



## The Joy Of The Plygain Service

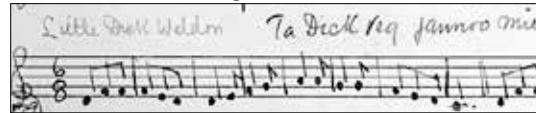
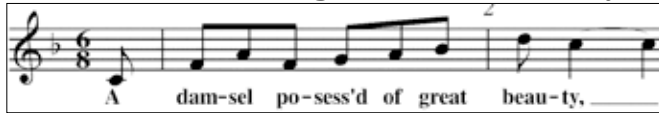
**THE PLYGAIN** - a service with its emphasis on singing traditional carols, unaccompanied - many of them are very old. Uniquely, anyone can take part - as long as the conventions and customs are respected - and, apart from a short service, no words are spoken.

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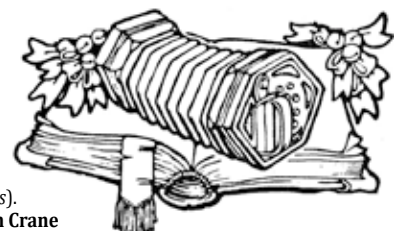
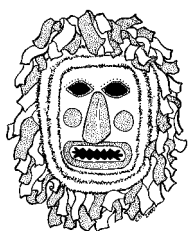


### Folklife news: societies & organisations, researchers, publications

The Cornish National Music Archive, p4. Trac Cymru, Doc Rowe, Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, Folklore Society, Broadside Day, p16. Pedlars Pack, 100 Ballads website, p17. Traditional Song Forum, Access Folk, p18. • Our thanks to Roy & Lesley Adkins, p11.



- **Exhibition:** Un/Common People Exhibition: Folk Culture in Wessex (in Swindon, Wiltshire, Poole and Salisbury Museums, p17 ~ on left: Ooser; corn dolly.
- **Books & Recordings:** Saydisc, p4. Seiniwn Hosanna (carols in Welsh), p10. Chwedlau Gwerin Cymru/Welsh Folk Tales, 'Jinny The Witch' and other Song Folk, The Ballad Partners, p18. Patrick Tayluer Shanty Singer podcast, Roy & Lesley Adkins' Newsletter. Teyrngeid I Llewelyn Alaw/A Tribute To Llewelyn Alaw - comments by Mick Tems.
- *This Journal:* by post; contribute; advert rates; see page 19.



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## Cornish Fairs, Carnivals and Tea Treats, *by* Lamorna Spry

For centuries, Cornwall has enjoyed a rich cultural history, with many local Fairs, Carnivals and Tea Treats featuring traditional Cornish food, music and dancing.

These festivals, often unique to Cornwall, were more than mere social gatherings—they were a testament to the region's strong sense of community, religious heritage and industrial history. A number of the festivals have survived, for instance the **Padstow 'Obby Oss'** and **Helston Flora Dance** that both celebrate May Day. The 10 day **Golowan festival** in Penzance, which includes **Mazey Day**, is said to be the UK's second largest street festival. Added to that are the music, food and shanty festivals which provide so much fun and cultural entertainment for locals and visitors alike.

Many of these festivals have roots that go back a long way and although the modern versions often centre on the larger Cornish towns and villages, the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries saw even the smallest villages put on their own fairs, carnivals and of course, the popular 'tea treats'. The revelry typically occurred during the summer months, offering a welcome respite from the daily grind of poverty within the fishing, mining and agricultural communities. Local chapels and churches tended to organize these events which served as a highlight of the year for many Cornish families.

One of the largest events was the **Corpus Christi fair in Penzance**, with roots stretching back to the Middle Ages. Held annually in June, this fair transformed the streets of Penzance into a lively marketplace and carnival, drawing people from across the region. Unlike the more religiously-oriented tea treats, the Corpus Christi fair blended commerce, entertainment, and ancient tradition, reflecting the town's maritime heritage and its role as a commercial hub in West Cornwall.

I have a personal interest in the Corpus Christi fair because my grandmother, Minnie Guy (nee Nicholls) told a number of stories relating to this particular event. One of her stories, that I found hard to believe, was that she had her tonsils burnt out at the fairground. I always thought this was a bit of Cornish nonsense until I read a scientific paper on the history of tonsillectomy that described the process, common at the time, of diathermy developed by Gregg Dillinger. Diathermy used a high frequency electric flow to raise the tissue temperature and then a metallic needle-hook was connected to an electric source and inserted in the tonsil. Ouch!!!

One year at the fair, she went to one of the many fortune tellers who told her she would not marry her fiancée of 7 years, but would marry a dark-haired gentleman from across the sea. Grandma had never been further than Penzance, let alone abroad, so thought this completely fanciful. But a short time later her fiancée left her for another woman and departed Newlyn to work in Birmingham. She never saw him again and at 27 years of age, she felt she would be a spinster for the rest of her life. However, at the next Penzance Fair she was walking with her best friend Nellie Badcock when they bumped into two young men from their home village in Newlyn. The two men were on a visit back to Cornwall from Detroit in the USA where they were working for the Ford car company. One of the men had jet black hair and was called William Osborne Guy. Within 6 weeks he and grandma were engaged and were later married that same year on 31st December 1921. Grandad never did return to the USA and the fortune teller's predictions were spot on.



The photograph (above left) from the 1952 carnival shows my sister Janet Spry in the front row, 3<sup>rd</sup> from the right in the pretty white frilly dress. My grandparents, Harold and Florence Spry, can be seen dressed up as the Pearly King and Queen in the **Port Isaac carnival float, circa 1950** (above right).

The village of **Port Isaac** and its neighbour Delabole still put on a carnival each year. I'm not sure how far back the tradition goes but I have photos from the 1950s.



Aside from the fairs and carnivals, some of the most popular local community events in the 19th and early 20th century were the '**Tea Treats**'. Most villages had their own Methodist Chapel with a well-attended Sunday School and each location would hold their own particular version of the tea treat, but the common theme would be music, dancing and food, the latter of which was most welcome in poorer communities. Tea treat buns, often saffron buns, would take centre stage and everyone would dress up in their best attire.

The tea treats would normally be held in the summer months and at some places villagers would also take part in a **Snail Creep**. This is a dance unique to the mid-Cornwall Clay Country and one that still survives is held annually at Rescorla Chapel. The Rescorla Snail Creep finished in the late 1940s but was revived in 2008.

The dance involves a long procession of couples following a band, led by two people holding up branches. Once the couples have processed through the village and back to the chapel, they form a large circle and then spiral into the middle and back out again, hence the name 'snail' creep. The Snail Creeps would often have their own music to dance to, as does Rescorla.



*Left:*

**St Stephen's Tea Treat 1910**

(Courtesy of the Cornish National Music Archive)

*Below left:*

**1911 Tea Treat procession at Torpoint**

(Courtesy of the Cornish National Music Archive)

*Below right:*

**Rescorla Snail Creep Procession 2024**

(Courtesy Garry Tregidga)



## Rescorla Snail Creep

*Traditional Tune to the Rescorla Snail Creep as remembered by Jean Harris and transcribed by Mike O'Connor in 2007.*



(Courtesy of the Cornish National Music Archive)



## Cornish Fairs, Carnivals and Tea Treats, by Lamorna Spry, continued

Although the tea treats, fairs and carnivals were held in the warmer months, there were also 'choir treats' that took place in the winter to acknowledge the dedication of the choir members. There is a very pretty chapel at Gunwen and this poem describes what a great day the choir had in 1889 on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January.

Twass in the first month of the year  
The eve was very wet  
When Gunwen Choir did all appear  
To have their choir treat  
Twass in the schoolroom at Gunwen  
That all of them did meet  
When young and old did all attend  
That sit in the singing seat

The first in age is Henry Hick  
The oldest in the rig  
That brings me to the second man  
And that is Joseph Grigg  
He's what we call the organist  
But players there are four  
And if we come up to the point  
I don't know how much more

William John Philips sings the bass  
And John Rawe too sometimes  
While Egbert Rowe comes next in turn  
For he the alto minds  
There's Ernest Griggs and Harry White  
That does their very best  
Then Charlie White and Silas Jane  
They join in with the rest

And then the female singers too  
The last but not the least  
There's four 'Edith and Mable Rowe'  
Rebekkah Parsons and Lucy Keast  
These males and females make the choir  
That did on Thursday meet  
Thirteen of them that will not tire  
To have a choir treat

I think the friends were very kind  
Thanks from the choir is due  
For treating them with rabbit pie  
And nice potatoes too  
And then there was a fine beef pie  
Which tasted very nice  
And that I'm sure you would have said  
If you had but a slice

And after all had got their fill  
And things were laid aside  
The evening passed away with speech and song  
The time did swiftly glide  
And then the eve came to a close  
With coffee, cake and tea  
And first rate bread and butter too  
And all of it came free

(Courtesy of the Courtney Library, Truro)

So despite the hardships of everyday life, even in the poorer areas of Cornwall, they certainly made the best use of music, dance, poetry, food and traditions through their wonderful Fairs, Carnivals and Treats.

For more information on the Tea Treats, visit the [cornishnationalmusicarchive.co.uk](https://cornishnationalmusicarchive.co.uk)

**Lamorna Spry © November 2024**

Lamorna is a fiddle player, singer, and Kesskrifer ~ Kernow, Bewnans Gwerin / Correspondent ~ Cornwall for Folklife West magazine.

## Folklife news: societies & organisations; researchers; publications

**THE CORNISH NATIONAL MUSIC ARCHIVE** is a fantastic resource for anyone wanting to hear and play traditional tunes and songs from Cornwall. It can be accessed on YouTube [[www.youtube.com/channel/UC-FQd0apFJSPOE6AAwt2vaw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-FQd0apFJSPOE6AAwt2vaw)], although a new website is currently being built (<https://cornishnationalmusicarchive.co.uk>). There is a vast library of performances from Tea Treats to pipe music, including music that goes back to medieval days such as the Rescorla Snail Creep. Snail Creeps were popular in the clay country and involved a procession of people walking behind a variety of instruments, eventually forming a close spiral. One is still performed every year in July at the Rescorla Festival. **Lamorna Spry**

☐ Kernow/Cornwall: Kesskrifer/Correspondent for *Folklife West*

### publications & recordings announced

- **Publicity for appropriate books/publications** and for **recordings of collected songs:** up to 200 words plus cover ~ please see [www.folklife-traditions.uk](http://www.folklife-traditions.uk) ⇒ "Contributions" page.
- **We don't review 'Folk' CDs** ~ Folklife Members can send news (up to 160 words +pic) for *Folklife West*.



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## Shoes, cats, bogeymen, and the origins or not of Long Lankin, by Rosie Upton

I've often wondered about the origins of the ballad **Long Lankin** ~ **False Lankin**, **Lamkin** and similar titles ~ (Roud 6 and Child 93), of which there are numerous versions found throughout these islands as well as in the USA and Canada.

Is it simply a cautionary tale to ensure that our homes are securely locked to prevent access by rogues or robbers? But could there be some truth in the story? Was it blood sacrifice, retribution for a debt unpaid or just superstition? It is certainly a gruesome ballad and the words filled with menace. Whilst a lord is away from home, Lankin creeps in, tortures the lord's baby, its blood collected in a basin, and then murders the child's mother. He is subsequently hanged, and his accomplice, the baby's nurse, is burnt in a fire. In some versions Lankin is taking vengeance, in others there is no motive and he is the bogeyman of nursery rhymes.

There are many claims to the veracity of the ballad and several locations claimed as genuine in the border country between Scotland and England. Whilst Scotland and Northumberland are the favoured locations, there are counter-claims from the West Country, Southern England and East Anglia.

Professor Child in his 'English and Scottish Popular Ballads' printed 26 versions, and in Bronson's 'Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads' there are 30 variants. Many of these collected in the USA and Canada. The protagonist is identified in some as a stonemason seeking retribution, but this is far from the case in all. Folk song collector Anne Geddes Gilchrist had her own theories and identified two different strands to the story, one from Scotland the other from Northumberland. She had a somewhat strange theory that Lankin may have been a leper because a supposed cure for leprosy was to drink a child's blood from a silver bowl!

Is it just a fable or is there any evidence for what some claim happened in the 14th or 15th century, and can the location be identified?

Welton Hall, now a farmhouse in Northumberland, is one possible location but no written record exists of such an event. This fine Grade II starred listed building dates from the 13th century, and was originally a mediaeval hall house with a later square defensive tower dating from the 15th century which is a scheduled monument. Many of the stones are of Roman origin.

The 13th century Nafferton Castle and its 14th century Tower House, a scheduled monument, now in ruins not far from Welton Hall, also known as Lonkin's Tower, has long been associated with 'Lang Lonkin'. Other than a local legend that he was a pirate who murdered the lady and her child at Welton Hall, there is no evidence to support this.

It is alleged in some versions of the ballad that there was a dispute between stonemason Lankin and Lord Wearie over non-payment for the building of his castle. Yet the Wearie family name originated in Devon, not in Northumberland, and no one of that name is associated with Welton Hall which was home to the Welton family. However, a baron by the name of Richard de Balwearie was born circa 1200 at Balwearie Castle.

The ruined mediaeval 15th century tower house of Balwearie Castle in Fife could be a likely contender. There are numerous stories about the Wizard of Balwearie, Sir Michael Scott a 12th century theologian obsessed with the occult and heir to Richard de Balwearie. Yet there are no tangible references to Long Lankin, even though it gives some credence to that source for the story.

So many theories, but the facts remain elusive with very little evidence. Perhaps there is an element of truth but it may have been embellished through time. The story inflames our fear of the dark and the unknown. I have my own theory and think it possible that there is a distant connection to blood sacrifice which subsequently mutated into the burial of shoes and other artefacts to protect homes and those living inside from evil demons and bogeymen of every kind.

Much of my working life was involved in conservation of historic buildings. The first time I was shown a tiny pair of ancient children's shoes found buried within a chimney breast in a 17th century listed cottage being refurbished in Gloucestershire I felt slightly uneasy. It was suggested that they had been placed there to protect the occupiers from evil spirits or the devil entering the house through the chimney. A sort of malign Santa Claus! The owners assured me that although they weren't superstitious, they would bury them back where they were found. I would have done the same, not necessarily through fear or anxiety, but because they were an integral part of the dwelling, part of its history and evolution.

I've since seen many similar powerful charms buried within old dwellings, under floorboards, at door thresholds, in inglenooks and chimney breasts. Ranging from single shoes and pairs of old boots in sizes from those for small children to adult. Always well worn, never new. It is said that because the shoe still holds the impression of the wearer's foot it therefore retains a trace of the 'soul' of the person to whom they once belonged. Acting as a decoy to entice and entrap the malign spirits securely away from the current occupants. They've been found in the most modest cottages, ancient farmhouses, manor houses and castles, so the beliefs were clearly widespread. It has been suggested, but without any evidence, that the shoes may be those of dead children, which given the extent of infant mortality years ago may be true, though I have my doubts. Hundreds of these shoes have been found and many can be seen in museum collections despite the belief that by removing them from their hiding place will bring bad luck.

It has been claimed that the custom, which goes back many centuries, relates to human sacrifice with blood poured into foundations of new buildings or the remains of the body buried there to ensure the longevity of the property and good fortune of the owners. The stuff of nightmares! The practice allegedly evolved through time by replacing blood offerings with shoes and other protective symbols. These chilling legends of sacrificial offerings is widespread, especially in Eastern Europe. There are similar stories of people walled up whilst still alive! More likely to have been accounts of Anchorites who willingly withdrew from the world to be permanently enclosed within a small cell, often within a Christian church, where they could lead a life of prayer and meditation.

I've been shown mummified cats, a carved stone lion thought to be Roman but later identified as medieval, and children's toys. Several wooden toys were found by a builder in a Georgian house in Bath when the firm I worked for was carrying out renovations. Secreted between the floorboards in front of the hearth. I've seen many pairs of shoes including a tiny child's pair found by friends of mine in Bradford on Avon. Elsewhere skeletons and human skulls have allegedly also been found. It is claimed that a hanged man was buried within the walls of an inn at Tucker's Grave near Norton St Phillip in Somerset and there have been similar stories in other places.

One fine example of a mummified cat, petrified within the limestone walls, was allegedly found during repairs is at The Three Stags Heads pub in Wardlow Mires, near Tideswell in Derbyshire. A favourite haunt of mine as a teenager. The macabre remains of the cat within a glass case stood in a corner beside the bar. I don't think it is still there. It was said to have been walled up when the building was constructed as a good luck charm. Just pity the poor cats!

Whatever the origins of Long Lankin, who doesn't like a good old-fashioned revenge tragedy or horror story?

**Rosie Upton © November 2024**



## Gallant Hussar: Song, Tune and Dance, by Charles Menteith

Gallant Hussar is best known now as a morris dance and tune from Bledington, Glos. But in the 19th century a song of that name was published quite often in broadsides, for instance by Barr, of Leeds (1), Such of London (2), and in song-books. The following example is typical. It comes from WA Barrett's English Folk-Songs (1891) pp.24-25 (3)

### Gallant Hussar, WA Barrett, English Folk-Songs (1891)

A dam-sel po-sess'd of great beau-ty, She stood by her own fa-ther's gate. The  
gal-lant Hus-sars were on du-ty, To view them this mai-den did wait. Their  
hor-ses were cap'-ring and pran-cing, Their ac-cout-re-ments shone like a star, From the  
plain they were nea-rest ad-van-cing, She es-pied her young gal-lant Hus-sar.

1. A DAMSEL possessed of great beauty,  
She stood by her own father's gate,  
The gallant hussars were on duty,  
To view them this maiden did wait;  
Their horses were cap'ring and prancing,  
Their accoutrements shone like a star,  
From the plain they were nearest advancing,  
She espied her young gallant Hussar.
2. Their pellisses were slung on their shoulders,  
So careless they seemed for to ride,  
So warlike appeared these young soldiers,  
With glittering swords by each side.  
To the barracks next morning so early,  
This damsel she went in her car,  
Because she loved him sincerely -  
Young Edward, the gallant Hussar.
3. It was there she conversed with her soldier,  
These words (s)he was heard for to say.  
Said Jane, "I've heard none more bolder,  
To follow my laddie away."  
"Oh fie!" said young Edward, "be steady,  
And think of the dangers of war,  
When the trumpet sounds I must be ready,  
So wed not your gallant Hussar."
4. For twelve months on bread and cold water,  
My parents confined me for you,  
Oh hard hearted friends to their daughter,  
Whose heart it is loyal and true.  
Unless they confine me for ever,  
Or banish me from you afar,  
I will follow my soldier so clever,  
To wed with my gallant Hussar.
5. Said Edward, "Your friends you must mind them,  
Or else you are for ever undone,  
They will leave you no portion behind them,  
So pray do my company shun."  
She said, "If you will be true-hearted.  
I have gold of my uncle in store,  
From this time no more we'll be parted,  
I will wed with my gallant Hussar."
6. As he gazed on each elegant feature,  
The tears they did fall from each eye,  
I will wed with this beautiful creature,  
And forsake cruel war, he did cry.  
So they were united together,  
Friends think of them now they're afar,  
Crying, "Heaven bless them now and forever,  
Young Jane and her gallant Hussar."

A search through the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library's website for title "Gallant Hussar" or Roud no. "1146" will show many examples. Amongst others, it was collected at Brigg, Lincs, by Percy Grainger (4), and by Alfred Williams from James West at Quenington, Glos (5). Williams was not a musician; his interest in songs was social rather than musical. So he noted no tunes. However, C Sharp collected the tune and first verse from Richard Smith (6) at Swinbrook near Burford, Oxon, also in the upper Thames valley. This tune can be combined with Williams' verses. The tune was used for morris dances at four villages in Gloucestershire. Cecil Sharp collected the following version, originating from Lower Swell, from William Hathaway, then living in Cheltenham (7).

### Gallant Hussar, William Hathaway, 1907

A dam-sel po-sess'd of great beau-ty, She stood by her own fa-ther's gate. The  
gal-lant Hus-sars were on du-ty, To view them this mai-den did wait. Their  
hor-ses were cap'-ring and pran-cing, Their ac-cout-re-ments shone like a star, From the  
plain they were nea-rest ad-van-cing, She es-pied her young gal-lant Hus-sar.



The manuscript notes "morris dance, corner dance". Although Sharp's mss. include comments about the Lower Swell dances, he never described them systemically. What can be gleaned from Sharp's notes has been brought together by P. Davenport (8). He writes "I offer this in the hope that a side somewhere will become interested and perhaps adopt and develop the information." Sadly, I don't believe anyone has done this. A dance with the same name is mentioned from Oddington; neither the tune nor the steps were noted. R. Kenworthy Schofield noted The Bold Huzzar (Headington Reel) (9). It is a variant of the Manchester Hornpipe, and so quite a different tune. RKS also noted Gallant Huzzar in Bledington. He did not note the C music. George Butterworth notated the dance from Longborough (10). He did not note the tune. In L Bacon's Handbook of Morris Dances (11), the tune for the Longborough dance is as noted from William Hathaway, with the C music from another source. There is some justification for this link. Roy Dommett (12) states "There were obviously close ties between the dancers in Longborough and Lower Swell, possibly there was only one side between the two places in the 1870's and 1880's." In 1909 Sharp was in Bledington, where he noted morris dances, of which he subsequently published detailed descriptions. Among the tunes was Gallant Hussar, from Charles Benfield of Bould, a hamlet about a mile from Bledington, over the county boundary in Idbury parish in Oxfordshire (13).

### Gallant Huzzar, Charles Benfield, 1909 and Morris Dance Book 3 (14)

I have added **A**, **B** & **C** denoting the sections of the tune and dance. The **A** section, up to bar 8, is taken up by fairly standard steps and figures, which don't differ much, within each village, between one dance and another. The sections peculiar to each dance are **B** and **C**. In this dance the sections are danced in the order ABABACAC. In parts **B** and **C** the dancers pass their opposite numbers, crossing over to the other side of the set [bars 9-10 or 17-20]. They then turn [bars 11-12 or 21-22] and perform a half-hey [half figure of 8] in bars 13-16. In section **B** the cross-over is done with rapid steps which only require two bars [9-10] of music. In the **C** music, longer and more elaborate steps are used, requiring four bars [17-20]. Musically this is achieved by playing something like the two bars of **B** music at half the speed. The bar in 3/8 at the beginning of the **C** music is without steps. In practice a convenient solution is to cut short bar 8 after the initial dotted crotchet, and go straight into the **C** music. Sharp's notes include instructions for the dance. I have included his steps for C1. He wrote: "Rb means right foot behind on toe left leg bent at knee" (with the weight on L). Lb, similar with L for R. J = jump. n = spring [transferring weight to the other foot]. A hook-leg is a turning step as a result of which the two lines of dancers face each other before the half hey [half figure of 8].

C Sharp published Gallant Huzzar twice in his Morris Dance Books [MDB], nos. 3 and 5, as well as in his Morris Dance Tunes [MDT], which, incidentally, strike me as being aimed largely at the amateur pianist market [where the sales lay]. The first time it appears in his MDT Set 5, pp 14-15 (15), as collected, arranged for piano, as well as in MDB 3. In MDT Sets 1-8 and MDB 1-4 Sharp collaborated with Herbert Macilwaine, while in sets 9 and 10 and MDB 5 he was joined by George Butterworth. Gallant Hussar appears again in MDB 5 and MDT set 9 (16). While the A and B strains are the same as in Set 5, even down to the piano arrangement, the melody of the C music is as follows, with the steps taken from Morris Book 5 (17).

### Gallant Hussar, from Morris Dance Book 5

The gap in the original has been eliminated by cutting bar 20 down to 3/8, and starting the slow steps in the 3/8 bar 16. The first notes of the bars, normally accentuated, thus occur at different, in my view inappropriate, stages in the steps. An experienced morris musician has described this to me as "a bloody nuisance". In addition some of the steps have been changed. This version of the tune has been repeated by Lionel Bacon in his Handbook of Morris Dances (11 p 81). I have not seen a traditional version which justifies the two bars in 3/8. I suggest that, now that C Sharp's manuscripts are readily available through the VWML website, it is time for a revision.



## Four Manx tunes from Isabella Kennaugh, by Stephen Miller

Dr John Clague collected ten tunes from **Isabella Kennaugh** at some time in the 1890s. In the tune books she is variously noted as "Mrs T. Kennaugh Ballakaighen," "Mrs Tom Kennaugh Ballakaighen," "Mrs Kennaugh." She is properly Isabella Kennaugh, born in 1813, dying in 1897, when she was buried on 17 August that year in Malew churchyard. The 1891 census finds her living on Ballakeighan in Arbory, aged 77, with her husband, Thomas (83), the farm having passed to their son, John (50), a widower. John's daughter, Issabella [sic] (19), was also present, as well as his sister, Patience Lawson (40), a butcher's widow, and her daughter, Issabella [sic] Lawson (16), working on the farm.

Here are four of those ten tunes collected by Clague: (1) "Molley gys Jee, m[y] chaarijn," (2) "Cur ass jig as cap as cloak," (3) "Little Dick Weldon" or, "Ta Dick Veg jannoo mie," (4) "Gouyn dy linsey wunsey."

Stephen Miller, RBV © November 2024

A dedicated researcher into Manx folklore, folksong, and folk dance, plus the figures and collectors involved with the Celtic revival, Stephen's extremely impressive work in Manx and Celtic Studies are shared freely online, in print and in person, and freely available to others on his **Chiollagh Books** website, <http://chiollaghbooks.com>  
<https://culturevannin.im> RBV: winner of the annual Reih Bleeaney Vanannan award 2020, see

👉 Comments from musicians on these Manx tunes would be most welcome.

## Gallant Hussar: Song, Tune and Dance, by Charles Menteith, *continued*

### References

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FTJ 77, March 2025, will include a separate article on Hussars by Charles Menteith.



## Folk clubs and local radio in the late twentieth century, *by* Keith Gregson

### ***Keith Gregson uses recently re-discovered recorded material to examine Folk Club activity in North East England forty years ago***

Some 45 to 50 years ago, BBC Radio Newcastle ran a weekly programme called **Folk Voice**. The show featured new recordings and recorded visits to local folk clubs. At the time I was involved in one such club which met at a place called **Belford House** in Sunderland – a social club linked to a declining (or indeed declined!) Wearside ship building company. The folk club audience was made up mainly of members of the social club who came along for a 'sing-song' and an evening's entertainment. The guest list frequently included acts popular in the clubs at the time such as Silly Wizard, Aly Bain and Tom Anderson, Mike Harding, Gary and Vera Aspey and local singer/song writer Ed Pickford.

A few years ago I rediscovered a number of cassette tape copies of recordings made by the BBC at the club and recently managed to transfer them to mp3s. Hopefully the list of performers and songs/tunes below should be of interest to those researching the nature of folk clubs in the north east in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The resident group, Frigate, was made up of three middle aged men and one younger one. The group was extremely popular with the audience and adopted an approach similar to that of the popular Liverpool Spinners. The group featured on the following tracks accompanied by humorous patter. Their performances were spread across a number of recorded shows and included;

- The Fox (went out on a chilly night)
- The Keeper
- Lamorna
- The Old Dun Cow
- Cushie Butterfield
- Sally Wheatley
- Hanging Johnny

These were all songs which required audience participation. Thirty years later, three of the songs were picked up from my original tapes by indie band the Futureheads, and used for their much acclaimed 2011 a cappella album Rant. As a result the band's version of the 'Old Dun Cow' has become something of a Wearside anthem accessible on Spotify.

Belford House was also able to call upon a second resident group called Quayside, which included an organist and fiddle player and had among its members Marilyn Fox (wife of Bob Fox). It was fronted by much respected and sadly missed song writer Pete Finley. Tracks on Folk Voice by Quayside included:

- Black Jack Davey
- Farewell to Tarwathie
- Dead Skunk in the Middle of the Road
- The Seaham Boat's Sailing Away (Pete's composition)

There are a couple of tracks from Pete Smith, husband of the still popular Marie Little. Pete's roots lay in Salford which explains one of his choices for the recording;

- Dirty Old Town
- Van Diemen's Land

Ken Johnson, from the small pit town and port of Seaham contributions were

- The Black Velvet Band
- Cushie Butterfield

Gary and Vera Aspey gave us two entries from one of their albums;

- A medley of Lancashire children's songs
- Don't Get Married, Girls

Folk comedian, the late Mike Elliot, came up with a risqué version of Cushie Butterfield (with considerable patter) while fellow member of 'the Northern Front' – Ed Pickford – provided two of his self-penned pieces;

- The Oldest Swinger in Town
- The Tortoise Song

I came up with one of my own compositions and a nineteenth century Cumbrian Song I had found in an ancient booklet;

- The Man Who Could Not Sing (Caedmon's Song)
- British Beer

### **Some Observations**

It may be inaccurate to call Belford House a typical late twentieth century folk club. Only further detailed research into clubs of the time will make any real conclusions possible here. However both from the nature of the recorded tracks and my personal memories as a club resident, I would put Belford House Folk Club into a 'broad church' category. Humour, audience participation and songs contemporary and music hall seem to have been the order of the day. Joe Wilson's 'Sally Wheatley', now a standard, had been recently revived in the 1980s with a new tune by Alex Glasgow. Ed Pickford's performance of his own 'Oldest Swinger in Town' may well predate the chart entry recording (no.6) of Fred Wedlock. Loudon Wainwright's 'Dead Skunk in the Middle of the Road' had been around for a decade or so. 'The Old Dun Cow' and 'Lamorna' have fascinating roots. The former's stretches back through the Copper Family to the music halls, while Cornwall and Lancashire both played a part in the development of Lamorna. Ewan McColl's post war 'homage' to Salford 'Dirty Old Town' has morphed its way to becoming an 'Irish Folk Song'! 'The Keeper' and 'The Fox' may have been familiar to the audience from school days.

I have a play list of the 'Folk Voice' recordings on my computer and listen to them frequently. They are as fresh as they were over forty years ago.

***Keith Gregson © November 2024***

### **Footnote**

Keith's articles on folk clubs in north east England in the 1970s can be seen in **FTJs** May and October 2021. The former article references Belford House briefly, and mentions a single BBC recording. Recent sorting out of the tapes indicates that the club was visited more than once by the local BBC Show.

### ***Keith would welcome feedback as to whether this was 'typical' of clubs at the time.***

He adds: "we still have our monthly afternoon gathering at the Stumble Inn in Sunderland. At the most recent gathering there were about 40 there - half performers and half audience with a wide variety of music from traditional unaccompanied to Roger Whittaker's Last Farewell - sung to the accompaniment of an English concertina."



## The Joy Of The Plygain Service, by Hywel Parry Smith; *from Arfon Gwilym*



A **Plygain** is a special form of a traditional carol service held in parts of Wales around Christmas [December & January] - a service with its emphasis on singing traditional carols, unaccompanied. Many of these carols are very old. Uniquely, anyone can take part - as long as the conventions and customs are respected - and apart from a short service (a reading, a prayer, a carol for the congregation), no words are spoken.

**Dr Hywel Parry-Smith**, a singer from Bro Madryn ministry area, describes what these unique services are all about. From being almost forgotten about by the 1970s, except in rural pockets of mid and north Wales, the traditional Welsh 'Plygain' service is making a quiet but significant comeback today.

The Welsh word "**plygain**" or "**plygien**", depending on dialect, is derived from the Latin words for cockcrow: 'pulli cantos'. The services started as watchnight services on Christmas Eve. They have now mostly shifted to post-Christmas and can be held until the end of January. The form of the service is simple, with a few variations depending on local custom and church tradition. After a pared-down version of Evening Prayer and a congregational carol (or a hymn, reading and prayer in non-conformist chapels), the Plygain is declared open. By convention children are the first to sing, followed by adults from the hosting congregation, and then anyone else who wants to join in. Only one carol is offered, unaccompanied, without a conductor but always from a copy of words with or without the music. They are all in Welsh. There is no pre-arranged order and the same carol should not be offered twice in the same service. Singers need therefore to have a decent repertoire in case their first or second choices have already been sung.

Once everyone who wants to has had a chance to sing, silence descends on the congregation and whoever is leading the service judges it time for another congregational hymn or carol. After this the second round begins, following the same order as the first. Usually the last carol is sung by all the male carollers: 'Carol y Swper', sung to the tune Difyrwrch Gwyr Bangor. After the blessing, supper is served in the vestry or hall or sometimes nearby farm. Carollers are served first!

Very few of the carols are known outside Plygain services. Many date from the 18th and 19th centuries, some from the 20th and a couple seem to have survived from before the Reformation. A few families of singers still jealously guard their own carol, although I can think of almost 100 that are now available in print. The carols are bursting with theology, written in metre, and recount not only the nativity of Christ but go on to Jesus' death and resurrection and the Second Coming. Many a line urges us to amend our lives whilst we still have the opportunity.

On the whole the carols are sung to old ballad tunes, in major and minor keys, and like the old ballads have many verses; usually only a handful are chosen, but the option is always there to sing all of them. Although women are now in carols arranged for four parts, trios of baritone with tenor and bass are particularly appreciated. The lines can be changed to suit the numbers and voices available. Parties are not usually more than eight. It is often difficult to squeeze more than that on to the chancel steps or into a chapel's Set Fawr [area around pulpit where chapel elders sit, facing congregation - Ed.] Soloists will get up and sing too.

The singing is not polished and is not expected to be; these are not art-songs. The carols are offered in an act of worship, not on the stage of an eisteddfod. The words are all-important, as is taking part - singing ability is not judged. A tuning fork to pitch the carol is still used more often than a note from piano or organ. If singers miss the note and have a false start, nobody bats an eyelid. Some of the carols have one voice to start and the tune is thrown to and fro between the different voices but all join in harmony before the end. A refrain is very rare. I've yet to sing in a Plygain service without electric light, although candles and lamps usually burn somewhere in the church or chapel. It's difficult to imagine what the services looked like when lit by scores of candles. They were a noted feature of these services. In Llanfyllin, candles were made especially for Plygain. Plygain services are now held in many areas of Wales and by Welsh exiles in London. The well known Mallwyd Plygain is yet to come, held on New Year's Eve of the Old Welsh Calendar - January 13. A plygain at Llandeilo Fawr has been held for about a decade now on the last Sunday of January.

Ask around and see if there is one being held near you. You don't have to understand every word, although that helps. The atmosphere of these dignified and joyful services, which are unique to Wales and have remarkably survived the centuries through adaptation, will surely affect you. Wear warm clothing, beware of the candle flames and listen as the Christian faith is proclaimed afresh to each generation. Be challenged and amazed at "the Divinity in Mankind, wearing the nature of Man", and ponder on "The Heir of Heaven, God of Hosts, and no less". Followed by food, fellowship and fun.

### Hywel Parry Smith

#### Editors' note:

**Diolch i / Thanks to Arfon Gwilym**, who contributed this article from the **Plygain website**, [www.plygain.org/home.htm](http://www.plygain.org/home.htm) (the English-language version). The site gives full details of the tradition and how it has evolved; for more details, see "**The Plygain Today**" webpage.

The website was put together through the joint efforts of Ceris Gruffudd, Ffion Mair, Roy Griffiths, Rhian Davies, Gareth Williams, & Arfon Gwilym. It includes the **Plygain Diary** for **December** and **January**.

**An online video:** Arfon explains about the Plygain tradition for the Smithsonian Folklife Festival on <https://festival.si.edu/blog/2013/singing-tradition-welsh-plygain-carol/>, and also sings the Plygain carol 'Ar Gyfer Heddiw'r Bore' with Robin Huw Bowen and Sioned Webb.

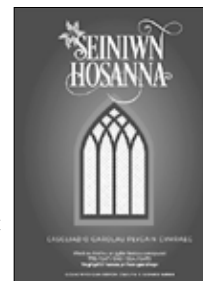
**"Plygain singing is folk singing ... real folk take part, it's an open door policy" ~ Arfon Gwilym**



all photos from plygain.org © copyright

#### Book :

**A new collection of carols: SEINIWN HOSANNA, edited by Arfon Gwilym & Sioned Webb.** 60 carols, arranged for different voice combinations; along with the story of the carol singers themselves, in Montgomeryshire and other parts of Wales. Price: £10 (+£2.99 P & P). Order by leaving a message at: [plygain@gmail.com](mailto:plygain@gmail.com) Please note your name, address and telephone no. You will be contacted for payment. Bookshops: normal discounts apply. This volume is published with the financial support of the Powys Eisteddfod Cymrodoriaeth committee, and the profits will all go towards designing and maintaining the Plygain website.





## The Old Wonder Not For Joes, by Annie Jones



**THE OLD WONDER NOT FOR JOES**, published by Annie Jones, © 2024. ISBN 978-0-9526285-1-4. £2.50, or £4 by post, from Mrs. A. J. Jones, Millfield, Golden Valley, Bishops Frome, Worcs WR6 5BN. 01885 490323; chatter@anniej.me

The favourite dance was always the Black Boy to the tune Not For Joe. Bill's version was

*Not for Joe, not for Joe,  
Not for Joseph if he knows it,  
Not for Joe, not for Joe,  
Stick him in the garden let him grow.  
If I had a penny, I'd buy a penny gun.  
Fill it full of powder and make the coppers run.  
Not for Joe, not for Joe,  
Not for Joseph if he knows it.  
Not for Joe, not for Joe,  
Stick him in the Garden let him grow.*

There were other verses which were sung throughout the dance and Bill said that they would make up verses as they went along.



**Step into the rich history and vibrant traditions of Welsh Border Morris dancing** with this comprehensive guide that brings the past to life. Based on detailed recollections from **Bill Scarrott**, a seasoned dancer from the early 20th century, this book offers an authentic look at the origins and evolution of the dances. Through meticulous descriptions of costumes, steps, and the music that accompanies these lively performances, you'll discover the cultural significance of this unique form of expression. Whether you're a novice looking to learn the basics or an experienced dancer seeking to refine your technique, the pages within provide everything you need to recreate these traditional dances with accuracy and spirit.

As **Old Wonder Not for Joes** side revived these age-old dances, they recognised the need for subtle refinements, ensuring that each move was performed with precision and respect for tradition. The book guides you through these refinements, helping you navigate the intricate patterns and timing that define Welsh Border Morris. From 'Bicycle Chain' to 'Three Times Round Your Dad,' each dance is broken down into easy-to-follow instructions, making it accessible for dancers of all levels. Let this book be your guide as you embark on a journey into the heart of English heritage, preserving and celebrating the legacy of Morris dancing for generations to come.

For more information, please visit <http://www.morrisdances.co.uk>

And you can watch The Old Wonder Not for Joes dancing at the Butchers Arms, Woolhope, Herefordshire (May 1990) on YouTube, courtesy of Graham Baldwin, on [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_ZVdC8XdYds&t=963s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ZVdC8XdYds&t=963s)

**Editor's note:** on our website you can find some extracts from Dave Jones' "The Roots of Welsh Border Morris" book,

- **'The Pershore Not For Joes'** [1] (incl. sung verses), p40-41, 2013 Jan, **FT 36**.
- **'The Pershore Not For Joes'** [2] (incl. sung verses), p42-43, 2013 Jul, **FT 38**.

You can download these issues as PDFs (free) from our archive: <https://www.folklife-traditions.uk/index-issues-1.html> These articles were revised and extended from articles originally published in FTJ's predecessors, "The Welsh Border Broadsheet" and "The Somers Journal".



Dave Jones talking to Bill Scarrott in 1985



**The Roots of Welsh Border Morris**  
by the late Dave Jones,  
1988, revised 1995;  
ISBN No. 0 9526285 0 3.

£5 by post from:  
Mrs. A. J. Jones,  
Millfield, Golden Valley,  
Bishops Frome,  
Worcs WR6 5BN  
01885 490323;  
email  
[chatter@anniej.me](mailto:chatter@anniej.me)

## Our thanks to long-time contributors Roy and Lesley Adkins.

We'd like to record our appreciation of Roy & Lesley Adkins, historians and archaeologists, who have now retired from writing **Journal** articles. We were delighted to receive researched articles from professional authors of books on naval and social history, including **Eavesdropping on Jane Austen's England**, **Jack Tar**, and **When There Were Birds: the forgotten history of our connections** ~ see [www.adkinshistory.com](http://www.adkinshistory.com)

They wrote some **29 articles**: *A Propaganda Lullaby; Abroad for Pleasure; Beating the Bounds; Block Ornaments; Cockades; Drive the Cold Winter Away; I trudge the morning dew...; Johnny Cope; Joseph Ritson; Song Collector; Poor Portraits and Broken Tokens; Roll, Alabama, Roll; Rushes; Selling Wives; Stand To Your Guns; The Banks of the Nile; The Boars Head Carol – and Blood Month; The British Salamanders; The Death of Saint Monday; The Female Cabin Boy; The Handloom Weaver & the Factory Maid; The Leaving of Liverpool; The Poor Ballad Sellers and Singers; The Sailors Dream [Franklin]; The Saucy Sailor; The Song and the Place: Here's the Tender Coming; The Standing Stones Ballad; The Twa Corbies; Who was Kishmul?; Women Who Went To War.*

[www.folklife-traditions.uk/index-articles.html](http://www.folklife-traditions.uk/index-articles.html) lists the relevant **Journal** issue that the articles appear in, with free PDF downloads.



## Songs that grow like trees: an appreciation of Sydney Carter (1915–2004), by Ian Pittaway



*Your holy hearsay is not evidence  
Give me the good news in the present tense*

So begins *The Present Tense*, a song by Sydney Carter which sums up his approach to life and faith: based on personal conviction not imposed authority, complex not simplistic, questioning not dogmatic. He has been, through his songs, an inspiration and support to many, most of whom he never met, many of whom were not even aware of his name, some of whom do not even share his faith. And that includes me, an atheist who nevertheless appreciates the power, the beauty and the wry humour of Sydney Carter's songs.

### Encounter with folk music

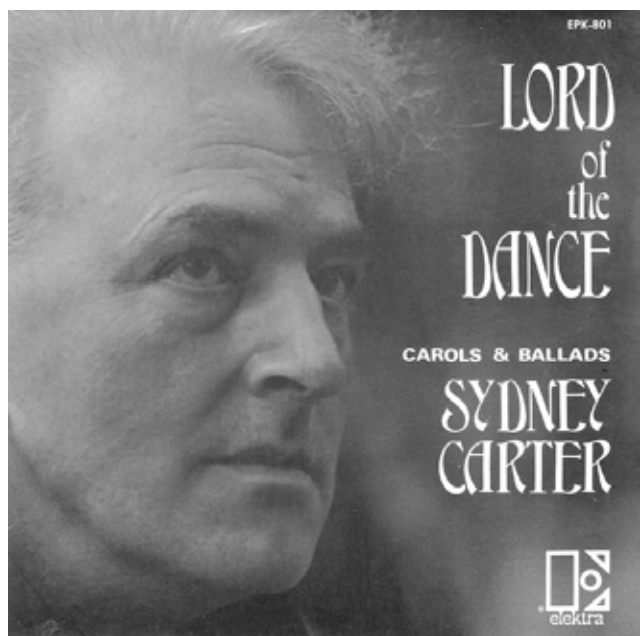


Sydney Carter (holding a skull) with the Friends (Quakers) Ambulance Unit in the summer of 1940.

Sydney Carter was born in 1915, during World War I. He was baptised and buried as an Anglican, but his spiritual home was with the Quakers, a nickname for the Society of Friends which stuck. Like the Quakers, he was a pacifist and joined the Friends' Ambulance Unit when World War II broke out, serving in Egypt, Palestine and Greece. In Greece he had his first significant encounter with traditional or folk music, which in turn led to his career as a songwriter.

His songs have a definite folk quality to them in melody, lyrics and phrasing, and one of his most well-known songs is set to a traditional melody. *George Fox*, about one of the founders of the Quakers, uses a morris dance tune, *Monk's March*, with words which sum up both Fox's and Carter's theology:

*With a book and a steeple and a bell and a key  
They would bind it forever, but they can't, said he  
The book, it will perish and the steeple will fall  
But the light will be shining at the end of it all.*



One of his most-sung songs, *Lord of the Dance*, is based on the melody of a Shaker song, *'Tis The Gift To Be Simple* or *Simple Gifts*, often credited as traditional but written by Elder Joseph Brackett, Jr. (1797–1882). It isn't so widely known among the many schoolchildren, church choirs and folk singers who have sung the song that Sydney's inspiration for the lyric came from a confluence between Jesus and the god Shiva, Hinduism's Nataraja or Lord of the Dance, who destroys so that the god Brahma can re-create. This source of inspiration sums up Sydney, seeking unity in diversity, seeing all faiths as imperfect attempts to encode what is essentially mysterious about life, "by whatever name you know", as he put it in song. His only enemy was unyielding institutional dogma, which brings with it the certainty of truth, which in turn creates enemies of all who question or believe differently.

### Outrage and revolt

And it follows from this theology, what Carter called his "rock of doubt" or his "dance in the dark", that he saw the bringing of unity and peace in the world as central to his faith. Thus it was that he wrote his other 'signature tune', *When I Needed A Neighbour*, for the launch of Christian Aid Week in 1965, premiered by The Ian Campbell Folk Group at a rally in Trafalgar Square. This song is a little unusual for Sydney, lyrically

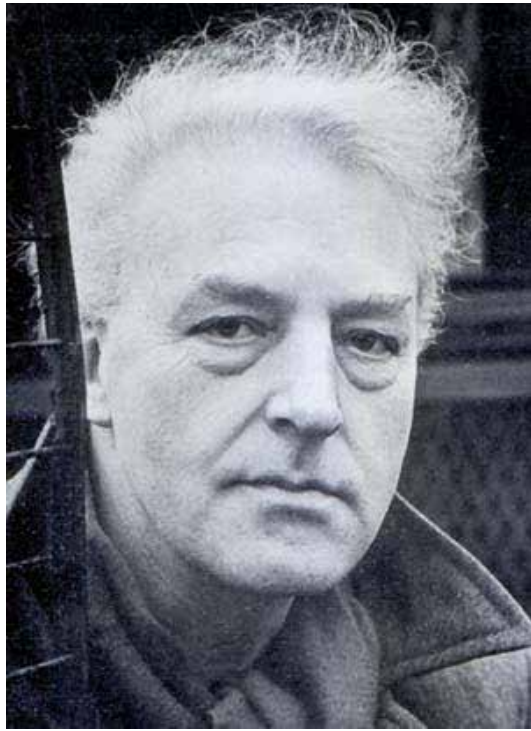


simple with a straightforward message, as you might expect from a campaign song. Most of his songs were more deliberately oblique, as he saw the true meaning of the song, not in the voice of the singer, but in the response in the mind of the listener.

Thus *Friday Morning* caused outrage, resulting in 2,000 letters of protest when it was first published in 1959 in The World Council of Churches' *Risk* magazine. Written from the point of view of an unnamed guilty prisoner being crucified alongside the innocent Jesus, the hookline retorts:

***It's God they ought to crucify instead of you or me  
I said to the carpenter a-hanging on the tree.***

In 1960, both Enoch Powell and *The Daily Mirror* tried to have the song banned. What those outraged Christians failed to realise is that being angry at God for injustice is only as controversial as the *Psalms*, and that one mainstream version of Christian theology is that God was crucified on the tree to pay for the sins of humanity. This isn't stated outright in the song, of course: Sydney Carter's songs were a subtle teasing, a catalyst, not a theological sledgehammer or a statement of dogma.



*John Ball* was written for the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the peasants' revolt of 1381, in memory of a man who was hanged as a rebel. The man celebrated, and the song in his name celebrates, the dream of an equal society where people are not born into privilege based on injustice, or born into undeserved servitude and slavery, and where a good day's work means a good day's pay. John Ball was excommunicated by the Archbishop of Canterbury and not allowed to preach in any church as he was expounding the *Bible's* message as one of social justice. So he became a roving preacher, a 'hedge priest', without a parish or any link to the established order, giving talks on the village green or wherever he could find a gathering. The Archbishop then gave instructions that all people found *listening* to Ball's sermons should be punished. When this failed to work as there was mass non-compliance, John Ball was arrested and sent to Maidstone Prison for his "heretical speeches". Still not defeated, he was rescued from Maidstone Prison by Kentish rebels led by Wat Tyler and, on 12<sup>th</sup> June at Blackheath, he preached to the rebels in the open air with lines that inspired Sydney Carter:

"When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman? From the beginning all men by nature were created alike, and our bondage or servitude came in by unjust oppression."

"Gentlemen" then meant the gentry, who owned the land and thus held the power: they were the lords of the manors, living richly off the labour of others. Sydney Carter wove this into the verse ...

***Who'll be the lady, who will be the lord  
When we are ruled by the love of one another, tell me  
Who'll be the lady, who will be the lord  
In the light that is coming in the morning?  
... followed by the glorious chorus that begins:  
Sing, John Ball, and tell it to them all!***

## Secular songs

Not all of his songs were overtly religious or theological, but all were thoughtful, playful, gently provocative.

*The Rat Race* wryly tells the story of a man who steals to keep up with the demands of consumerism, then on conviction he climbs on his prison bed to see the view beyond the bars, only to find that "a bloody great advertisement had blotted out the stars".

The words of *Like The Snow* are based on a poem of François Villon, not a translation, but Sydney's own work based on the ideas in *The Testament*. François Villon was a 15<sup>th</sup> century French thief, killer, barroom brawler, vagabond and poet. The song, like the poem, takes true stories of history to make the point that all life is fleeting. The first in the song is Helen of Troy, the most beautiful woman in ancient Greece, abducted then rescued by her brothers. Then Pierre Abelard, 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century French theologian, expected to be celibate – as all scholars had to be, in the belief that sex added the rational male mind – but who had a child with Heloise, his pupil, niece of the canon of Notre Dame Cathedral, who then punished Abelard with castration. The lovers became monk and nun, their bodies reunited only in the grave. Lastly, Jeanne d'Arc, 15<sup>th</sup> century Catholic visionary cross-dressing army leader, who turned the Hundred Years' War in France's favour, but was then burned at the stake for wearing men's clothes and claiming authority from God rather than the Catholic Church. The point of Villon's poem is in his asking where these famous people are now, followed by his refrain, "But where are the snows of last winter?" Sydney reflects this in his refrain, "She has" or "They have vanished like the snow."

*Crow On The Cradle* juxtaposes the hopes and dreams of parents for a newborn baby with the realities of living in a war zone, to which even newborns are not immune.

*Good Literature* teases those whose wish to be well-read is defeated by the easiness of pop culture:

***Good literature  
Never bother with the book  
I'm waiting for the film to come.***

*Silver in the Stubble* is one of the few songs I know about growing older, and the most telling song I know about middle age. "This song should be accompanied by an electric razor", said Sydney on his live LP of 1967, *Sydney Carter & Jeremy Taylor at Eton*.

*Mixed Up Old Man* expresses the view of a convicted old man who wishes he was young because, he imagines, if he were he could get away with it by blaming his actions on the influence of TV violence and being "misunderstood" by society.



## Songs that grow like trees: an appreciation of Sydney Carter (1915–2004), by Ian Pittaway, *continued*

### Sydney and the folk fraternity

The folk singing fraternity recognised the significance of Sydney's song-writing talent from the beginning. His songs have been performed and recorded by Martin Carthy and Dave Swarbrick, Julie Felix, The Ian Campbell Folk Group, John Kirkpatrick, Maddy Prior, Show of Hands, Sheila Hancock, Nadia Catthouse, Jackson Browne, Dayle Stanley, Stefan Sobell, Tania Opland and Mike Freeman, Mary Black, The Spinners, Donald Swann, Judy Collins, Dave Webber, Bob and Carole Pegg, Pete Seeger – to name just a few. He achieved the remarkable feat of composing three songs that have been so widely sung in churches, in choirs, in schools and at public occasions that almost anyone would recognise them, whether or not they've heard of Sydney Carter: *When I Needed A Neighbour*, *Lord of the Dance* and *One More Step Along The World I Go*. At folk clubs and festivals you can add *John Ball* to that list.

I have sung Sydney Carter's songs since I was 18 (I am nigh on 60 now), nearly always in folk clubs, which Sydney saw as the natural home of his work, and where he sometimes performed himself. My only near encounter with him personally was in 2000 when I recorded *George Fox* for a solo album. I wanted to send him a copy of the album, but his publisher informed me that he had Alzheimer's and was being cared for in a nursing home. He died in 2004.

### Enduring songs

Why are Sydney Carter's songs so enduring? And why do they matter? He expressed it best himself when he told the story of attending the lecture of a folklorist and folk song collector:

"A. L. Lloyd was talking about the way, in Romania, folk songs had been passed from one generation to another. A mother would teach her daughter how to sing a song, saying: 'You don't see the point or meaning of this song now, but you will need it later', as if she were giving her a magic spell or a bottle of medicine."

Sydney's songs matter for the same reason that folk or traditional songs matter: they timelessly tell the stories of our lives, yours and mine, in multilayered ways that reveal more the more you live with them. They live and grow, like the progression of a folk song, changing over time, transformed through being sung in the mouths of different singers, and Sydney wanted it that way:

"There is nothing final in the songs I write, not even the words, the rhythm and the melody. This is not an oversight; I would like them to keep growing, like a tree."

This article can also be read online at <https://earlymusicmuse.com/sydneycarter/> where you can see videos of the author performing Sydney Carter's *Like The Snow and Silver in the Stubble*.

Ian Pittaway © November 2024

**Early Music Muse:** musings on medieval, renaissance and traditional music, <https://earlymusicmuse.com>, is a site written by Ian Pittaway, singer and player of medieval, renaissance and early baroque music on period instruments – harp, lute, bray harp, cittern, gittern, citole, etc. – and traditional/folk music on modern guitars in various tunings.

## Barb'ry Allen, sung by Wiggy Smith, Cheltenham, by Veronica Lowe

Barbara Allen

Barbara Allen is one of the truly old ballads, first mentioned by Samuel Pepys as singing 'an old Scottish song' with friends on New Year's Eve, 1665. It is considered the most collected of all traditional ballads, so it is not surprising that GlosTrad has four versions listed, though two were noted without tunes.

I have used the version collected from Wiggy Smith, one of the great Gypsy singers of the Gloucester area, with some verses from the singing of the other great among the traveller community, Danny Brazil. Danny had a huge repertoire of songs but never learned to read, so demonstrates the power of the aural tradition.

This was recorded on 9 October, 1994, by Gwilym Davies and Paul Burgess, those two great civil servants who used to cycle from GCHQ in their lunch hour to meet with Wiggy Smith at The Victoria pub, Cheltenham. On Glos Trad, the song is listed under Barbara Allen, but it is transcribed as Barb'ry Ellen, and Wiggy sings it 'Barb-Rye Ellen'

Wiggy and Danny locate this in Birmingham Street.

The other Glos Trad setting, collected from Emily Bishop, places her in Reading. The version used for the last century in school and community song books places it in Scarlet Town.

The New Penguin Song Book uses one from Charlie Wills recorded in October 1952 by Peter Kennedy in Bridport Dorset which places the singer in Scotland and London, and also has a last line repeat, as does Emily Bishop's. Some folk song collectors concentrated on the tunes, and others, like Alfred Williams, collected only the words, and it is James Mills of South Cerney whose words collected by Williams around 1916 that are used to complete the Bishop version.

When song words were disseminated on broadsheets, tunes were whatever fitted. Oral transmission gives misheard and reconstructed verses and stories. That's the folk process.

My first acquaintance with it was at school where I was rather taken aback by the words, "Young man I think you're dying," and this rather callous comment is kept in most of the versions I have seen, but not in Wiggy's.



**Barb'ry Allen, sung by Wiggy Smith, Cheltenham, by Veronica Lowe**



[Look over, look over in yonders field,  
You'll see some cows a-feeding;  
For they are mine they are left for thine,  
They are left for Barbary Allen.]

Oh mother dear, look above my head  
You'll see my gold watch hanging  
You give it to the one I really love best  
And that is Barb'ry Ellen.

[Look down look down at the foot of my bed,  
You'll see a basin standing;  
A basin of blood from my heart I've shed,  
For you my Barbary Allen.]

Oh mother dear, come and make my bed  
You make it long and narrow  
For I want to lay down and die  
For the sake of Barb'ry Ellen.

[Oh parson dear dig me a grave,  
Dig it neat and narrow,  
And on my bosom place a red rose,  
And on Johnny's a sweet briar.]

[They growed and growed to the top of the church,  
Til they couldn't grow any higher,  
And they turned back in a true love's knot,  
The rose around the briar.]

Source: Sung by Wiggy Smith at The Victoria pub, Cheltenham, 9 October, 1994. Recorded by Gwilym Davies and Paul Burgess.

Notes: Wiggy only sang 3 verses. The words in brackets have been supplied from a version sung by Danny Brazil.

© Gloucestershire Traditions

**Barb'ry Allen - notes, continued from previous page.**

The first time I sang the song in a folk session I used the version from a 1940s American play called *Dark of the Moon*, not a musical, but a 'legend play with folk songs' set in the Appalachians in local dialect. The story is a folk tale of a witch boy who longs to be human because he is in love with.... Barbara Allen. My choice was partly decided by the fact that I could get away, with three chords, and I had only had my first guitar for five months! And the words fitted the 'standard' tune. Our teaching college liked the idea of a new folk club, in February 1964, so we were allowed to use the Tudor banqueting hall with open log fire.

English folk is rarely taught in schools now, which is daft. Whatever version you sing, sing it.

Veronica Lowe, 3rd October 2024.

**Veronica Lowe © November 2024**

See <https://glostrad.com/barbary-allen/> to hear this song and tune as collected and hear a version to sing, in various formats. Gloucestershire Traditions - Glostrad - is the one-stop website for songs and tunes collected in Gloucestershire. See <http://glostrad.com/> Gloucestershire Traditions was set up by Carol Davies, the late Gwilym Davies, Stephen Gale, Charles Menteith, and Veronica Lowe. Thanks to Veronica, who has kindly volunteered to send us contributions from the The Glostrad archives.



## Folklife news: societies & organisations; researchers; publications

*for appropriate publications & recordings announced, up to 200 words per publication welcome*



### TRAC CYMRU [F]

The folk development organisation for Wales, which works to promote our traditional music, dance and song at home and beyond. It is funded by the Arts Council of Wales and the Welsh Government.

Free online resources: <https://trac.cymru/en/learning-resources/> includes

- **Traditions:** Articles on Wales' iconic instruments & song traditions according to the experts, on <https://trac.cymru/en/articles/>
- **A Collection of Welsh Folk Songs** with the help of Arfon Gwilym, one of our major tradition bearers: videos, soundfiles, dots, & words, on <https://trac.cymru/en/songs/>
- **Tunes:** get playing videos, soundfiles, & dots, on <https://trac.cymru/en/tunes/>

*Trac Cymru* organises **Gwerin Gwallgo**, a residential Folk Weekend for 11-18s [see our *FOLK LIFE WEST* magazine's **FESTIVALS & WORKSHOPS DIARY**]

See *trac* website, <https://trac.cymru>, for **news, directory, listings, resources**, and on **Facebook**, at [facebook.com/traccymruwales](https://facebook.com/traccymruwales), where you will find videos, details of gigs, etc.

*Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu yn Saesneg / We welcome correspondence in English or Welsh.*

[F] **trac, Music Traditions Wales.** [megan@trac-cymru.org](mailto:megan@trac-cymru.org), 07467 184143. <https://trac.cymru/>



*We're very grateful to Doc for his listings & photos (see back page)*

### News from DOC ROWE [F]

The MichaelAnnjillo CD [see *Folklife West*]: we've paid over £2000 into the MacMillan Cancer Support so far which is great.

I am doing the Katharine Briggs Memorial Lecture for The Folklore Society at Cecil Sharp House on 12th November - see **Folklore Society news** on right.

Jill Pidd and I are at the **Lewes Saturday Folk Club**, on 16th November. I'm doing a workshop during the day and joining Jill for the song club in the evening.

*Doc*

### VAUGHAN WILLIAMS LIBRARY [F]

Several VWML/EFDSS events are now ready for booking:

- **The Library Lectures** are on Zoom, so open wherever you live:
  - Tuesday 14 January: Peter Harrop - 'Looking for a new England?' A reflection on progressive folk.
  - Tuesday 11 February: Jo Miller and Stuart Eydmann - Fiddling in Dumfries & Galloway
  - Tuesday 11 March: Katie Howson - Up from the Sea, Up from Town: singing in Southwold, Suffolk
  - Tuesday 8 April: Mary Shannon - Finding Billy Waters: Regency London's famous black busker

*If you book for all four you will get a discount.*

For further information & to book, go here: [www.efdss.org/about-us/what-we-do/news/14270-library-lectures-2025](http://www.efdss.org/about-us/what-we-do/news/14270-library-lectures-2025)

- **Broadside Day 22nd February 2025**, see details in right-hand column (Steve Roud has sent round a call for papers for Broadside Day).

You can book a ticket to attend here: [www.efdss.org/whats-on/61-conferences/14205-broadside-day-2025](http://www.efdss.org/whats-on/61-conferences/14205-broadside-day-2025). In-person only event, at Cecil Sharp House. Speakers will have a code to purchase a discounted ticket, so if you are proposing a paper, don't book yet!

*Best wishes, Tiffany*

Tiffany Hore Library & Archives Director  
The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, English Folk Dance & Song Society, Cecil Sharp House, 2 Regent's Park Road, London NW1 7AY.  
020 7485 2206 ext. 229 / 020 7241 8959  
[efdss.org](http://efdss.org), [cecilsharpshouse.org](http://cecilsharpshouse.org), [vwml.org](http://vwml.org)



**THE FOLKLORE SOCIETY [F]** 50 Fitzroy Street, London W1T 5BT, 0203 915 3034. *A learned society devoted to the study of traditional culture in all its forms.*

Our Library and Archives are at University College London Library and Special Collections, and publicly available for consultation. Many of our books can be loaned by FLS members.

### Forthcoming Folklore Society Events:

- **Tue. 12 Nov., The Katharine Briggs Lecture & Book Award 2024.** *Jointly hosted this year by The Folklore Society and EFDSS.*

Cecil Sharp House, 2 Regents Park Road, London NW1 7AY. Doors open 5.30pm; lecture begins at 6pm.

### Dr Doc Rowe: 'Transmission, Transformation and Trends: Historic and Contemporary Approaches to our Cultural Traditions'

An illustrated lecture with photos and film clips from six decades of documenting seasonal events, song and dance performances.

After the lecture, we will announce the winner of this year's Katharine Briggs Award for recent books on folklore studies, and all the books entered for the award will be on display.

There will also be a special presentation to Prof. Ronald Hutton; there will be music; there will be snacks and drinks, and we will raise a toast to Doc Rowe for his imminent 80th birthday.

Tickets are £6 (£4 for Folklore Society members).

- **Thu. 14 & Fri. 15 Nov., Folklore Without Borders: November Meeting.** 9.30am - 5pm, online & at 50 Fitzroy Street, London W1T 5BT.

A two-day symposium for the *Folklore Without Borders* research network.

### • **Folklore Society online talks. All on Tuesdays.**

- **29 Nov., 30 Years in Avalon: Fieldwork and Vernacular Religion in Glastonbury.** 6pm - 7.30pm. Talk by Marion Bowman.
- **10 Dec., Rising Tides: Water Beings as Agents of Change in Environmental Activism.** 6 - 7.30pm. Talk by Veronica Strang.
- **21 Jan. 2025, 'They're eating the dogs, they're eating the cats!' AI Approaches to Folklore and Political Storytelling.** 7pm - 8.30pm. Talk by Timothy R. Tangherlini.
- **4 Feb. 2025, The Calendar Custom and Contemporary Fiction.** 7pm - 8.30pm. Talk by Sophie Parkes-Nield.
- **18 Feb. 2025, Saint Valentine, the Ersatz Patron of Love.** 7pm - 8.30pm. Talk by Eric Huang.
- **04 Mar. 2025, Royal Funerals: A History.** 7pm - 8.30pm. Talk by Helen Frisby.

*More new Folklore Society events coming soon!*

*For details of tickets, see [www.folklore-society.com](http://www.folklore-society.com)*



### **BROADSIDE DAY conference 2025 - CFP, from Steve Roud**

Our next annual **Broadside Day** will be on **22nd February 2025**, at **Cecil Sharp House**, 2 Regents Park Road, London NW1 7AY.

The Broadside Day has been going for over 25 years and is a one-day in-person gathering for all who are interested in cheap print and street literature of the past.

**Call for papers** – anyone wishing to offer a presentation (20 minutes), please submit a title, synopsis (300 words) and brief biography (100 words), by **1st December**, to [steveroud@gmail.com](mailto:steveroud@gmail.com). Remote presentations will be considered.

Organised jointly by:

the Traditional Song Forum (<https://tradsong.org>), and the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library (<https://www.efdss.org/vwml>).

See [www.efdss.org/about-us/what-we-do/news/14266-broadside-day-2025-call-for-papers](http://www.efdss.org/about-us/what-we-do/news/14266-broadside-day-2025-call-for-papers)



**Folklife news: societies & organisations; researchers; publications**  
for appropriate publications & recordings announced, up to 200 words per publication welcome

**PEDLARS PACK**

A discussion list for people interested in street literature and cheap print of the past (broadside, chapbooks, songsters, prints, etc) in Britain and beyond.

The whole point of the group is to facilitate communication, so don't be shy about telling us of books, articles, projects, events, that you are involved in – we won't think you're showing off. And if people would like to introduce themselves with a brief (yes, brief) statement of their interests, it would be a good way to start the ball rolling.

One thing to mention at the start is that it is clear that we will be coming at our core interest (cheap print) from different angles. The impetus for the group comes from those of interested in song (broadside ballads) and related content, but many who have joined through the SHARP list, in particular, will be from book history, printing history, bibliography, literacy, and various other fields. This is exactly what we want because we need each other to get to grips with a fascinating, but often slippery subject. Please be patient and tolerant of other peoples' obsessions.

To join, email [pedlars-pack+subscribe@at>groups.io](mailto:pedlars-pack+subscribe@at>groups.io) Steve Roud

**New website: 100 BALLADS, on <https://www.100ballads.org>**

**From Bob Askew.** ~ thanks to Bob for bringing this to our attention.

I am happy to say that **Professor Christopher Marsh** has at last completed his **Website with the tunes of the Top 100 Best Selling Ballads of the 17th Century**. It has audio renditions of the songs, and I think it is a wonderful resource. A great chance to get to know some ballads that are a bit earlier than most that we sing. There are some great ballads in there, and some tunes which would have gone on to be used in later ballads as well.

Some of the ballads may be religious or political, but it is great to know that misogynic ballads were not popular. There are some lovely and interesting ballads. Many would be great to hear sung today, although some might benefit from some shortening, just as seventeenth century people shortened some of the earlier ones!

I think that it is a wonderful resource. Do send on to any singers, researchers, historians, or anyone who might be interested.'

**Editor's note:** the project and website were created by Chris, the Principal Investigator (and initiator of the project) and two Co-Investigators: **Andy Watts** (Carnival Band), who masterminded all the performances), and **Dr Angela McShane** (publication histories and political songs).

**"Un/Common People: Folk Culture in Wessex:" Touring Exhibition Nov 2024 – May 2026**



**Top Row:**

**Ooser** at Cerne Abbas, **Summer Solstice** at Stonehenge (both Create Studios, 2024); **Poole Speedway fans** from Pam Whittle's album, c.1950s (Poole Museum).

**Middle Row:**

**Patchwork quilt**, c.1830s, handstitched cotton (The Salisbury Museum); **Portrait** by anonymous artist, c.2021 (Museum & Art Swindon); **Sweetheart pin cushion**, 1914–1918, made by servicemen (Museum of British Folklore).

**Bottom Row:**

**Wooden ocean liner**, c.1930s, carved and painted, **Corn dolly** (both Museum of British Folklore); **Apple Wassailing** at Richard Jefferies Museum, Swindon (Create Studios, 2024)

**"UN/COMMON PEOPLE: FOLK CULTURE IN WESSEX:" TOURING EXHIBITION November 2024 – May 2026** celebrates the vibrant folk art and seasonal customs of the Wessex region, past and present, showcasing over 100 unique objects (many of which have not been on public display before), film, photography and a song map. Curated by Simon Costin and Mellany Robinson from **The Museum of British Folklore**, and Amy de la Haye from the **London College of Fashion**, it explores how the region's folk heritage has been adopted, reimagined, and enriched by the people of Wessex today.

- **Museum & Art Swindon** 29 November – 8 March 2025
- **Wiltshire Museum:** April – September 2025
- **Poole Museum:** October 2025 – Jan 2026
- **Salisbury Museum:** February - May 2026 ~ for more details, check individual websites.

**Un/Common People** redefines the term 'commoner' by showcasing the extraordinary creativity found in regional folk culture whilst challenging preconceptions by exploring how it has been adopted, reimagined and enriched by the people of Wessex today.

Each artefact has its own tale to tell, echoing the relevance and enduring appeal of folk culture.

Each museum will display additional objects from their own collections and platform new folk art, co-created with local communities and artists offering fresh perspectives on what folk means to Wessex people today.

Exhibition Curator Simon Costin, Museum of British Folklore, said *"Folk culture is about people, their lives, fears, desires and how they celebrate and express themselves creatively. The Museum of British Folklore are itinerant curators; we have collaborated with our curatorial colleagues who have generously opened their collections and shared their local knowledge with us. Our objective is to reveal the distinctive – and perhaps unexpected - heritage of folk culture in Wessex and reveal its resurgence, vitality, inclusivity and, diversity today."*

Complementing the objects on display, the exhibition will include a showcase of the region's intangible folk culture and heritage through film and photography by Create Studios capturing the vibrant seasonal customs of Wessex. Also, a folk song and story map illustrated by artist Bridie Cheeseman, will feature five traditional regional folk songs reimagined by local musician Chloe Herington working alongside local communities.

**Follow @WessexMuseums on Facebook, Instagram, & <https://www.wessexmuseums.org.uk/>**





**Folklife news: societies & organisations; researchers; publications**  
for appropriate publications & recordings announced, up to 200 words per publication welcome

## TSF

### THE TRADITIONAL SONG FORUM (TSF)

A national organisation dedicated to the promotion, performance and publication of traditional folk song in the UK.

The Traditional Song Forum has organised successful talks on Zoom, more are planned. These talks are very popular, now attracting international visitors, currently limited to 100 places; so if interested, see [www.tradsong.org](http://www.tradsong.org) sooner rather than later.

These typically have 3 speakers, plus occasional single-speaker sessions: these included on 5th May 'Using the Roud Indexes on the New VWML Website - A Practical Guide', by Steve Roud, and on 13 October, 'Heritage secured: the new Vaughan Williams Memorial Library archives and indexes' by Tiffany Hore, Library & Archive Director. An introduction to the new VWML website, focusing on using the various search tools.

**Videos of all the TSF Online meetings** are available on the TSF YouTube channel - <https://youtu.be/ty-Or2wGhkQ>

Future dates: • 10 Nov 24 - TSF Online 67 - Speakers tbc • 8 Dec 24 - TSF Online 68 (Christmas Special) • 22 Feb 25 - Broadside Day, Cecil Sharp House

This website is a gateway to a number of useful resources for those interested in researching or performing traditional folk songs. There is a newsletter to sign up to. Latest details on [www.tradsong.org](http://www.tradsong.org)

All enquiries to **Martin Graebe** , (TSF Secretary), [martin.graebe@btinternet.com](mailto:martin.graebe@btinternet.com)

### ACCESS FOLK

Access Folk is a University of Sheffield-based project led by folk singer and scholar Prof. Fay Hield that explores ways of increasing and diversifying participation in folk singing in England.

For more information, visit our website <https://accessfolk.sites.sheffield.ac.uk/activities/action-research>

## Publications

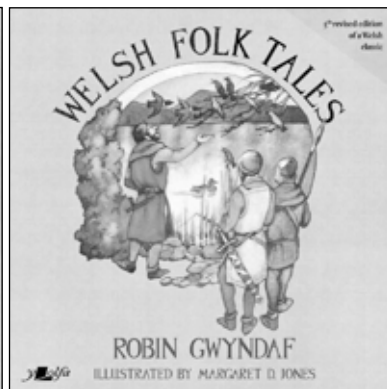
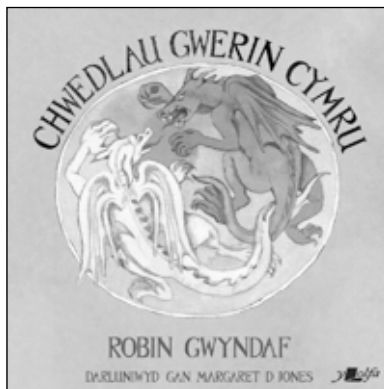


### CHWELDAU GWERIN CYMRU / WELSH FOLK TALES

**POSTER:  
MARGARET JONES**

**LLYFR/BOOK:  
ROBIN GWYNDAF**

**Y Lolfa, [www.ylolfaf.com](http://www.ylolfaf.com)**

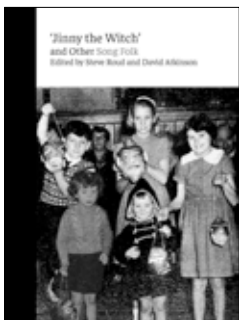


Mae'r Lolfa newydd ail-ryddhau **un o bosteri eiconig Margaret Jones - Poster Chwedlau Cymru**. Pris y poster yw £9.99 +p&p a gellir ei archebu yn [www.ylolfaf.com](http://www.ylolfaf.com) neu yn eich siop lyfrau leol.

Hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg a Saesneg argraffiad newydd o lyfr **Robin Gwyndaf Chwedlau Gwerin Cymru** sy'n cynnwys dros 60 o chwedlau a gwybodaeth am arferion gwerin y Cymry (£9.99).

**Y Lolfa** has released one of **Margaret Jones's** iconic posters - **Welsh Folk Tales**. Priced at £9.99+p&p, it can be bought at [www.ylolfaf.com](http://www.ylolfaf.com) or in your local book shop.

Also available, in both Welsh and English, a new edition of **Robin Gwyndaf's** book **Welsh Folk Tales** including over 60 tales and information on Welsh folk customs. (£9.99)



### 'JINNY THE WITCH' AND OTHER SONG FOLK, ed. Steve Roud & David Atkinson, published by The Ballad Partners.

The fourth in our series of new papers on aspects of traditional song research, published in association with the Traditional Song Forum.

Featuring papers given at the TSF conferences in Limerick and Sheffield, and also at the Forum's online meetings.

This wide-ranging volume has something for everyone: plenty for both folk music scholars and those with a more general interest in folk music, social history and cultural studies. Whether you're interested in seasonal customs, traditional hunting songs, song collectors in the UK and America and folk songs' links with music hall. There are also two fascinating chapters with a more theoretical perspective: what do we mean by an 'authentic' folk song and is there a folk music canon? You'll need to read the book to find out...

#### List of contents:

- *Singing that Ancient Doggerel about 'Jinny the Witch': Hollantide Eve Songs from the Isle of Man*: Stephen Miller
- *New Year's Eve Carol Singing in West Lancashire*: Peter Bearon
- *The Enduring Textual Structures of Hunting Songs*: Mary Emmett

- *The Fuller Sisters in America*: Michael J. Bell
- *Alfred Williams' Surviving Notebook*: Richard Spencer
- *Framing the Collectors: The Collector-Singer Relationship in Historical and Comparative Perspective*: Hugh Miller and Paul Mansfield
- *Folk Song and the Metaphysics of Canon Formation*: David Atkinson
- *Harry Clifton and Harry Lauder - Their Impact on the Folk Repertoire*: John Baxter
- *Felix McGlennan - Manufacturing First-Class Songs*: John Baxter
- *Folk Song, Self-Realization, and the Measure of Authenticity*: David Atkinson

£15 (plus £3.50 p&p UK), pbk. 210pp. ISBN 978-1-9161424-8-0

Available from The Ballad Partners website: [www.theballadpartners.co.uk/publications](http://www.theballadpartners.co.uk/publications)



### 'The Ballad Partners'

A cooperative venture, founded with investment from interested individuals and utilising the invaluable professional expertise of experienced editors David Atkinson and Steve Roud. Under their guidance conference proceedings and other material on folk song, music, dance, custom and related subjects are published, always with the aims of helping raise awareness and encouraging the study of the folk arts through books that are both very readable and affordable.

Keep an eye on The Ballad Partners website for more news and book sales: <http://www.theballadpartners.co.uk/publications>



**PATRICK TAYLUER, SHANTY SINGER, PODCAST**

From the TSF Newsletter mailing list (see TSF above), by Steve Roud [E]:

For those interested in shanties, see this podcast from the Library of Congress 'Folklife Today American Folklife Center & Veterans History Project':

'Patrick Tayluer: The Greatest Sea Shanty Singer You've Never Heard', posted by: Stephen Winick.

<https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2024/09/patrick-tayluer-the-greatest-sea-shanty-singer-youve-never-heard/?loclr=eafth>

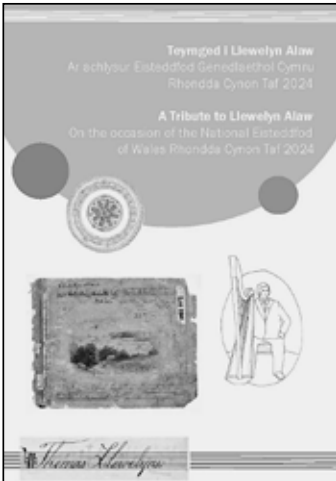
## Publications

**ROY & LESLEY ADKINS' LATEST OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER**

... is on [www.adkinshistory.com/newsletters/newsletter-70/](http://www.adkinshistory.com/newsletters/newsletter-70/)

The usual fascinating collection of topics in Newsletter 70, October 2024 ~ A1 and A1: classification of ships, Charles Dickens and A1 as an expression. More Lloyd's Register Foundation maritime stories: ballast, shipwrecks and swimming. More Book Snippets: London Library bookshop, Pelham Bookshop in Havant and Irene Babbidge. The London Fire of 1748: Cornhill, Lombard Street and maps. Creating Fire: early matches, safety matches and matchboxes.

Left: "As I was a-walkin' down Paradise Street", woodcut by Freda Bone, from *Capstan Bars*, by David W. Bone, Edinburgh, The Porpoise Press, 1931.



**TEYRNGED I LLEWELYN ALAW / A TRIBUTE TO LLEWELYN ALAW**

Bilingual, ring-pull 82-pages book. Published by Addoldai Cymru. £15.

By post +£3.50 UK, see <https://welshchapels.wales/shop-2/>

Addoldai Cymru, Welsh Religious Buildings Trust. From their website:

"... fully bilingual ... examples of the music, with descriptions and illustrations of the manuscripts to give the reader a full insight into Llewelyn Alaw's work.

Also ... an essay by David Leslie Davies, a Cynon Valley historian, on the fascinating story of Llewelyn Alaw's life, as well a history of Hen Dŷ Cwrdd ... some of the notable people connected to the chapel, including Llewelyn Alaw, were instrumental in the organisation and development of the first 'modern' National Eisteddfod, held in Aberdare in 1861."

Below is adapted from our correspondent Mick Tems' column Tudalen Cymru ~ Wales page in Folklife West, September 2024.

Here's a fascinating postscript to the 2024 National Eisteddfod's week-long stay in Ynysangharad Park, Pontypridd: a magnificent ring-pull 82-page book, containing the celebrated 19<sup>th</sup>-century harper, composer and collector Llewelyn Alaw's many tunes; and the history of the Trecynon Unitarian chapel where he worshipped and was buried in its graveyard.



Llewelyn Alaw, aka Thomas Dafydd Llewelyn, was responsible for more than 60 jigs, hornpipes, waltzes, airs and marches; many folk musicians bought the book, which clearly shows the strong link between the chapel and the current Eisteddfod, which this month was in the heart of the host county borough council, Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The triple harper Robin Huw Bowen first highlighted Llewelyn Alaw's work, and the Welsh duo Calennig recorded a smattering of his polkas and reels.

The first congregation was established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the Old Dissenters, nonconformists who pursued radical causes such as the abolition of the slave trade, electoral reform, Chartism, workers' rights, trade unionism, the provision of education and women's emancipation. The first chapel was constructed in a field on belonging to Gadlys Uchaf farm, to the north near Aberdare; afterwards, they built the mother church, Hen Dŷ Cwrdd (The Old Meeting House) in what is now Trecynon and had a uniquely rich relationship with the origin of the Gorsedd of Bards and the development of the modern Eisteddfod.

The famous folk forger Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwg) was a regular visitor; Tomos Glyn Cothi (jailed for two years at Carmarthen for allegedly singing a song in support of the French Revolution) and John Jones, a leading Chartist, were its ministers from 1811-1833 and 1833-1862 respectively. Another significant minister was Edward Evan, who was really close to Iolo Morganwg; Iolo used his religious and literary good name to invent and create the supposedly ancient Druidic continuity of the Gorsedd of Bards, which grew out of the Eisteddfod. In fact, Iolo created the modern Eisteddfod out of his own imagination.

The book, named *Teyrnged i Llewelyn Alaw / A Tribute to Llewelyn Alaw*, is written in Welsh and English and is published by Addoldai Cymru, the Welsh chapels trust which has saved and restored 11 redundant religious buildings. Led by manager Christine Moore, the trust was granted £249,000 by the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the restoration of Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, who had lain empty for 15 years and had deteriorated significantly; the successful application was 'An Eisteddfod Tradition'.

The tribute to Llewelyn Alaw contains many full-colour illustrations, but the national archives could provide only one photograph of the harper.

A dozen contributors are responsible for bringing out this book; Christine Moore was the instigator, and the editors are Rob Bradshaw and Jeff Jones. Rob, who successfully decoded Llewelyn Alaw's manuscripts, has a life-long interest in folk music and is a Llantrisant Folk Club committee member. He started Llantwit Major Tune Club with Steph Kempley, and they have been running it successfully for 12 years. Jeff has been a musician for various Welsh dance groups for the past 40 years, and currently plays the melodeon for Penybont Dancers and Cardiff-based Cobblers Awl Dancers. He runs the Cefn Cribwr Tune Club and has been researching the Llewelyn Alaw manuscripts since 2015.

David Leslie Davies, who researched the tribute, has been active with the Cynon Valley History Society as author, editor and chairman for many years; freelance artist and maker Anne Gibbs conducted workshops with the pupils of Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun about Hen Dŷ Cwrdd and its links with the Eisteddfod, and award-winning artist Lowri Davies provided the line drawings and water colour sketches for the book. In addition, Llantrisant and Cefn Cribwr Tune Clubs participated in the Llewelyn Alaw workshops.

Mick Tems

Mick is the Wales Correspondent for Folklife West magazine; a reviewer of live events & CDs; a musician & singer; and a folk traditions researcher/collector, esp. SE Wales. His Archive is on [www.folkwales.org.uk/archive.html](http://www.folkwales.org.uk/archive.html)

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TAR BARREL ROLLING 5 Nov  
photo: © Colin Davies



UP-HELLY-AA Last Tue in Jan



GOATHLAND PLOUGH STOTS  
1st Sat after Plough Mon

MARI LWYD from before Christmas  
to New Year's Day



**The Doc Rowe Collection Support Group** has been set up to support the Archive of Doc's unique collection.  
See: [www.docrowe.org.uk](http://www.docrowe.org.uk)

All listings & photos © Doc Rowe, unless stated otherwise. We are very grateful to Doc, for generously providing detailed listings and photos. In *italics*; additional info from ‡Chris Ridley, ‡Bill Pullen ©, ‡Tom & Barbara Brown ©, ‡Audrey Smith, Gary Heywood-Everett and the Editors ©.

More entries welcome (& further details &/or contact details), subject to consent of the event's organisers - some may not want publicity.

For links to websites, see Doc's website: [www.docrowe.org.uk](http://www.docrowe.org.uk)

Dates believed to be correct, but some weekday dates seem to be changing towards weekends.  
Detailed reports - and photos - are welcomed.

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## NOVEMBER

|                           |                             |                          |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Kaking Neet               | South and West of Sheffield | 1st November or near     |
| Guy Fawkes                | various                     | Up to & inc. 5th Nov.    |
| Lewes Bonfire             | UK                          | 5th November             |
| Hatherleigh Fire Carnival | Sussex                      | 5th November             |
| Bridgwater Carnival       | Devon                       | 2nd Saturday in Nov. **  |
| Tar Barrel Rolling        | Somerset                    | 1st Saturday in Nov. **  |
| Wroth Silver Ceremony     | Devon                       | 5th November             |
| Firing The Fenny Poppers  | Warks                       | 11th November            |
| Armistice Day             | Bucks                       | 11th November            |
| Yorkshire Carols          | UK                          | 11th November            |
| The Lords Mayor's Show    | Yorks                       | From 11th November       |
| Laxton Jury Day           | London                      | 2nd Saturday in November |
| Wall Game                 | Notts                       | Late November            |
| Court Leet                | Berks                       | Late November            |
|                           | Fylingthorpe                | December                 |
|                           | N. Yorks                    |                          |

## DECEMBER including CHRISTMAS, BOXING DAY, NEW YEAR'S EVE

|                                    |                                              |              |                             |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| Tin Can Band                       | Broughton                                    | Northants    | Sunday after 12th Dec       |
| Plygain singing                    | Montgomeryshire & nearby; now also elsewhere |              | Mostly pre-Christmas [Eds]  |
| Tup Plays                          | Sheffield and Chesterfield area              |              | Christmas                   |
| Burning Ashen Faggot               | Dunster                                      | Somerset     | Christmas Eve               |
| Tolling The Devils Knell           | Dewsbury                                     | W Yorks      | Christmas Eve               |
| Mummers                            | Bampton                                      | Oxon         | Christmas Eve               |
| Feather Guisers                    | Uttoxeter                                    | Staffs       | Christmas Eve and Day       |
| Crookham Mummers                   | Crookham                                     | Hants        | Boxing Day                  |
| Flamborough Sword Dance            | Flamborough                                  | Yorkshire    | Boxing Day                  |
| Greatham Sword Dance Play          | Greatham                                     | Co. Durham   | Boxing Day                  |
| Straw Boys/ Mummers                | Fermanagh                                    | Ireland      | Christmas                   |
| Barrel Rolling competition         | Denbigh                                      |              | Boxing Day [Eds]            |
| Wren Boys                          | Dingle                                       | Ireland      | Boxing Day                  |
| Mummer's Day                       | Padstow                                      | Cornwall     | Boxing Day & New Year's Day |
| Handsworth Sword Dancers           | Handsworth                                   | S. Yorkshire | Boxing Day                  |
| Grenoside Sword Dancers            | Grenoside                                    | S. Yorkshire | Boxing Day                  |
| Monkseaton Dancers                 | Monkseaton                                   | Tyne-Tees    | Boxing Day                  |
| Marshfield Mummers                 | Marshfield                                   | Glos         | Boxing Day                  |
| Ripon Sword Dancers                | Ripon                                        | N. Yorks     | Boxing Day                  |
| Annual Dip                         | Whitby                                       | N. Yorks     | Boxing Day                  |
| Tewkesbury Medieval Play [Mummers] | Tewkesbury                                   | Glos         | Boxing Day [Simon Hopkins]  |
| Symondsbury Mummers                | Symondsbury                                  | Dorset       | Christmas                   |
| Fylingthorpe Guisers               | Fylingthorpe                                 | N. Yorks     | Christmas                   |
| Flambeaux Procession               | Comrie                                       | Tayside      | New Year's Eve              |
| Swinging The Fireballs             | Stonehaven                                   | Grampian     | New Year's Eve              |

Mari Lwyd different places - different days S.E. Wales Before Christmas to New Year's Day

## JANUARY

**Wassailing: in many places in England West & Mid-West, some listed here**

|                                                   |                                   |                    |                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| Mari Lwyd                                         | different places - different days | S.E. Wales         | before Christmas to New Year's Day |
| Wassailing                                        | Combe in Teignhead                | Devon              | January                            |
| Wassailing                                        | Churchstanton                     | Somerset           | January                            |
| Mummer's Day                                      | Padstow                           | Cornwall           | 1st January                        |
| Haxey Hood Game                                   | Haxey                             | Lincs              | 6th Jan [Twelfth Night]            |
| Bodmin Wassailing                                 | Bodmin                            | Cornwall           | 6th January [Twelfth N.]           |
| Twelfth Night Revels                              | Southwark                         | London             | near 6th January                   |
| Goathland Plough Stots                            | Goathland                         | North Yorks        | 1st Sat after Plough Mon           |
| Straw Bear Day                                    | Whittlesea                        | Cams               | Sat nr 6 Jan.                      |
| Hen Galan [old New Year], Calennig [New Yr gifts] | Cwm Gwaun                         | Sir Benfro / Pembs | 13 Ion/Jan                         |
| Longtown Wassail #                                | Longtown                          | Herefds            | a Sat in January                   |
| Apple Tree Wassailing                             | Whimble                           | Devon              | 17th Jan [Old Twelvy Night]        |
| Wassailing                                        | Carhampton                        | Somerset           | 17th Jan [Old 12th Night]          |
| Dydd Santes Dwywnwen / St Dwywnwen's Day          |                                   | Cymru/Wales        | 25 Ion/Jan.                        |

## FEBRUARY, incl. Shrove Tuesday (13 Feb 2023), Ash Wed. (day after)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                         |                |                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| Carlows Charity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Woodbridge              | Suffolk        | 2nd February                |
| Cradle Rocking                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Blidworth               | Notts          | Sunday near 2nd February    |
| Chinese New Year                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | various                 | UK             | 2024: Sat, 10 February      |
| Quit Rents Ceremony                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Royal Courts of Justice | London         | February                    |
| Trial Of Pyx                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Goldsmiths Hall         | London         | February (and May)          |
| Red Feather Day: Sir John Cass                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Service Aldgate         | London         | Friday near 20th February   |
| Westminster Greaze                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Westminster School      | London         | Shrove Tuesday              |
| Sedgefield Ball Game                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Sedgefield              | Co. Durham     | Shrove Tuesday              |
| Football                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Alnwick                 | Northumberland | Shrove Tuesday              |
| Football                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Atherstone              | Warks          | Shrove Tuesday              |
| Ashbourne Royal Football                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Ashbourne               | Derbys         | Shrove Tuesday & Wednesday  |
| Hurling the Silver Ball                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | St Columb Major         | Cornwall       | Shrove Tuesday & Sat. after |
| • Unique in being a Shrovetide football where the ball is hurled, not thrown. Hundreds of hurlers turn up, the two teams being the Townsmen and the Countrymen. Goals are about two miles apart, but a goal can also be scored by being carried over the parish boundary. There is an afternoon and an evening game. Youngsters get 'silver cocoa' and the silver ball goes round the pubs being submerged in beer to provide 'silver beer'. Based on information from © ‡Chris Ridley. Ref: Hurling at St Columb, Ivan Rabey (Lodenek Press, Padstow: 1972). |                         |                |                             |
| Cakes And Ale Ceremony                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | St Pauls                | London         | Ash Wednesday               |
| Dame Elizabeth Marvyn Charity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Ufton Nervet            | Berks          | Mid Lent                    |
| Dydd Gŵyl Dewi (dathliadau, digwyddiadau ysgol)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                         | Cymru          | 1 Mawrth /                  |
| / St David's Day (celebrations, school events)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                         | Wales          | 1 March                     |

[www.folklife-traditions.uk](http://www.folklife-traditions.uk)

All events subject to change, please check first.

