

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

Many thanks to everyone who turned out to lift the darkness of winter with music and song on 21st January in the Howard Arms, on the theme of 'Scotland/all things Scottish'. A particular welcome to Ruby on accordion, joining us for the first time, and Charlie on fiddle, back after a long absence.

We had a rich variety of instrumental music. Ruby and Charlie kicked off with *Loch Lomond; Comin' Thro' the Rye* and *Ye Banks and Braes*, and continued later with the music hall delights, *The Northern Lights of Old Aberdeen* and *I Belong to Glasgow*. Adrian on melodeon found devious Scottish links for his tunes: *Duncan McGillivray* is a Canadian tune written for the Scottish pipes, and *The Banks of the Dee* is an English morris tune about a Scottish river! Sally Hardaker on recorder played *Flatwater Fran* (Scottish composer) and *Da Lounge Bar* (a Shetland tune). She and Richard on tin whistle joined together in the waltz, *Alloa House*. Charlie gave us some fine solos (in which all the other instrumentalists in the room joined): *Major Graham of Inchbrackie* and *Lady Baddinscough's Reel*.

Our pretext for the theme was the approach of Burns' Night, so Les wrote *Burns' Night Blues* for the occasion. Gerda sang a revamped version of *Go Fetch to Me a Pint o' Wine*. In more traditional mode, Richard commemorated Burns' brief visits to the Highlands with *My Heart's in the Highlands*; Jane lamented that *It Was a' for our Rightful King* and Katy celebrated the birth of *Ranting, Roving Robin*.

Nostalgia and homesickness are popular among Scots abroad, so Steve longed to return to *Caledonia* and, more specifically, to the *Valley of Strathmore*. John's *Hearts of Olden Glory* looked back to Scotland's past, while Sally longed for her lost love on *The Isle of Eigg*. On a lighter note, the *Skyscraper Wean* (Charles) regretted moving to a '20-storey flat'.

Seduction and romantic love are widespread subjects in any country! Sometimes tragic: *Mary Hamilton* (Sally) was hanged for infanticide; *Bogie's Bonny Belle* (Chris) was separated from the father of her child; the heroine of *Fear a Bhata* (Gerda) waits with dwindling hope for her lover's return. Phil decided he preferred a drinking companion to his *Star of the Bar*. A happier outcome awaited the young couple who spent the night at *Rarie's Hill* (Gerda); Alan invited his sweetheart to pick *Wild Mountain Thyme* (and generated some brisk discussion about whether the song is Scottish or Irish!) and Jane's hero wished he were a *Baron's Heir* in order to lavish riches on his beloved.

Some connections were ... tenuous. John sang the hymn *Only Remembered* because its author was a Free Kirk minister; *Skimbleshanks the Railway Cat* (Charles) rides the night train to Dumfries; *Oud Rimbant* (Anne) alludes to the alleged parsimony of the Scottish people; Les's *Crystal Dragon of Eryri* takes us right round the British Isles; Alan's *People Get Ready* was squeezed in because it had been covered by Rod Stewart 'who has a Scottish surname'. Phil's *Best of the Barley* tells the story of a Falkirk man who hustled for survival in the USA during the Depression and Chris, quite frankly, cheated with his folktale *Eilidh and the Banshees* (were the banshees on holiday from Ireland, Chris?)

We next meet in the **Howard Arms, Brampton, at 8pm on 18th February** with the theme 'Stories/Storytellers'. **ALL WELCOME!**

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

We met on 18th February in the Howard Arms with the theme of ‘Stories and Storytelling’ (a very wide and all-embracing subject). A warm welcome to Garry, joining us for the first time from Corbridge.

Given the reputation of folk music (‘a dismal song in three-four time’), no-one was surprised when the body count started to rise. Some were single deaths such as the eponymous hero of *The Ballad of Billie-Joe* (Jane); the heroine of *Molly Malone* (Steve), and the grasshopper in the fable of *The Ant and the Grasshopper* (John). There were double deaths in *Miss Otis Regrets* (Gerda) and *Barbary Allen* (Chris), and thirteen deaths of smokejumpers caught in the forest fire of Montana in 1949 (*Missouri Waters* – Liz). Anne despatched a whole Cumbrian army and a monarch (*King Dunmail*).

Several singers found songs with factual backgrounds. *Nine-Pin Jacques* (Alan) was written by Sam Millington, based on a friendship between an American blues singer and Durham teenagers that lasted fifty years. We also heard *The Story of Isaac* (John); the history of the first immigrant to pass through the Ellis Island, the *Isle of Hope* (Steve). Les sang his own song, *A Walk in the Park*, about meeting, marriage and loss, and Anne her own *Finsthwaite Princess*, about a woman buried in Finsthwaite churchyard who was said to be Bonny Prince Charlie’s illegitimate daughter (unlikely!)

Luckily there were plenty of cheerful and funny songs. The *Mary Ellen Carter* (Adrian) was raised from the depths of the sea by her tenacious crew; the sailors who are *Rolling Down to Old Maui* (Liz) are rejoicing at their return home; *Wedding Bells* (Jane) are ‘ringing out one day of joy’ and the extraordinary participants in *The Reel in the Flickering Light* (Phil) had a wonderful time. *The Widow of Bridlington* (Charles) defied spiteful neighbours to continue on her merry way. Sam Millington’s song *Never Press Nine*, sung by Alan, is a hilarious ‘take’ on the frustrations of call centres; *The Muck Spreader Song* (Garry) is a comic tale of malfunctioning agricultural equipment (to put it delicately); Phil sang the tall tale of *The Silloth Submarine*, about U-boat submariners who came ashore for fish-and-chips in wartime, pretending to be Free Poles.

Some had more ambiguous endings. The highwayman of *Whiskey in the Jar* (Charles) may or may not escape; the fragile heroine of Gerda’s *Beeswing* keeps her freedom but at great cost, and we never know if the daughter heeds her father’s warning against marrying the *Willy ‘Ole Lad* (Liz).

Particularly ingenious were those who told tales of tales. Chris told the tale of *The King’s Tailor*, whose suit ends up as a story. *The Story that I Started at the Kirk Soiree* (Katy) is a story about a storyteller telling a story. Les’s own song *So Many Stories* is inspired by ‘people watching’, seeing them playing out their own stories; while Garry’s *We Tell Stories* explains that story-telling is part of the human condition. Adrian topped the lot by encompassing the greatest story of all in his tune on melodeon, *How Great Thou Art*.

We next meet on **18th March in the Howard Arms, Brampton, at 8pm**. The theme will be ‘**March**’ – think hares and madness; the beginning of the spring. Or getting one’s marching orders. Or military marches (a gift to instrumentalists!) **ALL WELCOME!**

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

This being the month of March, our theme was ‘March’ (or ‘march’) when we met at the Howard Arms on the 18th (yes, of March!) We had connections to military marches; winds (March winds); madness; hares (mad March hares), spring, and of course events that took place in the month of March. Or any other subject that could plausibly be wrenched round to refer to March.

The month of March is clearly not as popular in song as, say, May or October, but Phil headed for *The Lakes of Pontchartrain* on a ‘bright March morning’; Charles’ *Kerry Recruit* decides to enlist ‘one morning in March’; Alan’s version of Masfield’s *Cargoes* mentions ‘mad March days’ and Richard’s *Ballad of John Willie Stell* commemorated his great-uncle, killed in the March 1918 German offensive. Gary Skinner assured us that the March wind was ‘blowing his blues away’ (*Sun’s Gonna Shine in my Backyard Some Day*) and less season-specific winds featured in Steve’s *Blowin’ in the Wind* and Gary’s *Dust in the Wind*. As March is generally considered to be first month of spring, Charles enjoined us to celebrate by *Poisoning Pigeons in the Park* while Steve met his love in the springtime, *When Blue Skies Turn to Grey*.

Hares and madness (not in combination) were popular. Les sang us his own song, *Hare Magic*, while Gerda’s *Hare Spell* dates chillingly from a Scottish witch trial. Geoff and Kath found a mention of hares in *Where Ravens Feed* and in the poem *The Poacher*. Gary imagined how young men would take to hunting if girls were *Hares on the Mountain*, then Anne lowered the tone further (naturally) with the *double entendre* of *The Bonny Black Hare*. Gerda assured us that it is a *Mad World*; Les told us that his own song was a *Load of Nonsense and Insanity* and Anne sang the tragedy of *Crazy Man Michael*. Tom o’ Bedlam (Katy) begs his way on the roads of Jacobean England and Garry Swinton found both madness and a march in the parody *Psychotherapy*, where ‘the id goes marching on’.

Which brings us to ‘marching’. Sally, on recorder and flute played the *March of the Men of Devon* and a medley of Irish marches: *Battle of Auchram*; *Lord Mayo*; *Chief o’Neill* and *Tralee Gaol*. Gerda’s *Lancashire Lads* marched away; Geoff and Kath sent the troops *Over the Hills and Far Away*; Richard’s *Peat Bog Soldiers* ‘marched with their spades to the moor’ and the captain of Irish dragoons wooed *The Bonnie Lass of Fyvie* (Phil). On a more light-hearted note, Garry Swinton’s *Dedicated Follower of Fashion* has a ‘Carnabetian army marching on’.

Outliers included Alan’s devious inclusion of Sam’s *Lost in IKEA* (by routes that are too complicated to describe!); the doomed love between *Tushie Law* and ‘the Earl of March’s daughter’ (Phil) and the Easter poem-song, *Jerusalem Tomorrow* (Charles).

We next meet on **Tuesday, 15th April at 8pm in The Howard Arms, Brampton**. The theme will be Houses/Places to Live (think palaces, castles, houseboats, shacks, tents, caravans...). ALL WELCOME.

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

We had a good turn-out on 15th April when we met in the Howard Arms to make music and tell stories on the theme of 'Houses/Places to Live'. A warm welcome to Bev and Hedley, visiting us from Maidenhead, the former with her portable piano (not a common instrument at folk sessions!)

To start with 'houses' (including 'cottages'): Sally sang us the ribald story of *The Yorkshire Couple*, involving a whole row of cottages, plus a pub. *Little Boxes* (Kath) is critical about the houses of 1960s America, and the *Skyscraper Wean* (Katy) complains about the inconveniences of high-rise living. On the other hand, the value of house and home was presented in Sam's song *Give Me Clean Water* (sung by Alan) which argues that 'a house with four walls' is an essential for happy living; the heroine of *The Galway Shawl* (Jane) takes her admirer to her father's cottage, and Gerda grieves for the 'homes that were drowned for a city' (*Ashokan Farewell*). Chris went upmarket with two stories involving manor houses: *The Witch of Edmondthorpe* and *King of the Cats*. Steve lamented that 'this old house is falling down' (*Dimming of the Day*), while John sought patches of garden between 'terraced houses and concrete towers' (*A Place called England*). Les's entertaining parody, *Ukulele Hallelujah*, described how no 'dwelling, house, or home' could escape from the instrument, while proving how many rhymes he could find for 'ukulele'! Some songs implied houses by mentioning 'bits of house' – a window in *Love Minus Zero* (Bev and Hedley); another window in *It's Been a Long Time* (Steve) and a door in *Lights of Home* (Gerda).

There were lots of imaginative variations on 'houses.' Phil found a lodging-house (*Keep Your Feet Still, Geordie Hinny*) and Alan a house of ill-repute (*The House of the Rising Sun*). *The Keeper of the Eddystone Light* (Adrian) lives in a lighthouse; while *Barges* (Gary) provide another watery residence – with castles (also a place to stay) painted on the side! A gypsy caravan features in *Beeswing* (John), as do 'the tent and the old caravan' in *Thirty-foot Trailer* (Phil). The protagonists of *The Little Old Sod Shanty on My Claim* (Chris) and of *Little Bridget Flynn* (Kath) both want wives to come and look after their homes and themselves.

Some places to live are decidedly temporary: the hotel mentioned in *Big Yellow Taxi* (Gary); the warm boxcar of *The Hobo's Lullaby* (Hedley and Bev) and the sentry box that witnesses the frolics of *The Gentleman Soldier* with his 'fair maid' (Anne). What does it say about folk song that we had three separate references to prisons? *I Wish There Were No Prisons* (Adrian); *Little Tim McGuire* (Sally) and *To Althea from Prison* (Anne).

'Home' can be a place, rather than bricks and mortar. Kath and Geoff rejoiced to be *Westering Home*; Les commended *Glasgow (No Place Like Home)*; Geoff looked forward to *Going Home* and Gerda sang *Lay My Heart* about the place where the narrator feels safe and at home.

And finally, there is homelessness: *London Lights* (Jane), the Victorian song about the deserted mother in the winter streets, and Hedley and Bev's of *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, adapted to speak about homelessness.

We next meet on **20th May in the Howard Arms Brampton at 8pm**, with the theme of 'furniture and household plenishings' – think 'beds, chairs, clocks, spinning wheels, crockery, saucepans' and so on.
ALL WELCOME!

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

We missed some regular faces (voices?) on 20th May when we met in the Howard Arms, but were very pleased to welcome Martin joining us again from London, and two visitors who came to listen.

Our theme was 'Furniture/Household Plenishing'. Charles and Martin both went for the big picture, so to speak, with *Not Without a Fight* (Charles), about a family resisting their home being bulldozed in Gaza, and *The Auction Song* (Martin), about poverty leading to a family's household possessions being auctioned and dispersed.

The most frequently mentioned item of furniture, (this is, after all, folk music!), was the bed. Charles presented it as the most basic necessity threatened by flood waters in *River, Stay Away from My Door*. In mood, we ranged from romps in *Grandma's Feather Bed* (Kath), through sleeping children visited by *John o' Dreams* (Phil) and the giver of *Scarlet Ribbons* (Jane), to the inevitable seduction at *The Bedmaking* (John). 'Bed' was also the scene of ultimate revenge by a battered wife (involving needle, thread, frying pan, rolling pin etc) in Gary's *Stitch in Time*.

Next came chairs of all sorts. Les announced *You Ain't Going Nowhere* in an easy chair (not surprising, really). Phil inherited a fortune hidden in *Granny's Old Arm Chair*. Anne's parody of *Side by Side* included a chair as well as a bed. We had a kitchen chair in Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah* (John); a chair of bamboo in *Sand and Foam* (Gary); a pub chair in the *Red Rose Café* (Les) and a sofa in Sam's *Self-Assembly Blues and Yellows* (sung by Alan). Tables and chairs go together, and were mentioned accordingly in Les's own song *People to People*, while John on mandolin played us *William Taylor's Tabletop Hornpipe*.

Clocks were unexpectedly popular, whether as the main theme in *My Grandfather's Clock* (Geoff and Kath); a metaphor in Charles' *The Windmills of Your Mind*; or a passing reference in Jane's *If You Wait*.

Tools and household equipment cropped up as baskets and creels in Martin's *Thirty-Foot Trailer*; in Anne's exhortation to *Dance Around the Spinning Wheel* and Geoff's plea to *Buy Broom Besoms*; in Jane's *Bogie's Bonny Belle* (pots, pans, paraffin lamps); in Martin's *Oak and Ash and Thorn* (bowl and cups), and as a metaphorical *Potter's Wheel* (Kath). Household linen sneaked in, taking the form of sheets offered to *The Jolly Beggar* (Phil); a pillow supporting the heroine's head in *That's No Way to Say Goodbye* (Jane) and Katy's query *O, Can Ye Sew Cushions?*

And who would have thought that so many obscure and unexpected household items could work their way into song? Bookshelves? Anne's *Joyce the Librarian*! Litter trays? Alan's *Our Cat*! A fuse-box and a gas-tap? Geoff's *The Gas-Man Cometh*! A phonograph? Alan's *Don't Blame the Motorman*! A mantelpiece? Anne's *The Keyhole in the Door*! Not to mention Gary's *Little Pot Stove*.

We next meet on **Tuesday 17th June at 8pm in The Howard Arms, Brampton**. The theme will be 'Wildlife' – forests, wildflowers, wild animals etc. **ALL WELCOME!**

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

We sang, played and recited around the theme of 'Wildlife', when we met on 17th June. We had a good turnout, and were delighted to welcome Carys from Carmarthen, who got us singing along in Welsh. What exactly constitutes 'Wildlife' led to some entertaining discussions, which we referred back to Gary who proposed the topic! (Essentially, if the singer reckoned it was wild, then it was).

Gerda started us off with the magnificent cycle of life, *I Was an Oak Tree*; Adrian grieved for his dead love buried by *The Ash Grove* and John sang the sad tale of the *Babes in the Wood*. Kath found a 'hawthorn bush' in the otherwise domesticated setting of *Little Bridget Flynn*; Carys celebrated 'red roses, white lilies' in *Ar Lan Y Môr* and Katy praised the broom and heather of the *Gallowa' Hills*. Charles fed his cattle - sorry, his 'little dogies' - on Texan jimsonweed, sandbur, prickly pear and cholla (*Whoopee Ti-Yi-Yo*).

Alan, with *Sweet Baby James*, and Jane, with *After the Gold Rush*, both looked at the bigger picture: 'wildlife' as 'the great outdoors' or 'Mother Nature'. Carys followed the same line of thought as she looked out at sea and wind from *Ty Bach Twt*. In similar vein, Phil took us hillwalking to Yarrow on a *Cloudberry Day*, and Kath rejoiced to live *Where Ravens Feed*.

Birds fluttered through many a song: Geoff's *Twa Corbies*; Gerda's *The Blackbird's Song*; the wild geese heading south under *Grey October Clouds* (Steve); the blackbirds, thrushes and larks that make a midsummer morning *Pleasant and Delightful* (Geoff and Kath) and the raven that deceives *Crazy Man Michael* (John). A jenny wren popped up discreetly in Les's parody *Ukulele Hallelujah* while Jane found a reference to a cuckoo in *Soil and Soul* and to the starling, heron and raven in *The Spell Song's Blessing*.

Animals ranged from the sort you expect in folk song to some very exotic ones indeed. We saw the whale-hunt from the perspective of the *Greenland Whale Fisheries* (Sally) and from that of *The Last Leviathan* (Steve). *Daddy Fox* (John) raided a farmer's yard; *Ein Jäger aus Kurphalz* (Adrian) pursued deer and hare and Les sang his own song about *Hare Magic*. Some less-than-completely wild animals crept into Alan's account of his *Oklahoma Home*, Geoff's lament for the hardships of a modern cow's life, *A Load of Old Bull* (tsk!) and Carys's summons to improbably-coloured goats, *Oes Gafr Eto?* Ranging further afield, Gary found buzzards and buffaloes (*Indian Sunset*); Steve praised the *Wild and Wonderful* snow leopard; Phil's uncle went *Waltzing with Bears*; and *Jennifer's Rabbit* (Sally) socialised with a turtle, kangaroo and monkeys. We even had invertebrates: Gerda's *Moth*; Phil's terpsichorean daddy-long-legs (*The Reel in the Flickering Light*), and Adrian's *Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly*.

And finally, there were the mythical animals. Some were old acquaintances – a unicorn in Sally's *Unicorn Song*, or a dragon in Les's *Crystal Dragon of Eryri*. Charles, on the other hand, introduced us to some very obscure fauna, in the shape of the Tickletoteaser and Rugabug bat as discovered by the crew of the *Walloping Window Blind*!

We next meet on **15th July at 8pm in The Howard Arms, Brampton**. The theme will be 'family relationships'. **ALL WELCOME!**

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

We had a good turnout when we met on 15th July in the Howard Arms. A warm welcome to John Garner and his harmonica, joining us for the first time.

It is all too seldom that we have purely instrumental music, so it was a pleasure to hear John G on harmonica playing *Charleston No 1* and *The Gold Ring*, and Adrian on melodeon with *Duncan McGillivray* (all with cunning links to the theme).

The theme was ‘family relationships’ which, seen through the prism of folk music, turned out to be unexpectedly tragic, not to say criminal! Witchcraft, murder, child sacrifice, bigamy and suicide all featured: John L introduced us to the mother-in-law from hell who casts a spell on *Willy’s Lady*, intending her to die in childbirth. Jane sang *The Bonnie Bows of London* and Gerda, *The Two Sisters*, respectively English and American variants of the old murder ballad in which the older sister drowns the younger. John L linked *The Story of Isaac* to the modern sacrifice of youth for ideology. Not all songs about crime were so grim: Les claimed that *Humpty Dumpty* was pushed off the wall because his mother had insured his life, and the children in Geoff’s song remonstrated *Don’t Jump off the Roof, Dad* because he would spoil the garden bed! Nor indeed did Phil seem too disturbed to discover his father’s multiple bigamy at *Dad’s Funeral*. Chris told us the story of fairy abduction (including the bearing of the fairy’s baby) in *Molly and the Hiring Fair*.

Chris’s singing of Kipling’s poem *Cells* made the link between crime (‘drunk and resisting the guard’) and tragedy (the effect that the protagonist’s drunken spree will have on his wife and child). *Morecambe Bay* (Charles) was the scene of the death by drowning of 23 Chinese cockle-pickers, whose ‘broken-hearted parents’ mourned them in Fujian. Romantic tragedy featured in Steve’s *She Moved Through the Fair*, where the heroine dies before her wedding day and Phil’s *Lost at Sea*, where the young father dies at sea and his wife dies in childbirth with their baby. The mother holding her *Silver Dagger* (Gerda) intends to protect her daughter from false young men, whereas for the luckless girl in Jane’s *London Lights*, homeless with her illegitimate child, the warnings come too late. (Whereas young *men* with illegitimate children fare better, as Charles recorded in *The Foggy, Foggy Dew*).

After so much that was sombre, it is good to record some cheerful families: in *It Seems Like Only Yesterday* (Kath), the uncle, sister and mother celebrate an Irishman returning from America. Les expressed *Gratitude with Loving Thanks* -for ‘ohana’; Steve rejoiced that *You Shine on Me*; Anne happily celebrated her daughter’s wedding in her *Wedding Song* and Kath and Geoff urged us to *Let Union Be*. Adrian and Katy both traced traditions of work passing down the family in *Clittering, Clattering* and *Generations of Change*. Even the small boy bewailing the arrival of his baby sister (*I Tell Thee Dick* - Anne) is simply humorous.

We next meet on **19th August at 8pm in The Howard Arms, Brampton**. Our theme will be ‘Money and Reward’. **ALL WELCOME!**

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

If we were lacking some of our regular attenders (stolen from us by folk festivals!) when we met on 19th August, on the other hand we were very pleased to welcome Jenny, joining us for the first time.

Our theme was 'Money and Reward', which gave us plenty of scope for different approaches. Well done to John Garner on harmonica, who found several money-related tunes – *Penny Candle*; *The Bank of Ireland* and *Sixpenny Money*.

Some pointed out the advantages of wealth: Alan lamented that *Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out*; Charles yearned to be 'in the rich man's world' (*Money, Money, Money*) and Geoff's young lad starting work looked forward to being a *Three-Day Millionaire*. *Jack Tar on Shore* (Phil); *The Wild Rover* (Kath) and *The Saucy Sailor* (Geoff and Kath) all described how differently they were treated when they had money in their pockets. Jane frankly commended the sailor as sweetheart because, 'sailors they get all the money' (*Rolling Sea*), while Les assured us 'I love money and money loves me', in his cheeky song *Money Madness* (written for street busking!)

The 'hardships of poverty' are the flip side of 'the advantages of wealth'. Thus, we heard about the widowed mother trying to feed five hungry mouths out of *That Old Cook Pot* (Gerda); the *Poor Little Beggar Girl* (John Luffrum) dancing and playing accordion as she begs and the *King of the Road* (Charles) describing the uncertain life of a hobo. Alan told us how his *Oklahoma Home* blew away in the dustbowl, taking everything with it but debt, and Phil's little washer lad hopes that the mine owner will raise his pay from *Fourpence a Day*.

Money is a pretty big motivator for crime – although, in fairness, *Sovay* (Jenny) only robbed her lover to test his loyalty. *Pretty Boy Floy* (John Garner) was an American version of Robin Hood; so (perhaps) was the Surrey clergyman/highwayman in the story Les told. Not so the gang of thieves who surrounded Colonel Taylor's house in Chris's story *The Long Pack*, or the highwayman who tried to rob *The Maid of Reigate* (Katy). Still worse, the treacherous captain of *The Golden Vanity* (Chris) regrets the bargain he made and leaves the cabin boy to drown. Other dangers of cupidity include the risks of gambling (*Blackjack*, sung by Alan and *The Gambler*, sung by Charles). Lighter in tone, but still a warning, was the fate of *Roger the Miller* (Jenny) who lost the girl he loved because he was greedy about her dowry.

Not that money can buy everything! Gerda stoutly maintained that *Hard Times Ain't Gonna Rule My Mind*, and Kath and Geoff, with their 'bottle and friend', were as happy as those with *Thousands or More*. The suitors in *Come Write Me Down* (John Luffrum) and *What Do You Want If You Don't Want Money?* (Jane) are both taken aback to find that the respective lady-loves turn down offers of wealth and precious stones, while Gerda's *Queen of Hearts* is too deeply in love to care about a mountain of gold and silver. In melancholy vein, Lady Franklin would gladly give 'ten thousand pounds' to have her husband alive (*Lord Franklin* – Chris).

And finally, there were mentions of currency. Dollars in *Shallow Brown* (Jane) and *House of Orange* (Phil); shillings in *The King's Shilling* (Jenny) and *Over the Hills and Far Away* (Les); pounds in *Down Where the Drunkards Roll* (John Luffrum) and half-a-crown in *High Part of the Town* (Charles).

We next meet at **8pm on Tuesday, 16th September in The Howard Arms, Brampton**. The theme will be 'Celestial Bodies' (sun, moon, stars, planets...anyone know a song about comets?) **ALL WELCOME!**

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

We met on 16th September in the Howard Arms, Brampton, to make music and tell stories on the theme of 'Celestial Bodies'. It was a pleasure to welcome newcomers Geoff P, Ron and Linda.

Of all potential celestial bodies, the moon proved the most song-worthy. The moon definitely has romantic connotations: Steve praised his beloved for drawing him as 'the moon pulls on the tide' (*Dimming of the Day*) and, in his own song, stated *You Shine on Me (Like the Moon)*. Alan's song invited his sweetheart to dance at the time of a *Harvest Moon*; Ron and Linda lamented lost love under the *Blue Moon of Kentucky*; and Geoff P described a brief encounter with a woman who asked him to 'show her the moon' (*Of Course I Will*). The improbable events of Chris's *The Grey Goose and the Gander* take place by the 'light of the moon; John L sang to us about the lonely existence of *The Man in the Moon*, and, (still in the realm of tall tales), *Jennifer's Rabbit* (Sally) builds a castle of moonbeams. Tallest of all tales, however, was Phil's circumstantial account of how *The First Man on the Moon Was a Cumbrian! The Voyage of the Moon* (Gary) foretells a journey towards joy, whereas *Bad Moon Rising* (Ron and Linda) predicts disaster and death. Equally sinister and dramatic is Jane's *Mother's Savage Daughter*, who 'howls at the moon'.

Stars came next. Kath mourned for *Vincent* and his 'starry, starry night'. Gerda sang of the 'pull of the Pole Star' at the *First Frost*; Charles was *So In Love* as 'stars fill the sky'; Jane asked her lover to *Dream a Little Dream of Me* while stars were shining above and Les hoped to *Make You Feel My Love* as 'stars appear'. Sally commented on the impossibility of 'lighting a penny candle from a star' (*Galway Bay*), while Geoff P compares his ship to an 'upward shooting star' as he is *Off to Outer Space Tomorrow Morning*. Geoff B didn't travel quite so far, but still told us that he was born under a *Wand'rin' Star*. John G on harmonica found several star-themed tunes: *The Star of Munster*; *The Star of the County Down*; and *Seven Stars*. Chris told the story of *Nanabush and How the Bear Lost His Tail*, and worked round cunningly to a reference to the constellation of Ursa Major!

'The sun was going down' over the *Sand and Foam* in Mexico (Gary) but 'rising bright in France', watched by a Jacobite exile (*My Ain Countrie* – Katy). Under his classical name of 'bright Phoebus', the sun arises in John L's *Thousands or More*. Adrian's baby 'cries for the sun' (*Crow on the Cradle*), while Alan sang for *My Friend the Sun*. Phil managed to work in every imaginable heavenly body (red sunrise; silvery moon; shooting stars; Northern Lights) as witnessed by *The Old Man of the Sea*.

Gerda likewise watched 'the borealis' (*This Is Where I Lay My Heart*), which brings us to the less obvious Celestial Bodies. Charles most ingeniously sang Tom Lehrer's *The Elements* because it mentions Mercury! Anne thought big and found a reference to 'galaxies' (okay, 'of cotton mills', but the principle holds good!) in *Elsie Bell*.

And finally, we move on to metaphysical Celestial Bodies: Les told us the story of the Angel of Mons; Anne's angels took us back to the Civil War (*To Althea, From Prison*). Kath and Geoff looked forward to the life that is to come (*Going Home*). So did Adrian - sort of - with his parodic anticipation of paradise for Morris dancers, *When Your Bells Have Turned Green*.

We next meet at 8pm on 21st October in The Howard Arms with the theme 'Railways'. ALL WELCOME!

P.S. If anyone wishes to dispute whether the Aurora Borealis is a Celestial Body, we will stand our ground! – Katy and Anne 😊

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

Sixteen folk braved the autumnal weather and darkening nights to attend the sing-around and tunes session at the Howard Arms, Brampton, on the 21st October, with the theme of “Railways and Trains” in celebration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the World’s first passenger train journey on 27th September last. All in all I counted forty-eight songs, tunes, and stories. We went round the circle at least three times but sadly, at the hour of eleven on the clock, and with a barmaid keen to tidy up, it meant the circle was broken on the fourth round.

Unsurprisingly, despite it being a British bi-centenary, there was a dominance of American railroad songs. Alan Clark’s “John Henry”, together with his level-crossing disaster “Don’t Blame the Motorman”; Charles with “City of New Orleans”; Gary sang Gordon Lightfoot’s 1967 song “The Canadian Railroad Trilogy”, also, Phil’s “The L&N don’t Stop here Anymore”. Then there was, Gerda’s “Railroad Bill” and Jane’s “If you Miss the Train I’m on”. John L *rocked us like a southbound train* in “Wagon Wheel”. Also another Gordon Lightfoot song from Gary, “Steel Rail Blues”.

Nearer to home, John G on his mouthy played a jig called “The Clanking Rail”, Adrian took us to “Bloody Orkney” where there is a distinctive lack of rail transport. “The Settle to Carlisle Railway” was celebrated twice, once by Steve, and again in the Dave Goulder version, expressing impending, as it happens revoked, closure, from Phil. Steve also sang the beautiful “Leaving Nancy” penned by Eric Bogle as he parted with his mother on Waverley Station, bound for the antipodes.

In terms of railway paraphernalia, Geoff took us “All Around the Watertank”. Railway construction and maintenance was covered by “Navigators”, Gerda, “Paddy Works On The Railway”, Chris, and the tune, “The Running Fitter”, John G. Locomotive operators figured, in Don Bilston’s “The Fireman’s Song”, it explains the vital role on the footplate played by the man that shovels the coal, Chris.

We had at least three runaways. “The Runaway Train ... and She Blew”, Adrian, “The Man That Put the Engine In the Chip Shop”, Phil, and then there was “The Monkey and the Engineer”, John G. There were some clever interpretations of the theme. John L sang Maggie Holland’s song, “A Place Called England” with the line, “*As the train pulled from the station through the wastelands of despair*”, buried deep in the lyric. He also managed an even more distant train connection buried in “Turpin Hero”. Likewise Jane (and Bob Dylan’s) “Crash on the Levee” has the line ... *Now, you can train on down to Williams Point*, which I’m not sure has anything to do with railways. Although not materialised, it was mentioned in passing that someone should have incorporated a bridal train in a song.

Pete Morton’s song “There’s Another Train”, with its rousing chorus was a message of hope from Ron on guitar, and Linda on beat box. They also sang of Annie Halsey descending from the train at a remote North Dakota station, greeted by her husband to be, in Harry Chapin’s song, “Mail Order Annie”.

Kath read “Trains” a poem from a book written by her father (D Healey). There were other poems and readings. For some reason, cats were particularly associated with the railways, “Skimbleshanks” from Sally, and Chris’s “Lucy from Number Nine”, about the feline residence of 9, Railway Cottages. Charles told us of “The Night Mail Crossing the Border. Phil finished the session with an extract from an A J Cronin’s tale that imagines the experience of a traveller on the Tay Bridge as it collapses.

Come along next month to The Howard on the 18th November at 8:00pm for another stomping good night. The theme will be “Fire”.

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

Thank you to all those who braved darkness and sleet to join us to make music around the theme of 'fire' on 18th November. A warm welcome to Richard Harris, joining us for the first time, and welcome back to Sally and Richard Hardaker.

It was a pleasure to have no fewer than three instrumentalists, John G on mouth organ; Sally Hardaker on flute and recorder, and Adrian on melodeon, all of whom found fire-related tunes. John G played us the jigs *Little Burnt Potatoes*; *The Fiery Clock Face*; *Blazing Turf* and *Pipe on the Hob*, plus a hornpipe, *Smoky Chimney*. Adrian, using the time-honoured oblique approach, played *Ladder Hill* 'because firemen use ladders'! Sally gave us *Chimney Bird*; *Small Coals and Little Money* (both on recorder) and *Crooked Stove Pipe* (flute).

A number of contributions linked the theme to Remembrance Day last week - Geoff P urged us, *Wear Your Poppy with Pride*, while Ron (vocals) and Linda (cahone) reminded us to *Keep the Home Fires Burning*. Jane and Anne used 'fire' in another sense – the narrator of *Normandy* (Jane), wondered how his father had felt 'under enemy fire', and Anne grieved for the men who were shot by firing squad during the First World War (*Jesus Wept*). Adrian took us to another war, another century, firing a broadside at the time of *The Death of Nelson*.

As this is folk music we're talking about, perhaps it's not surprising that crime, cruelty and catastrophe did seem to dominate. We heard about arson: *A Church is Burning* (Gary); *Little Tim McGuire* (Sally Jones); and the 16th Century *Burning of Auchindoun* (Richard Hardaker). *William Taylor* (Chris) died at the hand of his jilted sweetheart who 'fired and shot' him. Deeply disturbing was the death of *Bonny Susie Cleland* (Phil), burned for refusing to renounce her English lover. Catastrophes included fire by land and sea: Sally Jones and Ron and Linda sang different versions of *Fire Down Below*; Gary's *Ballad of the Yarmouth Castle* told of a 1965 maritime tragedy; while Geoff P's *Gresford Disaster* was about the worst mining disaster in British history. In the midst of so much that was sombre, there was a sprinkling of tongue-in-cheek crises *When the Old Dun Cow Caught Fire* (Adrian); when the firemen arrived at *The School Nativity Play* (Phil); not to mention Charles' recitation of Belloc's cautionary tale about *Matilda, Who Told Lies and Was Burned to Death*.

So let us turn to symbolic fires: Richard Harris warned us that *This Wheel's on Fire*; Gerda sang about uniting to overthrow oppression *If There's a Fire in Your Heart*; and Jane's *Motherless Child* has a 'soul on fire'. Charles and John L both used fire as a metaphor for passion, in, respectively, *Burn* and *When You Shook Your Long Hair Down*. The fire in Alan's haunting *Prisoner of Consciousness* is literal but loaded with emotional meaning, as the protagonist can 'see dancing flames, hear crackling logs' but is unable to turn his head to look at them.

Life-giving, light-giving, celebratory or just plain useful fires also featured. The young cowboy sits by his fire (*Sweet Baby James* – Alan); the dying lamp and fire contribute to the gentle melancholy of *Song for a Winter's Night* (Richard Harris); making a fire and cooking over it is comfort in hard times (*No Woman, No Cry* – John L); the farmer returns to candlelight and fireside at the *Day's End* (Anne) and the Highlander is homesick for the *Peat Fire Flame* (Katy). Gerda will 'build a fire and watch it burn' (*Lay My Heart*). The servants of Edmondthorpe Hall celebrate Christmas with bonfires and decorations, in Chris's story *The Witch of Edmondthorpe*. And to underline the usefulness of fire, *Are You Right, Now, Michael?* (Richard Hardaker), includes a steam train that doesn't go because the fire won't burn!

We next meet on **Tuesday, 16th December in the Howard Arms, Brompton, at 8pm.** The theme will be 'Light and Darkness'. **ALL WELCOME!**