

BRAMPTON FOLK SESSION

As the Howard Arms was temporarily closed for refurbishment, we met in St Martin's Cottage on 16th January – many thanks to Sally and Adrian Jones, who negotiated the use of the alternative venue for us! Owing to snow/illness/regulars being away, we were lower on numbers than usual, but we still had a cheerful evening of songs, tunes and recitation on the theme of 'dates'.

Some dates were very precise indeed: Phil took us to shenanigans at the *Blaydon Races* on 9th June 1862, and Sally Jones lamented the sinking of the *Ellan Vannin* on 3rd December 1909. Others were content with a year or a day of the month. Thus, *Barrett's Privateers* (Gerda) put to sea on their disastrous voyage in 1778 while Richard's wickedly funny parody *Morecambe – the Last Resort* 'celebrated' a boarding-house holiday in 1959. On a sombre note, *The Springhill Mining Disaster* (Sally Jones) killed 75 miners in 1958.

Sally Hardaker on flute and whistle found an impressive array of tunes with 'date' titles: *The 29th of May* (a Playford tune now used for the hymn *All Things Bright and Beautiful*); *The First of April* and *The First of October*. Gerda set off to meet her love at *Brig Fair* on 5th August; Adrian introduced two sea battles, one on 24th March involving *The Turkish Man of War* and one that brought about *The Death of Nelson* on 21st October. The sinking of the Titanic was commemorated twice, once with a specific mention of the date, 14th April, (*God Moves on the Water* – Sally Jones) and once without: (*Titanic, Fare Thee Well* – Gerda). Phil's own song, *The Ballad of Clifford Lawther*, starts on 1st January in a bus station in Hexham and ends in the bloodbath of Jarama Valley (February 1937).

Some songs brought in dates by implication: Richard's ballad, *Edom of Gordon*, mentions Martinmas (11th November, if anyone is interested!), as does Phil's *Jolly Waggoners*. Adrian, on melodeon, played us the tune *The Valentine*. Mick, visiting us from Lincoln, sang *The Bigger Picture*, 'which has a fiftieth birthday in it' and Sally Hardaker on whistle had a similar idea when she played *Happy Birthday*!

Let us not forget alternative interpretations of 'date': it can mean 'tryst/rendezvous'. Mick used it in that sense when he regretted 'never having made that date' (*Dandelion Clocks and Tumbleweed*), while Katy warned of the perils of courting by night in *Kissing in the Dark*.

We next meet, **back in The Howard Arms, on 20th February at 8pm.** The theme – a nice, straightforward one this time! – will be 'love', in honour of St Valentine's Day. Required or unrequired, tragic ending or happy, licit or illicit – up to you! **ALL WELCOME!**

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

It was Valentine's Day last week, so it was appropriate to have a session with the theme of 'Love', a topic that is as popular in folk music as in every other genre.

Not all the songs were about romance. Adrian proclaimed *Old Ale, Thou Art My Darling*; Jane's *Sad the Climbing* expressed love of place (Eigg); Chris loved and grieved for a shipwrecked boat, the *Jeannie C*; Alan's *Teach Your Children Well* is about love between parents and children; the *Quiet Joys of Brotherhood* where 'love is lord of all' (Jane) praises the natural world and laments our disconnection from it.

But moving on to romantic love, let's start with the not-too-serious treatments. Phil's *Star of the Bar* was 'coarse, heartless and not that bonny' and he recommended song and drink as a better option! *The Nutting Girl*, as Adrian pointed out, featured plenty of lust rather than love, and Sally's *Johnny be Fair* told a tale of a girl whose father has – ahem - sowed his wild oats altogether too effectively. John's hero (*Awake, Awake*) calls to the girl under her window at daybreak, but flees ignominiously when her father shows up. Chris's music hall song about a young man jilted for a *Calico Printer's Clerk* was bouncy and cheerful, and Gerda's *Miss Otis Regrets* is a dark comedy about a *crime passionnel*.

Love and sorrow go hand-in-hand, as was made clear in so many songs. The ballad *Matty Groves* (Ros) features adultery, jealousy and murder; *William Taylor's* sweetheart (Chris) shoots him for his faithlessness, but (more fortunate than *Miss Otis*!) she is rewarded by being made commander of a ship. *The Earl of March's Daughter* (Phil) dies of love and grief; *She Moved Through the Fair* (Steve) eerily laments the death of the betrothed girl. *We Didn't Know* (Alan) regrets losing the beloved through shyness and inaction. The suffering caused by inconstancy was a theme that found its way into Gary's *Go Your Way, My Love*, Sally's *Waltzing's for Dreamers*, and Phil's *Peggy Gordon*. Ros's *Rocks in the Ocean* more subtly indicated how coldness can alienate love; while Gary's *Poor Man's Labour*, more sombre still, starts with love and marriage and ends in hatred. *The Collier Laddie's Wife* (Liz), is barely any happier, with a life of unremitting and unrecognised toil.

But it wasn't all tragedy! Gerda sang the lovely declaration *The Dimming of the Day*; John expressed Dylan's longing for his true love, *Tomorrow is a Long Time* and Liz gave us Burns' famous love lyric *My Love is Like a Red, Red Rose*. *Harvest Moon* (Alan) vows 'I'm still in love with you'. The hero of *Willy's Lady* (Gary) goes to great lengths to save his wife from his witch-mother. Jane's heroine in *Canadee-i-o* dons sailor's clothing to follow her love to sea – though she does, slightly unexpectedly, then marry the ship's captain instead! Sailors in *Blue Water* (Gerda) and *Adieu, Sweet Lovely Nancy* (Chris) both promise to return to their sweethearts on land, and the girl in *Logie o' Buchan* (Katy) is constant to her poor lover and rejects a rich suitor. Steve's own song, *Will You Let Me Be the One?* offers love and protection, while Adrian on melodeon invited us to *Haste to the Wedding* and Sally got us singing along to *The Lewis Bridal Song*.

We next meet up on **19th March at 8pm in The Howard Arms, Brampton**. The theme will be 'Colours'. **ALL WELCOME!**

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

Owing to a combination of health and holidays, we were lower than usual in numbers when we met on 19th March, but we all dug deep into our musical repertoires and sang and told stories through the whole evening.

The theme was 'Colours', a good, wide-ranging sort of subject for a folk evening. In some contributions, the colour was evident in the name: Ros sang Donovan's song simply entitled *Colours*, which mentioned yellow (hair), blue (sky) and green (corn). Gerda warned off an importunate swain with a *Silver Dagger*; Chris took us sailing on *The Golden Vanity*; Liz told of the dangers awaiting the *Blackleg Miner*; Steve yearned to be home and no longer on board *The Grey Funnel Line*; Phil asserted that although *Red is the Rose*, his love was fairer still; and Katy longed for springtime, the *Yellow on the Broom* and the freedom of the roads. Liz commemorated *The Golden Locks of Anna* (one of Burns' lights o' love) and Ros tested our memories with the ancient counting song *Green Grow the Rushes-oh*.

Then there are titles that sound like colours but aren't really: a surname in *Shallow Brown* (Gerda); a placename or description in *Fiddler's Green* (Phil), *Scarlet Town* (Gerda) and *Polwarth on the Green*; not forgetting a musical genre as in *Big Knicker Blues* (Phil).

There were plenty of colours tucked into the text of a song or story. Chris had fun with colour detail in his story of *How Horses Came into the World* – green fields, blue sky, white clouds, and the animals themselves, roan, brown and black 'with tossing heads'. *Gentle Annie* (Steve) is a 'little black-eyed girl'. The maiden in *Flowers in the Valley* (Ros) is courted by three knights wearing, respectively, red, green and yellow. Mysterious but appetising references to a golden crust and black coffee recur in *Sinkin' Soon* (Gerda). Steve grieves for 'the glen of the golden and the green' (*Valley of Strathmore*); Phoebe (the sun) has 'red rosy cheeks' in *Thousands or More* (Chris) and Phil's extraordinary insect interlocutor has pupils of 'purple or magenta' (*The Reel in the Flickering Light*).

We did unusually well for ballads, also with fleeting references to colour – *Barbary Allen* (Chris) takes place at a time of 'green buds'; *Geordie* (also Chris) is to be hanged in chains of gold; *The Devil's Nine Questions* (Liz) asks 'what is whiter than milk?'

We next meet in **The Howard Arms, Brampton on 16th April at 8pm**. The theme will be 'Crime and Punishment', so time to practise all those songs about Jacobite risings, highway robbery and poaching! **ALL WELCOME!**