

FOLK SESSION - Howard Arms, Brampton

Although there is still 'Covid anxiety' around, the theme of 'topography' gathered a slightly larger group of performers on the 18th of January in the Howard Arms.

Some of us seemed to be competing to find the largest possible number of geographical features in one song: Gerda cited a mountain ledge, an island, rock pool, salt marsh and sand in *Dig In*; Sam mentioned highway, valley, redwood forest; Gulf Stream waters and deserts in *This land is your land*; Anne stayed local with *King Dunmail's* mountainside, mere, moor, field and plain and Phil came up with mountains, hills, crags, moorland peaks and stony ridges in *The Joy of Living*.

Various songs and one reading covered specific places. Sally sang of Arisaig and Craigmore in *The Isle of Eigg*, and Adrian followed with *The Mingulay Boat Song*; Polly found her love on *Blueberry Hill*; David read to us about the early life of the great civil engineer Thomas Telford who was born in poverty in Westerkirk, Eskdale, near Langholm. Phil (competing again?) covered most of England in *Brough Hill Fair*, gathering us in from the Chilterns, the Cheviots, the Yorkshire Moors; the Sussex Downs, the Pennines and the Norfolk Broads. Some contributors preferred to name one single, thumping great unmistakable feature, such as *The Mountains of Mourne* (Sally); *The Water of Tyne* (Polly); Cape Horn (*The Rounding of the Horn*- Katy) and *South Australia* (Adrian on melodeon).

Water features were almost as popular during the session as they were in an 18th Century nobleman's grounds: Wastwater and Windermere in Anne's *Witch of the Westmorlands*; Beaufort Sea and the Davis Straits in *Northwest Passage* (Phil); the Hudson Dam in Gerda's lyrics to *Ashokan Farewell*; sea, river and valley in *Darling Home Town* (Sam).

We next meet on 15th February in the Howard Arms, Brampton, from 8pm onwards. The theme (should be a counter-irritant for those who dislike red satin hearts and Valentine's Day!) is 'unhappy/unrequited love'. ALL WELCOME!

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Despite the threat of the impending storm Dudley, we were seventeen, plus one dog, in the upstairs lounge of The Howard this third Tuesday in February. It being the day *after* Valentine's Day, the theme was based on the negative effects of love: unrequited; lost; cheated; etc.

We welcomed Chris and Mike Leighton from across the water after a six year absence! Sally and Richard Hardaker who we know from Zoom sessions; Paul, a new arrival in the area; Chris Jones from Wall; Hillary (Aitch), all the way up from East Anglia; Martina and Giles (with four legged Crispin). This crew all joined in with the usual suspects.

On his Uilleann Pipes (unusually with a B-flat chanter), Mike described the broken love affair between a family and their country in the Irish emigration song "Green Fields of Canada". On the same theme, Chris sang "Isle of Hope, Isle of Tears", the story of Ellis Island, the gateway to America for many dispossessed peoples. Loss of loved ones featured in Aitch's "God Moves on the Water", including the poignant farewell to a Titanic sailor's wife as she leaves in the lifeboat without him. Enforced separation as a result of war. "I'll Go and Enlist for a Sailor" was the title of one of Frank's tunes on his melodeon, followed by Chris Jones' "High Germany". We all sang along with Polly about a jilted sailor in "Sally Free and Easy".

Sam was "Drinking to Forget", while Gerda was lamenting a missed lunch date with Miss Otis (unavailable because she was on the scaffold for shooting her false lover). Phil related his short, unhappy, relationship with "Peggy Gordon". "Ann O' Heathersgill" bewitched our ballad singer, Richard, but she preferred Jock the Carel, so dumped him. Paul took us to Shoreditch, lost his love to a Portuguese sailor, turned him inside-out and pushed him down a man-hole, not bad for a man of the cloth! David described the misfortune that afflicted a pair of love birds (goslings actually), who though separated in life, were together at Christmas (albeit in an oven).

The evening wouldn't have been complete without the false love of a blacksmith, "A Blacksmith Courted Me", Sally Hardaker. Meanwhile, our other Sally sang "The False Bride". Adrian followed with "The Calico Printer's Clerk", who ran away with the hapless narrator's love, Dorothy Drew.

We next meet on the 15th March in the Howard Arms, Brampton, from 8pm onwards. The theme is 'March'. Interpret that as you will – the month, the tune, or even the geographical border. ALL WELCOME!

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There were just eight folk gathered in the function room of the Howard Arms on the third Tuesday in March. Holidays in Cornwall, illness, and possibly an enhanced concern about a Covid resurgence kept some away. Nevertheless, the quality of the performances made up for it. Welcome to Ian who has just moved to the area, and Richard and Sally coming north again to be with us. We even had a couple of listeners in, escapes from the bar downstairs. The theme was "March", which proved quite tricky, although full benefit was taken of the available interpretations: the month itself; the act of military locomotion; and not forgetting the old term for the disputed national boundary of the "Debatable Lands".

An example from the Western Marches, was the border ballad, "Hughie Graeme", brilliantly sung by Richard. It tells of a horse theft undertaken as recompense for the seduction of Hughie's wife by the Bishop of Carlisle. As would be expected in these ballads, it doesn't end happily for Hughie. Phil sang the Lionel McLelland song "The Earl of March's Daughter", in keeping with the genre, not a happy ending either.

Christine sang of "Travelling Soldiers", probably very apt in the current European crisis. Gerda sang of a young lass who wanted to march away to the "Battle of the Nile" with her boyfriend. Mary read a letter about "Life in the Australian Army". The tune "March of St Timothy" played by Sally on her flute, originates from a church of that name in Detroit. Sally also, on a recorder this time, had us playing along to "Farewell to the Creeks".

The month of March hosts St Patrick's Day, and so it's reasonable to include any Irish song within the theme! Ian did just this with Mick Hanley's beautiful love song "Without the Fanfare". Sam followed this philosophy too with "The Green and Red of Mayo". Sally's flute gave us the haunting "Women of Ireland", and later "The March of the King of Laois", (in this case, ticking both boxes, an Irish connection AND a martial perambulation).

Back in March 19XX, Sam had a bad experience in a furniture warehouse in Gateshead that inspired his signature song "Lost in Ikea". After enquiring that there were no Greenpeace members present who might be upset, Phil headed out to Greenland on March the eighteenth day in search of the whale-fish. Ian would like to be able to "Play My Guitar like Tommy What's-his-Name". Gerda finished our session with "Hard Times Ain't Gonna Rule My Mind", an appropriate theme to muse on as we wend our various ways homeward.

We meet again on the 19th April in the Howard Arms, Brampton, from 8pm onwards. The theme is 'Food and Drink'. ALL WELCOME!

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

We foregathered in the Howard Arms on 19th April. It was a great pleasure to see Ruth, Kath and Geoff after a long absence, and to welcome Gary for the first time. Welcome also to the people who joined us to listen to the session (we are most flattered...)

The theme was 'food and drink'. Let us start the day with Anne's poem *The Perfect Breakfast*, with its awful warning about 'being bright at breakfast time', then move on to lunch in Ruth's tragicomedy *Fishballs and Bread*, the Cornish pasty of *The Oggie Man* (Sally) and the dry-stone waller's 'good cheese to his bread' (*Tailor of the Dales* – Phil). Gary's take on wage-slavery, *Gold Watch Blues*, worked in a reference to tea breaks, as did Geoff's poem *When I was 126*, with its mention of custard creams and Rich Tea biscuits.

Phil took us shopping at *Stanley Market* for all sorts of meats, which doubtless turned up at the banquet when *John Willy's Ferret* (Anne) caused chaos at a civic function. Like the banquet, we had a fish course: *Caller Herring* (Katy); *Tiny Fish for Japan* (Gerda); and a meat course: the buck and roast goose of the *Hal an Tow* (Adrian); the roast duck dinner that Nanabush *didn't* get in Chris Jones' story and 'beef in the larder and ducks on the pond' in *Mrs Bond* (Miriam).

For dessert we had lots of fruit: *I gave my love a cherry* (Kath and Geoff); Ruth's reading from Brian Keenan's *An Evil Cradling* described vividly the colour and scent of a bowl of fruit in a cell in Lebanon. Gerda's song *Sinking Soon* provided an apple pie for dessert and followed it up with a 'wheel of cheese' for our cheese course.

Animals also got a look in. *Daddy Fox* feasted on the grey goose (Geoff and Kath); Chris, accompanying himself on Indian lap organ, sang *Lambing Storm*, involving pulling a sickly lamb through with a bottle of milk. And then there are animals that feed on us, as Miriam's *The Twa Corbies* describes.

And now for drink! Adrian on melodeon played *Pepper in the brandy*; Sally sang of importing gin, rum and tea through *Whitby Harbour*. We all joined in *The Parting Glass*, led by Kath and Geoff, and then needed to go home in the *Big Yellow Taxi* (Gary)!

We meet next month on 17th May at 8pm in the Howard Arms, Brampton, with the theme 'Clothing', to be developed as creatively as you like. ALL WELCOME!

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

The Brampton folk session met on 17th May with the theme 'clothing'. It was a pleasure to see John from Whitley Bay joining us again after a long gap.

A sub-theme of 'footwear' seemed to develop early on (was there a Freudian significance in this?) *Betsy Bell and Mary Gray* (Gary) died of plague in their green shoes; Sam's *Quality Shoes* had steel toecaps; Gerda introduced sneakers, boots and 'regulation shoes' in her *Walking Song*; Anne's heroine wore golden slippers to *Dance around the spinning wheel*; Uncle Jasper, in Phil's parody *Prancing with ewes*, comes home with mud on his wellies; John envied St Peter's shoes (*Grey Funnel Line*), while the hero of the Stanley Holloway monologue, recited by Mary, suffers social opprobrium for wearing *Brahn Boots* to a funeral.

Uniform appeared on the 'manly form' of the officer whom Anne admired through the *Keyhole in the door*. Gary's heroine cursed the recruiting officer who induced her lover to wear the *Blue Cockade*, whereas in the ballads *Polly Oliver* (Ruth) and *William Taylor* (Chris) the girls put on men's apparel in order to join the army and follow their true loves. Mary's *Soldier Soldier* cunningly got himself kitted out from head to foot by his sweetheart.

We ranged through exotic to exquisite and from there to homely. Starting with the exotic, grass skirts featured when John suggested *Let's talk dirty in Hawaiian*, and huli-huli skirts in *She wears red feathers* (Ruth). Chris's ingenious shaggy dog story, *The King's Tailor*, ran through a smart suit, waistcoat, tie and button before coming to the punch-line. The *Laird of Cockpen* (Katy) wore wig, gold ring, sword, blue coat and waistcoat to go courting; Sam praised satins and silks but preferred *The Maid in the Calico Dress* and *Eli the barrow boy* (Gerda) wanted to dress his love in 'a fine robe of gold and silver' while he himself dressed in corduroy.

And let us not forget the underpinnings, so ably represented in Phil's *Big Knicker Blues*!

We next meet on **Tuesday, 21st June at 8pm in The Howard Arms** with the theme of 'water'. **ALL WELCOME!**

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An excellent turn-out did credit to the theme of ‘water’ when we met on 21st June in the Howard Arms. Welcome back to Eileen, Maddy and Sally Hardaker, whom we see all too seldom.

Our instrumentalists for the evening were Eileen on concertina, Sally Hardaker on flute and whistle, and Adrian on melodeon. Eileen showed the right (devious?) creative spirit when she played *Lord Inchiquin* ‘because there is a Lough Inchiquin’! The ‘body of water’ motif was a fruitful one: Eileen also played *Ye Banks and Braes O’ Bonny Doon* and took us *Over the sea to Skye*, while Adrian gave us *The Banks of the Dee*. Sally’s whistle took us sailing on *The Aran Boat* and her flute soothed us with *Midnight on the Water*.

This being folk music, we had of course our share of disasters and tragedies. Sally Jones set the scene with the *Ellan Vannin*, shipwrecked in 1909 in the Irish Sea, followed by Gary with the *Yarmouth Castle* (burned and sank in 1965 off the Bahamas) and the *Edmund Fitzgerald* (sank in Lake Superior in 1975). Gerda, on the other hand, did manage to find a grimly humorous side to maritime disaster in *Sinking Soon!* The protagonist of Chris Jones’ *Man of War* longed to be a farmer again, and the bride in Maddy’s *All Things Are Quite Silent* grieved for her husband snatched by the press-gang. The song simply entitled *Water* (Katy) by Dutch songwriter Jan van de Velde, commemorated the 1800 people who died in Zeeland in the 1953 flood. Christine and Mary both raised the subject of pollution, Christine in the moving (and true) *Black Waters*, Mary more light-heartedly in the parody *Bo’ness Bay*.

But not all was gloom! Sam praised simple country living in his ever-so-slightly tongue-in-cheek *Give me clean water*. Adrian demonstrated the resilience of the British tar in the music-hall number *Married to a Mermaid*. Phil described technology as it relates to the beauties of upland nature, firstly in *Settle to Carlisle* (which worked in steam, rain and icicles), and then in the wistful *The Lark Across the Vapour Trail* (water in the form of vapour). Ruth cheered us up with the prospect of only having *One More River* (and that’s the river of Jordan) to cross. And water is also the occasion of enjoyment and fun: Gerda celebrated the *Fermoy Regatta*; Sam made us laugh with the apocryphal story of *The Silloth Submarine*; *The Minstrel* (Christine) was about a boat that was the singer’s first and only love.

But the last word was with Chris, who took us firmly *Marching Inland*, as far away from the sea as we could get!

We next meet on **19th July, in The Howard Arms, Brampton, at 8pm**. The theme will be ‘relatives’ – so brush up those songs about your Grandfather’s Clock, Granny’s Hieland Hame and the ballads about wicked uncles and jealous sisters. ALL WELCOME!