall and handsome too
My love he is tall and slender too
But carries two hearts in the room of one
Won't he be a rogue when
I'm dead and gone.

Now, dig my grave both long and deep
A marble stone, both head and feet
And in the middle, a turtle dove
To show the wide world I died for love.

Spoken: That's it.

This is another recording of the same song to be heard on track 1 - 11, as *There is an Alehouse*.

This favourite lyrical song has been often collected and is still sung in many parts of the countryside. The flower symbolism is sexual and may be compared with that found in such songs as *The Seeds of Love*; for instance, 'rose' in verse 1 of Tom's song clearly refers to virginity. The country poet John Clare re-made the text of this song into his handsome poem: *A Faithless Shepherd*. A student re-make is *There is a Tavern in the Town*.

Roud has 249 entries, more than half of which come from England, and include 46 sound recordings - indicating that it remained popular well into the modern era.

The tune used by Tom Willett - one of many tunes attached to this song - is related to the melody used by (perhaps adapted by) the mid-19th century stage comedian Sam Cowell in his burlesque version of the ballad of *Lord Lovel*. Several of Cowell's tunes gained enormous currency in the towns and villages, e.g. *Villikins and his Dinah*.

Other CD recordings: Sarah Porter (MTCD309-0); Danny Brazil (MTCD345-7); 'Pops' Johnny Connors (MTCD325-6); Alf Wildman (MTCD356-7); Viv Legg (VT153CD); Jean Orchard (VT151CD); Geoff Ling (TSCD 660); Amy Birch (TSCD 661); Jasper Smith (TSCD661); Emma Vickers (EFDSS CD 002).

2 - 12 Once I Was A Servant
(Roud 269, Laws K43)
Sung by Chris Willett
Recorded by Mike Yates in 1978

Once I was servant in Sir George's hotel
I used to love my mistress
and master as well,
'Til one day a sailor
came home from the sea.
This was the starting of my misery.

He asked for a candle to light him up to bed;
Also a pocket handkerchief
to tie around his head.
Me, young and foolish, thinking it no harm,
I jumped into bed
for to keep that sailor warm.

Early next morning this sailor he did rise.
Into his pockets handfuls of gold.
"Take this, my fair maid,
for the deed that I have done.
And tell me this day nine months
Whether it's a daughter or a son."

"Now, if it's a girl, it shall
dance upon your knee.
If it's a boy, he shall

plough the deep blue sea.
Bell-bottom trousers, a suit of navy blue.
He'll have to climb the riggings
like his dadda used to do."

Now all you young girls
take a warning by me:
Never trust a sailor
one inch above your knee.
I trusted one and it's quite enough for me,
And now he's gone and left me
with a baby on my knee.

Putting Chris's unusual first verse aside, it is a version of *The Oak and the Ash* (a.k.a. *Rosemary Lane*), which may be considered as almost the archetypal seduction ballad, with 202 Roud entries, and is found throughout the Anglophone world - with the exception of Ireland. The oldest known text is a black-letter broadside in the Roxburghe collection, which is also titled *The Oak and the Ash* and sung to an old tune *Quodling's Delight*, that was included in the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book* (c.1609 - 1619). A version printed slightly later, c.1660, was titled *The Lancashire Lovers*. Chris sings what is probably a slightly later version of the song.

Other CD recordings: Jack Arnoll (MTCD309-10); Charlie Whiting (MTVD339-0); George Dunn (MTCD317-8); Jumbo Brightwell (TSCD652); Ted Chaplin (VTC2CD); Lucy Woodhall (VTC7CD).

2 - 13 A-Swinging Down the Lane (Roud 2870)
Sung by Chris Willett
Recorded by Mike Yates in 1978

Oh, boys and girls would oftimes go,
A-fishing in the brooks.
With bits of thread for fishing line,
And bented pins for hooks.
Now I've oftimes wished,
And thought of things.
Such tricks we used to play.
I'd rather go with Rosy Nell,
A-swinging down the lane.

But yet I'd give the world to see,
Those sweet days again.
Upon each other's violet-top,
To pass the time away.
But I've oftimes wished,
And thought of things.
But I've only wished in vain.
I'd rather go with Rosy Nell,
A-swinging down the lane.

Now boys and girls, take my advice,
And keep it while you can.
Never roam the streets at night,
Or else you'll be like me.
For the girls they are deceitful,
And the boys they are so gay.
They'll serve you as they served me,
While swinging down the lane.

For notes to this song, see track 1- 7.

2 - 14 The American Stranger
(Roud 1081)
Sung by Chris Willett
Recorded by Mike Yates in 1978

I'm a stranger in this country
from America I came.
Oh, and no one don't know me,
oh, nor can't tell my name.
Just to prove myself royal,
if you're go along with me,
I will take you to America
my own darling to see.

Now, the moon shall be in darkness
and the star shall give no light.
Oh, if I prove false to,
oh, my own heart's delight,
Just to prove myself royal,
I will take you to America

my own darling to see.

Give me love to pretty Polly;
 she's my own heart's delight.
Likewise my dearest Susan
 although she is poor.
Just to prove myself royal,
 if you're go along with me,
I will take you to America
 my own darling to see.

Now, some says I am rakish,
 while another says I am wild.
Oh, it's some says I am guilty
 pretty girls to beguile.
In the middle of the ocean
 there shall grow a myrtle tree
To maintain my own darling
 that's a long way from home.

For Notes to this song, see track 1 - 17.

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