

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

We were missing some regular attenders due to seasonal ill-health, when we met on 20<sup>th</sup> January but were delighted to welcome Paddy, returning after a long absence. Our theme was the thoroughly ‘folkie’ one of ‘Rogues, Vagabonds and Thieves’.

To start with the rogues at the top of the pyramid: corrupt politicians ranged from Gary’s 18<sup>th</sup> Century *Parcel of Rogues* through Sally’s gallery of 20<sup>th</sup> Century incompetents (*You Knew We Were Coming*) to Geoff’s comment on contemporary events, *Confounds the Science*. Adrian satirised dishonest entrepreneurs in *The Man Who Waters the Workers’ Beer*.

Slightly surprisingly, we had only one example each of those archetypal folk rogues, the highwayman, the smuggler and the poacher: Ron and Linda sang *Too Close to the Wind* and *The Whitby Smugglers’ Song*, while Katy gave us the ballad *Johnnie of Braidislee*. Rather more popular were colonial outlaws. America gave us *Pancho and Lefty* (Gary) and the unfortunate hero of *Slip Jigs and Reels* (Phil), while Sally took us to Australia for the exploits of the *Wild Colonial Boy*. Maritime villainy featured as piracy in Geoff’s *Captain Kydd* and as privateering in Anne’s *Polly on the Shore*. Alan (creative as always) mentioned the tiniest act of roguery possible, when the little boy in *Sunday in Savannah* is warned not to go fishing on the Sabbath.

We had lots of contributions about roguery in love – or, less delicately, sexual shenanigans. Gerda complained of faithless lovers in *Miss Otis Regrets* and *Queen of Hearts*; John on harmonica played tunes with warning titles like *The Randy Wives of Greenlaw*; *Big Market Lasses*; *The Unfortunate Rake* and *The Drunken Landlady*, while Sally took us through the convoluted sexual affairs of an entire village in her song *Johnny Be Fair*. Paddy and Phil both described how a sailor’s encounter with ‘flash girls’ is followed by being cheated and ends in a brawl (*Ratcliffe Highway* and *Jack Tar on Shore* respectively). Alan’s *Rocky Raccoon* features a shoot-out between rivals in love, while a rash marriage in *Lawless* (Paddy) leads to tragedy all round.

Charles approached the ‘vagabond’ part of the theme very directly with Stevenson’s *The Vagabond* and with *The Wraggle-Taggle Gypsies*. Phil’s *Jolly Beggar* is both a vagabond and a rogue (and, by his own statement, a thief). Anne pointed out that ‘vagabond’ originally meant an itinerant workman, as *Sullivan’s John* goes off to mend pots and pans with the tinkers.

Some singers called our attention to the penalties for theft: transportation in Ron and Linda’s *Fields of Athenrye*; gaol in Adrian’s *Sweet Swansea*; and his lament *I Wish There Were No Prisons*; gaol again in John G’s song *The Old Triangle*, and his tune *Jack Broke the Prison Door*.

We next meet on **17<sup>th</sup> February at 8pm in The Howard Arms, Brampton**. Our theme will be ‘Love’ (so close to Valentine’s Day, what else could it be?) **ALL WELCOME!**

And for those who like to prepare in advance, we have decided on themes for March – ‘Trades and Professions’ – and for April – ‘Rivers, Lakes and Seas’.

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Our theme, when we met on 17<sup>th</sup> February, shortly after Valentine's Day, was of course 'Love'. A warm welcome to Bob and Marion, joining us for the first time, and congratulations to Linda on her first solo song!

This being folk, naturally we had lots of songs about lost love, faithless lovers and all-round gloom! *Peggy Gordon* (Phil) slighted her young man's love; the lonely girl calls out *Horo Johnny* to her inconstant lover (Jane); Paddy sketched a destructive love triangle in *Famous Blue Raincoat*. Outright tragedy pursued the young man drowned in *Annan Water* (Phil) as he rides to visit his true love; while the lover in *She Moved Through the Fair* (Sally) is haunted by his 'dead love'. Adrian squeezed a reference to unrequited love into his melodeon tune, *Jenny Lind*, 'because Hans Christian Andersen fell in love with the Swedish Nightingale'. In more general terms, Linda lamented the brevity of *Plaisir d'Amour* and Sally warned us that *Waltzing's for Dreamers (and Losers in Love)*.

Folk song is aware of the dangers of loving unwisely: Ron's protagonist had to leave for America after ruining his life (*Love is Teasing*); we know that *Mack the Knife* (Charles) will be betrayed by his lights o' love, while Chris warned us of the dangers of *Flash Company*. We also heard of elopements – will they turn out well or ill? – in Gerda's *Ned of the Hill* and *Katie Cruel*; Sally's *I Know Where I'm Going* and John G's tune *The Runaway Bride*.

Then there are the poignancy of uncertainty and the bittersweetness of memory. Will the *Lady of Bendigo* (Ron) respond to the lover's plea? Will the sailor bidding *Farewell, Sweet, Lovely Nancy* (Chris) return safely to shore? The young man who showed a 'bonny young lassie' *The Road to Dundee* (Geoff P) is unlikely ever to see her again; the same is true of the man remembering *The Girl from the North Country* (Jane).

But love does not have to lead to disaster, even in folk music! John G on mouth organ exhorted us to *Cherish the Ladies*, then celebrated *The Pearl Wedding* and *The Bride's Favourite*. Bob uttered *My Thanks to You* for a shared life of memories and experiences; *The Sailor's Wife* (Katy) is giddy with delight at her husband's safe return; and Alan, tongue-in-cheek as always, sang *Cheapskate Birthday Blues (aka Three Little Words)* which he composed for his wife! The girl who loves *The Little Carpenter* (Gerda) refuses other proposals and remains faithful. *Sweet Anne of Hethersgill* (Geoff) loves, is courted and marries – as straightforward as anyone could wish - whereas John L's courtship gets off to a bumpy start but eventually succeeds (*Come, Write Me Down*).

Charles boasted that *Nobody Else Is Loved So Well by Isabel* and John L was delighted that *My Lady's a Wild-Flying Dove* and is 'mine, mine, mine'. The dancers in Alan's *Harvest Moon* are 'still in love'; Jane sees *La Vie en Rose* in her lover's arms; and Paddy sang *The Confidence Reel*, about falling in love later in life. On a lighter note, Adrian's rollicking music hall parody of *Rule Britannia* takes us from catastrophe (snatched by the press-gang) to happy ending - *Married to a Mermaid*.

And finally, let us pay tribute to the loves that are not romantic: a boat (*The Jeannie C* – Chris); alcohol (*Good Ale, Thou Art My Darling* – Adrian); and a brother (*Neil Gow's Lament for His Dead Brother* – John G).

We next meet on **17<sup>th</sup> March in The Howard Arms, Brampton at 8pm**, with the theme '**Trades and Professions**'. **ALL WELCOME!**

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

The Brampton folk session met on 17<sup>th</sup> March with the theme of ‘Trades and Professions’. A warm ‘welcome back’ to Charlie Chomse, returning after far too long an absence.

Let us start with the traditional folk-music-type trades: soldiers *Marching through Rochester* with Sally, and commemorated musically on melodeon by Adrian (*Duncan McGillivray*, who led the Ontario Pipe Band) and on harmonica by John G (*Colonel Fraser*); sailors catching *Tiny Fish for Japan* (Gerda) and keelmen *Carrying Coal* down the Tyne (Charlie). Weavers were well-represented – Phil celebrated the hand-weavers who made the *Music of the Loom*; Gerda described the hardships of factory weaving in *Poverty Knock*; and Richard recalled the amorous adventures of a weaver in the *Foggy, Foggy Dew*. Mining tragedies featured in Sally’s *Ballad of Springhill* and Alan’s *Rap ‘Er To Bank*. Alan celebrated *Jolly Ploughboys*; Ron rejoiced in *The Song of the Plough* and, still in rural mode, described the satisfactions of hedging (*The Hedger’s Lay*).

The toils and tribulations of labourers were described humorously in *The Sick Note* (John G) and with grim realism in *MacAlpine’s Fusiliers* (Geoff P), while *Billycock Hat* (Charlie) outlined the hard work and limited pleasures of a navy’s life.

Equally traditional, but less often represented in song, are the trades of joiner (*If I Were a Carpenter* – Richard); factory hand (*William Brown* – Paddy); fairground showman (*Rawtenstall Annual Fair* – Adrian) and fishwife (*Caller Herrin’* – Katy).

Some of our contributors were ingenious, not to say downright creative. Who would have expected two songs about sewer men? And yet Phil told us *I’m Glad I’m Working Down Below* and Adrian sang the Sydney Carter song *Down Below*. Charles went for the creative touch with a mathematician (*Lobachevsky*) and *I Am the Very Model of a Folk Musicologist*. Other out-on-a-limb contributions included Paddy’s *To Be a Pharmacist*; Anne’s sad tale of *Joyce the Librarian*; and Geoff P’s song about the Yorkshire painter *Peter Brook*. Anne found a cautionary tale about a policeman (*Speeding*) and John G a tune about *The New Policeman*.

Bob recalled that the date coincides with St Patrick’s Day, and went for an Irish theme, with *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling* and *After All These Years*.

We next meet on **Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> April at 8pm in The Howard Arms, Brampton**. Our theme will be ‘Rivers, Lakes and Seas’ (named ones! Think ‘Galway Bay’ or ‘Loch Lomond’). **ALL WELCOME!**

## FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

We circled the globe in song and tune, story and rhyme, when we met on 21<sup>st</sup> April, following a theme of 'Rivers, Lakes and Seas'. To start with our instrumentalists: John G on harmonica took us to *Lough Gowna* and *The Shores of the Logan*, and celebrated the *Braw Lads o' Gala Water*; while Adrian on melodeon gave us the Morris tune, *The Banks of the Dee*.

We had some metaphorical seas: John L told us that 'the heart is like an ocean, mysterious and dark' (Dylan's *One More Cup of Coffee*) and Richard compared life to sailing on uncharted waters (Tom Paxton's *Outward Bound*). Ron suggested that *If Wishes Were Fishes* 'we would all cast nets in the sea'. Chris, with his story *Howler Monkey*, took us via the South Atlantic and up the Amazon in order to make a mischievous comparison with politics.

Some bodies of water remained generalised or implicit, or were even fictional! The hero of *Cindy, Oh Cindy* (Bob) sails the seas but cannot not forget his sweetheart; Linda makes her *Journeys Home* 'over seas'. The 'Lowland Sea' on which the *Golden Vanity* sailed (Chris) is not clearly defined in any atlas; and while the Atlantic is clearly meant in Sally's song *God Moves On the Water*, it is not actually mentioned. The underground waters that flooded the Diglake Colliery in 1895 (*Diglake Fields* – John G) never had a name. Charles stated frankly that the 'cool Shalimar' in which Flanders and Swann's *Hippopotamus Song* takes place is not, in fact, a river!

Moving on to named rivers, seas etc, we ranged the world, visiting the Nile (Jane's *Queen of Egypt*); Table Bay (*All In Search of You* – Phil); the Mississippi (*Old Man River* – Charles); the Magellan Straits (*Rounding the Horn* – Katy) and the Czech River Morava (*Okolo* – Jane). Chris and Richard both took us to the *Northwest Passage* – Chris in Stan Rogers' song of that name, and Richard in *Lady Franklin's Lament*. Between them, they also managed to squeeze in references to Baffin Bay, the Beaufort Sea, the Davis Strait and the Fraser River (but *it's not a competition*, chaps!) Geoff warned us, with grim humour, against ending up in *Botany Bay*, whereas in Ron and Linda's song (*The Fields of Athenry*) the same destination is a tragedy for the convicted man and his family.

Nearer to home, Geoff recited the light-hearted poem Southey wrote for his children describing *The Cataract of Lodore*. Adrian threatened to cross the Tamar and Severn and march on London with 'twenty thousand Cornishmen' (*The Song of the Western Men*); Ron advised the *Sweet Thames* to *Flow Softly*; Phil's *Norland Wind* swept north across the Firth of Forth and the Tay; John L bade farewell to the Mersey in *The Leaving of Liverpool*; Sally warned *Here's the Tender Coming* and urged the sailor husband to hide until the press-gang moves on to Druridge Bay; the English Channel is either a routeway for Roman invasion (Adrian's *The National Anthem of the Ancient Britons*) or the homebound destination of sailors (Ron's *Spanish Ladies*).

We next meet on **Tuesday, 19<sup>th</sup> May, at 8pm in The Howard Arms, Brampton**. The theme will be 'placenames' – dry ones, this time! Cities, towns, villages, even streets. ALL WELCOME!