

Contents

English Folk Song: An Informal History by Jon Boden 06

JANUARY

1 Jan	In the Month of January	17
2 Jan	The Snow it Melts the Soonest.....	18
3 Jan	Daddy Fox.....	19
4 Jan	Apple Tree Wassail	20
5 Jan	The Rain it Rains.....	22
6 Jan	Drink Old England Dry	23
7 Jan	Captain Ward	24
8 Jan	Reynardine	25
9 Jan	The January Man	26
10 Jan	Peggy Gordon	28
11 Jan	The Seasons Round	29
12 Jan	Off to Epsom Races	30
13 Jan	Low Down in the Broom.....	31
14 Jan	Peggy Bann	32
15 Jan	Clock-o'-Clay	33
16 Jan	Let the Bulgine Run	34
17 Jan	Rap Her to Bank	35
18 Jan	Lowlands	36
19 Jan	Gosport Nancy	37
20 Jan	Horn of the Hunter	38
21 Jan	I Drew My Ship into the Harbour	40
22 Jan	All Jolly Fellows That Follow the Plough	41
23 Jan	Goodnight Irene.....	42
24 Jan	Three Drunken Maidens	43
25 Jan	Ca' the Ewes	44
26 Jan	Waltzing Matilda	45
27 Jan	My Son John	46
28 Jan	Gaol Song.....	47
29 Jan	Annachie Gordon.....	48
30 Jan	I'll Take You Home Again Kathleen	49
31 Jan	The Innocent Hare	50

FEBRUARY

1 Feb	Sheffield Apprentice.....	53
2 Feb	Bungay Roger	54
3 Feb	The Drowned Lovers	55
4 Feb	The Grey Funnel Line	56
5 Feb	Cold Blow and the Rainy Night	57
6 Feb	Sheep-crook & Black Dog.....	58
7 Feb	The Bonny Earl of Moray	59
8 Feb	King Henry Was King James' Son	60
9 Feb	Pancakes Hot.....	61
10 Feb	Rolling Down to Rio	62
11 Feb	Over the Hills and Far Away.....	63
12 Feb	I Am a Youth That's Inclined to Ramble	64

13 Feb	Butter & Cheese & All.....	66
14 Feb	Cupid's Garden.....	67
15 Feb	Young Banker	68
16 Feb	Donkey Riding.....	69
17 Feb	Tyne of Harrow	70
18 Feb	Bring Us a Barrel	71
19 Feb	Bird in the Bush	72
20 Feb	The Wellerman	73
21 Feb	The German Musicianer	74
22 Feb	Sorry the Day I was Married.....	75
23 Feb	Salisbury Plain	76
24 Feb	The Ballad of Charlie David	77
25 Feb	The Maid and the Palmer.....	78
26 Feb	Sir Patrick Spens	80
27 Feb	Captain Wedderburn.....	82
28 Feb	High Barbaree.....	83
29 Feb	Golden Glove.....	84

MARCH

1 Mar	Swansea Barracks.....	87
2 Mar	Willie's Lady	88
3 Mar	The Lakes of Pontchartrain.....	90
4 Mar	Rosin the Beau	91
5 Mar	Worcester City.....	92
6 Mar	Catch Me If You Can	93
7 Mar	Sweet Mossom	94
8 Mar	Banks of the Nile.....	95
9 Mar	Corduroy	96
10 Mar	The Weaver's Daughter.....	97
11 Mar	Plains of Mexico.....	98
12 Mar	Farewell My Lovely Nancy	99
13 Mar	One More Day	100
14 Mar	Dalesman's Litany	101
15 Mar	Cowboy's Getting Up Holler.....	102
16 Mar	Derry Gaol	103
17 Mar	The Green Fields of Canada	104
18 Mar	All Around My Hat	106
19 Mar	Turkey Rhubarb.....	107
20 Mar	When Spring Comes In	108
21 Mar	London Town	109
22 Mar	Kemp Owen	110
23 Mar	Doleful Dance of Death	112
24 Mar	Sally Free and Easy.....	113
25 Mar	Good Ale	114
26 Mar	Old Brown's Daughter	115
27 Mar	Ye Mariners All	116
28 Mar	Across the Line.....	117
29 Mar	Maid on the Shore	118
30 Mar	Juniper, Gentle and Rosemary.....	119
31 Mar	Lemady.....	120

APRIL

1 Apr	On One April Morning.....	122
2 Apr	When First I Came to Caledonia.....	123
3 Apr	There Once Was a Lover	124
4 Apr	The Sun is Setting	125
5 Apr	Banks of the Tees	126
6 Apr	Young Simon John.....	128
7 Apr	Adieu, Adieu.....	129
8 Apr	Hanging Johnny.....	130
9 Apr	Copshawholme Fair	131
10 Apr	Lord Bateman.....	132
11 Apr	Fortune Turns the Wheel	133
12 Apr	The Gardener	134
13 Apr	Seven Bonnie Gypsies.....	135
14 Apr	The Cuckoo	137
15 Apr	My Sailor Love	138
16 Apr	Mortal Cares	140
17 Apr	Sam Hall	141
18 Apr	The Week Before Easter	142
19 Apr	A Miner's Life	143
20 Apr	Maid in Bedlam	144
21 Apr	The Recruited Collier	145
22 Apr	Early One Morning.....	146
23 Apr	Stately Southerner	147
24 Apr	Pace-Egging.....	148
25 Apr	Katy Cruel.....	149
26 Apr	I Know My Love by His Way of Talking.....	150
27 Apr	Geordie	151
28 Apr	Bluey Brink	152
29 Apr	Auld Triangle.....	153
30 Apr	The Gentleman Soldier	154

MAY

1 May	Padstow May Song.....	156
2 May	Outlandish Knight	158
3 May	May Song.....	160
4 May	The Verdant Braes of Skreen	161
5 May	Broomfield Hill	162
6 May	One May Morning Early	164
7 May	Death and the Lady	165
8 May	Hal-an-Tow	166
9 May	Down on the Moor	167
10 May	As I Roved Out	168
11 May	Searching for Lambs	169
12 May	My Husband's Got No Courage in Him.....	170
13 May	Barbara Allen	171
14 May	When I Was on Horseback	172
15 May	P Stands for Paddy, I Suppose	173
16 May	Charming Molly	174
17 May	Gathering Rushes	175

18 May	Bold Fisherman	176
19 May	Lily Bulero.....	177
20 May	Fakenham Fair.....	178
21 May	Lovely Joan	179
22 May	House Carpenter.....	180
23 May	Claudy Banks	181
24 May	Little Sally Racket.....	182
25 May	Rout of the Blues.....	183
26 May	Banks of the Ohio.....	184
27 May	Birds Upon the Tree	185
28 May	Wild Rover	186
29 May	Babylon.....	187
30 May	Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard	188
31 May	John Ball.....	190

JUNE

1 Jun	Just as the Tide Was Flowing.....	193
2 Jun	The Beggar Laddie	194
3 Jun	Noah's Ark Shanty.....	195
4 Jun	Streams of Lovely Nancy	196
5 Jun	Let Union Be	197
6 Jun	After the Ball.....	198
7 Jun	Garden Hymn	199
8 Jun	Poverty Knock.....	200
9 Jun	The Birth of Robin Hood.....	202
10 Jun	Rosemary Lane.....	203
11 Jun	The Ghost Song.....	204
12 Jun	Wild Mountain Thyme.....	205
13 Jun	Down by the Salley Gardens	206
14 Jun	Rag Fair.....	207
15 Jun	The Rose of Allendale	208
16 Jun	Farmer's Boy	209
17 Jun	Grand Conversation on Napoleon	210
18 Jun	The Eighteenth Day of June.....	212
19 Jun	Roll Alabama Roll	213
20 Jun	Bold Archer	214
21 Jun	The Larks They Sang Melodious	215
22 Jun	Banks of the Sweet Primroses	216
23 Jun	Oak and Ash and Thorn.....	217
24 Jun	Midsummer Carol.....	218
25 Jun	The Way Through the Woods	219
26 Jun	One Night as I Lay on My Bed	220
27 Jun	Young Roger Esquire.....	221
28 Jun	Botany Bay.....	222
29 Jun	White Cockade	223
30 Jun	Hind Horn	224



English Folk Song: *An Informal History*

What is a folk song?

This book is a direct product of and a conscious attempt to represent the *English folk revival*, a process that began in the late nineteenth century with the early folk song collectors, died away during the two world wars, then came back with a vengeance in the *second revival* of 1960s. Like everyone who has got into folk music since the 1960s I would be termed a *folk revivalist*, therefore, when I talk about folk song in this book I am using it in a way that other revivalists would understand. Even within this narrow grouping there is still a wide variety of interpretations but, in essence, the core definition comes down to this: if you were to find yourself in a rural village in 1900¹ and were to ask the oldest residents if they could remember any songs they learnt from their grandparents, the songs they would then sing you would be, by definition, *English folk songs*.

It wouldn't really be enough to ask them what songs they were singing in general, or indeed to go further back in time and ask their grandparents directly what songs they were singing, because they might have learnt them that very day from a ballad seller or from a professional performer. The fact that the songs have been transmitted orally, from one singer to another, is as key to them being thought of as folk songs as is their antiquity. There's no official ruling on how many stages of oral transmission a song needs to go through before it becomes a folk song, but 'I learnt this from my grandmother' will generally get it over the line.

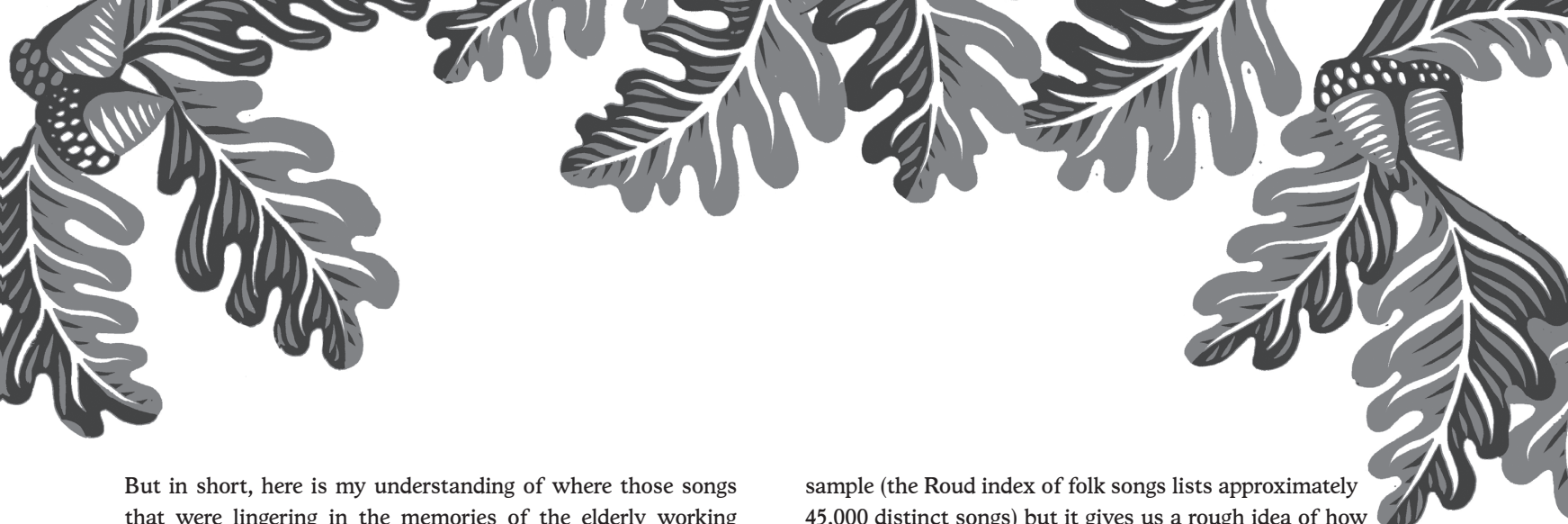
Well, that's the starting point anyway. That's essentially what the 'Edwardian collectors' (Cecil Sharp, Ann Gilchrist, Ralph Vaughan Williams et al) thought English folk song was. Since then the definition has expanded within folk-revival circles, with urban industrial song, ditties from music-hall performers, plus a whole new genre of twentieth century 'in-the-tradition' songwriting being brought inside the tent, depending of course on who you talk to. Nevertheless, if you were to ask a folk revivalist for an example of an archetypal English folk song, it would probably be the kind of song that an elderly rural worker in 1900 would remember their grandparents singing.

How old are folk songs?

The advantage of viewing it in these terms is it sidesteps the two big questions: 1) how old is English folk song? and 2) where did it come from? We don't need to know the answers because the definition is about outcome and process, not origin. If a rural farm worker in 1900 could remember a song their grandparents sang, that is an English folk song and that's that. Phew.

However, they are both fascinating questions so I'm going to make a quick attempt to answer them. If you are really interested to find out more the best way to do it is to read *Folk Song In England* by Steve Roud and Julia Bishop. It's a fantastic history of folk music from the sixteenth century up to the First World War. In my opinion you will not find a better, more factual, more balanced appraisal of the subject anywhere else.

¹ This definition could just as well apply to a farm worker in 1850 or 1800, but as folk song collecting didn't really take off till the late nineteenth century, it is this Victorian/Edwardian folk repertoire that is now thought of as archetypal English folk song.



But in short, here is my understanding of where those songs that were lingering in the memories of the elderly working classes in 1900 came from.

People have been singing songs since the earliest days of human existence, indeed there is evidence that singing evolved alongside complex language. In the caves of Ariège and Dordogne in the south of France, prehistoric wall drawings are found in an area that is most acoustically favourable, even though it is less hospitable in other more practical respects. This suggests that our Palaeolithic ancestors may well have prioritised the experience of communal singing above their own physical comfort.

In one sense then we *could* say that ‘folk song’ has been around for at least twenty thousand years. However, that is not the terminology for ‘folk song’ that we are using in this book. If we return to the rural worker in 1900 singing songs learnt from his or her grandparents, we could more usefully ask the question ‘How old were *those* songs?’ Or, to put it another way, ‘What is the earliest point in history at which songs were composed that would survive in the collective memory of the nation until 1900?’

There are a small number of such songs that we can trace back to the sixteenth century. ‘Froggy Went A Courting’, ‘When Jones’s Ale was New’ and ‘John Barleycorn’ (p.293) are the three you would be most likely to still hear in the fields, pubs and parlours of England in 1900.

That doesn’t mean there weren’t many more songs being sung by *the folk* in the 1500s, but most of those songs did not survive to find themselves retained in the memory of our archetypal rural labourer in 1900. Music evolves, fashions change, and only a small proportion of popular songs from one particular era remains relevant and useful in a later era.

Folk song scholar Steve Gardham has compiled a list of folk songs with the date of their earliest recorded versions. Of the 700 folk songs he’s researched, approximately 1% can be traced back to the sixteenth century, 10% to the seventeenth, 30% to the eighteenth, 50% to the nineteenth and 3% cannot be traced back any earlier than the twentieth century. This is only a small

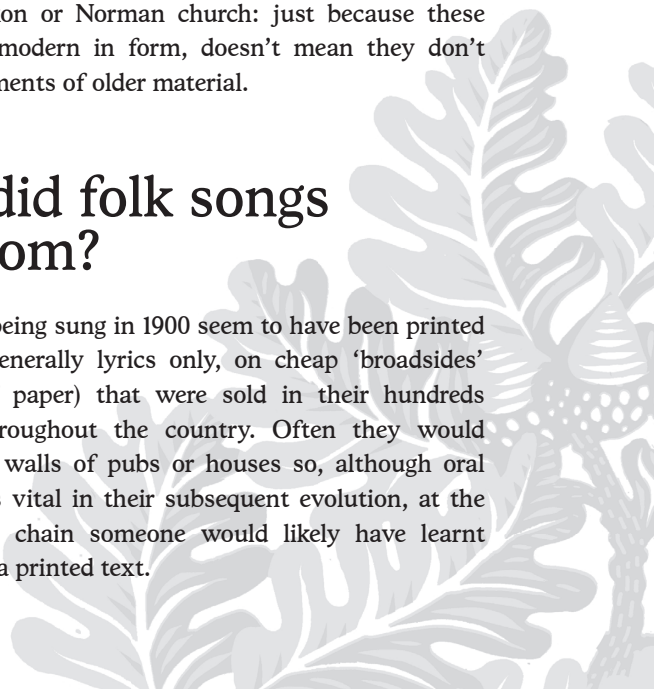
sample (the Roud index of folk songs lists approximately 45,000 distinct songs) but it gives us a rough idea of how old most of the folk songs being sung in 1900 were.

There is a possibility that more of the English folk songs sung in 1900 *might* have had sixteenth-century origins or even earlier, but that those early origins have not been documented. Ultimately the only evidence we have is the surviving paper record, and the paper record suggests that the lyrical and melodic origins of the folk songs sung in 1900 were no older than 400 years old, and most of them were no more than 150 years old.

There is one caveat: although speculation on the possible prehistory of lyrics and melody is generally fruitless, we can, I think, reasonably hypothesise that some of the stories and images contained *within* the folk songs being sung in 1900 had deep roots back into English history. We know, for example, that the plot of the eighteenth-century ballad ‘Hind Horn’ (p.224), derives from the plot of the thirteenth-century romance *King Horn*. Even more tantalisingly, the idea of the cockerel as harbinger of the opening of the world of the dead (as referred to in passing in ‘The Wife Of Usher’s Well’, first collected in 1802) is also present in the tenth-century Old Norse poem *Völuspá*. It’s a bit like those eighteenth- and nineteenth-century churches you come across that include stone from an earlier Anglo-Saxon or Norman church: just because these songs are fairly modern in form, doesn’t mean they don’t contain tiny fragments of older material.

Where did folk songs come from?

Most folk songs being sung in 1900 seem to have been printed at some point, generally lyrics only, on cheap ‘broadside’ (single sheets of paper) that were sold in their hundreds of thousands throughout the country. Often they would be pasted up on walls of pubs or houses so, although oral transmission was vital in their subsequent evolution, at the beginning of the chain someone would likely have learnt them direct from a printed text.



In the Month of January

From the singing of Sarah Makem of Ulster, recorded in 1955. Closely related to 'The Fatal Snowstorm', versions of which appear in print in England from the early 1800s. In 1908 George Gardiner collected a version from William Garratt of Petersfield, Hampshire. In these earlier versions mother and daughter perish in the snow.

Freely Words and Music Traditional Irish / English

It was in the month of Jan - u - a - ry, the hills all cov - ered with snow,

It was o - ver hills and val - leys my true love he did go,

It was there I be - held a pret - ty fair maid with a salt tear in her eye,

She had a ba - by in her arms and bit - ter - ly she did cry.

1. It was in the month of January, the hills all covered with snow
 It was over hills and valleys my true love he did go
 It was then I beheld a pretty fair maid with a salt tear in her eye
 She had a baby in her arms and bitterly she did cry

2. Oh cruel was my father that he barred the door to me
 And cruel was my mother, that dreadful crime to see
 Cruel was my own true love that he changed his mind for gold
 And cruel was that winter's night that pierced my heart with cold

3. For the taller that the palm tree grows, the sweeter is the bark
 And the fairer that a young man speaks, oh the falser is his heart
 For he'll kiss you and embrace you till he thinks he has you won
 Then he'll go away and leave you all for some other one

4. So come all you pretty fair young maids and a warning take by me
 Never try and build your nest at the top of a high tree
 For the green leaves they will wither and the branches all decay
 And the beauty of a fine young man it soon will fade away