

FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

The snow had largely melted when we met on 19th January in The Railway Inn, so most of our regulars (some of whom had been snowed in a week earlier) managed to attend. We lacked some of our regular instrumentalists, but were greatly honoured by a visit from Maddy Prior. Our theme was 'Rogues and Vagabonds', which proved an entertainingly broad field.

Pedlars, beggars, tramps, gypsies and travellers of all kinds come under the umbrella heading of 'vagabonds'. Some songs treated the travelling life with gaiety, such as Maddy's The Jovial Beggar and Anne's The Wild Rover. Some were elegiac, as in Ewan MacColl's Freeborn Man (Mary) or indeed the traditional [Tramps and Hawkers](#) (Phil). Sometimes 'vagabond' spills over into 'rogue': Phil's [Jolly Beggar](#) (a variant on The Gaberlunzie Man - there, I had to get that in, as a Scot!) is also a seducer, the jolly swagman in Waltzing Matilda, sung by Alison, is a sheep stealer as well as a wanderer. The eponymous antihero of The Merchant's Son takes up with a beggar and ends up departing the scene ignominiously in her old dress, as she has relieved him of his possessions while he slept.

The theme of roguery was still wider. We had songs about straightforward and obvious rogues: pirates (Hoist the colours – Miriam), a murderer (The Butcher Boy – Steve), highwaymen (Brennan on the Moor – Frank), reivers (Lock the Door, Lariston – Katy), an arsonist ([Frank \(sic\) McGuire](#) 'who loved to play with fire' – Phil), and various shades of fraud and deception (The Talking Dog – Ruth, and Three Jolly Rogues of Lynn – Frank).

However, roguery does not always come in such obvious (and illegal) forms. So we heard songs about callous betrayal and desertion, such as A Blacksmith Courted Me and False-Hearted Lover (both by Maddy). Or attempts on young women's honour, foiled by quick thinking, as in The Maid on the Shore (Miriam) and Bonny Shepherd Lad (Steve). Or oppression and revolt, expressed in The Blackleg Miner (Maddy) and The Fields of Athenry (Frank). And one could argue for ages about who was the rogue, and why, in Boney was a Warrior (Alison) or A Frog he would a-wooing go (Ruth).

We next meet in The Railway Inn, Low Row on Tuesday 16th February from 8.30pm onwards. Theme: anything that mentions animals, so dig out those songs about shearing and hunting – or at a pinch fishing! ALL WELCOME! January

FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

We had an excellent turn-out for our folk session in The Railway Inn on 16th February. We also had a wider range of instrumental music than usual. Anne, Phil and Alison always bring their guitars and Frank his hand-drum, but on Tuesday we had an additional guitar in Les from Alston, plus fiddle, flute and recorder (all played by Di from Alston) and saxophone (played by Charlotte from Barrow).

Frank had proposed the theme of 'animals'. The folk tradition has produced a lot of wonderful songs about farming, hunting and fishing, so we had several along those lines: for fishing we heard *Fiddler's Green* (Anne) and *Greenland Whale Fisheries* (Phil). For hunting, Les and Di sang *Dido, Fido* (a parody of *The Noble Fox-hunting*), Steve sang the border ballad *Johnnie o'Braidislee* about an outlaw and deer-stealer and Miriam sang *The Black Fox*, in which the tables are turned on the huntsmen. Farm animals featured in Tom's *I bought me a cat*, Alison's *Paddy McGinty's Goat*, Frank's *Susannah's a Funicle Man* (about pigs). Anne slipped in *Valentine* on the grounds that the heroine was a farmer's daughter 'and farmers keep animals'! Steve even managed to find a song that mentioned both his favourite mining theme *and pigs – Biker Hill*.

We found tunes and songs involving a much wider range of animals than these traditional themes might suggest. Charlotte played us *The Pink Panther* theme tune. Les and Di played a medley of tunes suggesting horses (*Winster Gallop, Gallopede*) and hens (*The Virgin Pullets*). Ruth recited *Albert and the Lion* and sang *The Lampton Worm*. Tom read *A Peaceable Kingdom*, a Shaker text which mentioned not only toads and tigers but basilisks, pollywogs, and katydids. We also heard about *Waltzing with bears* (Phil); *The Gnu* (Frank); *The Crow on the Cradle* (Mary); *Hound Dog Blues* (Charlotte again on her saxophone); *The Great Selkie [seal] of Sule Skerrie* (Katy).

We meet again on **Tuesday, 16th March in The Railway Inn, Low Row, from 8.30pm** onwards. The theme (suggested by Anne – gee, thanks, Anne!) will be 'Ancient Monuments' e.g. castles, standing stones, ancient cities, monasteries. Be creative! Be devious! **ALL WELCOME!**

FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

The Low Row folk session met on 16th March in the Railway Inn. Numbers were down compared with last month, but we had the great pleasure of welcoming back Georgia after a long absence. In addition to Georgia's concertina, we had Frank's hand-drum, Phil and Anne's guitars, Anne's mandolin and Miriam's flute.

Anne had set us the tricky theme of 'ancient monuments', and it is not surprising that we came up with a mixture of material even more eclectic than usual. To give an idea of just *how* eclectic, Mary kicked off with *Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall!* (The wall may have been ancient...) Anne, of course, had prepared songs that were very appropriate, *Long Meg and her Daughters* and *The Druid's Ring*. Phil too found a song about stone circles, *The Power of the Stones*, an irreverent take on New Age capers in Orkney.

We ranged far and wide to find references to other monuments: Ruth and Mary both thought of the Tower of London, singing *With her head tucked underneath her arm* (Ruth) and reciting *Albert and the Headsman* (Mary). Georgia played *Old Mother Oxford* on the grounds that Oxford is full of ancient monuments, and sang *In Good King Arthur's Day*, because there is a monument to King Arthur in Penrith. Frank managed to squeeze Hadrian's Wall, Carlisle Castle, and Carlisle Cathedral out of one song (*Visions of Cumbria*). We found references to castles and palaces (*Lord Derwentwater's Farewell - Phil*; *Men of Harlech -Frank*); to a pele tower (*The Border Widow's Lament - Miriam*); to Lanercost Priory (Anne); to city walls (*Joshua fought the battle of Jericho - Frank*) and to whole cities such as London, Edinburgh and Anuradhapura (in Sri Lanka: *Ode to a Sacred City- Katy*). Miriam played *Drink to me only with thine eyes* and sang *O Mistress Mine* because Ben Jonson and Shakespeare were 'monuments of English literature'!

Our April theme is 'any song that refers to a person's name' (for example, *Molly Malone* and *Jock o'Hazledean*). We meet on **Tuesday, 20th April in The Railway Inn, Low Row from 8.30pm onwards.**
ALL WELCOME!

FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

We were honoured by visitors from all over the north when we met for our folk session in The Railway Inn on 20th April. Jiva (the musical duo, Jimmy and Val) came all the way from Blyth, Les and Di from Alston, and Maddy Prior herself lent us her countenance. It was, overall, very well-attended, with a fine array of musicianship. Jiva brought 6- and 12-string guitars on which they play with subtlety and harmony, Les and Di brought, between them, guitar, fiddle, flute, recorder and bodhran, Anne and Phil played guitar and Frank his hand-drum.

The theme was 'any song that mentions a person's name', which gave us wide scope. A lot of traditional songs are known by the protagonist's name, so we heard the crossed-in-love stories of *Johnny Todd* (Mary; [Peggy Gordon](#) (Phil); *Cushie Butterfield* (Ruth) and *Barbara Allen* (Frank). Maddy gave us *Spencer the Rover*; *Miriam My son John*; *Frank Michael Finnegan*. Les and Di found tunes with names in the title – *Sir Sidney Smith's March*, a set of polkas, *Dennis Murphy* and *John Ryan*, and an exquisite instrumental rendering of *Annie Laurie*. Mary got us all singing *Frere Jacques* as a four-part round. Judith recited a poem, *Goliath of Gath*. Jiva sang contemporary songs, generally very sad, such as *Jimmy's Song*, about a man who came back from Vietnam addicted to drugs, and *Tommy*, a vivid depiction of the tragic life and death of a man with mental health problems.

Some of the songs worked in the name in the course of the lyrics – thus Steve sang *The Bonny Lass o' Fyvie* (Peggy) and *The Recruited Collier* (Jimmy); David played and sang *I feel so near* (Finn and John); Katy sang *The Capstan Bar* (the sailors' paramours Kate and Poll). Anne sang *Bluebells* (about Lady Jane Gray's short life) and *Stanton Drew* (about Will and Sue whose wedding guests prolonged their dancing into Sunday and were turned into a stone circle). [Phil's entertainingly satirical Socialist ABC](#) managed to mention Marx, Trotsky, Feuerbach, Lenin, Kier Hardie and Enid Blyton! Jiva sang *Love at the Five and Dime* (follows the marriage of Sue and Eddy).

We next meet on **Tuesday, 18th May at 8.30pm in The Railway Inn, Low Row**. Anne has suggested a theme of 'anything connected with dancing' (you do like to make it difficult, don't you, Anne?). E.g. polkas, jigs and reel tunes; anything with hopping and skipping; songs like *Dancing at Whitsun* and *Waltzing Matilda*. ALL WELCOME!

FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

On 18th May the folk session met in the Railway Inn with the theme of ‘dancing’. We greatly enjoyed the company of a number of visitors who contributed to the evening – Linda playing bouzouki, Alan from Cartmell on guitar, Terry and Sue from Tees-side singing harmony and Graham from Lockerbie playing percussion on the bones. We were also very pleased to welcome Maddy Prior again.

I thought that ‘dance’ was a tricky theme, but we managed to find a lot of songs where it features prominently. Anne sang the gentle and melancholy *Dancing at Whitsun*. We heard *Tomorrow shall be my Dancing Day* from Maddy, which Ruth and Mary followed with *Lord of the Dance*. Phil sang, by special request, the exuberant *Waltzing with Bears*. Frank gave us *The Lewis Bridal Song* (*Step we gaily*) and Miriam and Katy sang that satire on wifely affection, *One more Dance*.

Some of the references to dance appeared in the course of the song – so the hero of *Sally Wheatley* (Anne) sees his beloved ‘hopping about’ in a threesome reel; *Now is the Month of Maying* and *Come, Lasses and Lads* (both Alison) involve dancing and Maypoles; *Stately as a Galleon* (Ruth) is of course the very entertaining Joyce Grenfell song lamenting the shortage of gentlemen as dancing partners at old-time dancing. And as for *Dilys the Dachshund* (Mary), well, it managed to involve a dachshund in the snow and a career in ballet dancing! Alan sang a version of the *Wild Goose Shanty* because the shanty connected it with sailors, therefore hornpipes; *Yellow Handkerchief* (Maddy) was included because it involved flash company, therefore dancing.

Not all the songs stuck to the theme (we rarely do!). Linda, who said frankly that she sings tragic songs, played and sang *Flandyke Shore* and *Helen of Kirkconnel*, both about love and early death. From Terry and Sue we heard *Jones’s Ale* and *Pass around the Grog*. Alan contributed an Australian song, *Salisbury Street*.

This was Anne’s last appearance, as her work takes her down south from now on. Good-bye Anne, and thank you for the music and laughter we have enjoyed with you in the last year.

Our next session meets on **Tuesday 15th June from 8.30pm onwards in The Railway Inn, Low Row**. Theme: anything connected with summer. **ALL WELCOME!**

FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

We met at The Railway Inn on 20th July with an 'open' theme: people played and sang what they chose. We were very pleased to see Steve and Alison, who have been absent for a few sessions, and to welcome Maddy Prior again.

The atmosphere was particularly relaxed and uninhibited, which perhaps contributed to the fine harmony and chorus singing that evening. Frank and Miriam got us all joining in such old favourites as *Molly Malone*, *John Peel* and *The Quartermaster's Stores*. Phil had us all harmonizing to *Sammy's Bar*, while Alison did the same with *Courting too Slow* and Miriam with *Hallelujah* – all sad songs of lost love, with beautiful melodies. Steve sang *The Manchester Rambler*, by popular request, and *Bonny Glenshee* – excellent chorus songs. Katy worked in *Kismul's Galley*.

On the other hand, there was a good deal of exuberant silliness. Ruth had us all making train noises as the chorus to her song, *Riding down from Bangor*. Mary gave us *The Lambeth Walk*. Alison persuaded us all to do a Girl Guide round involving thigh-slapping, hand clapping and singing what sounded like 'Fee Fi Fo'. Phil was in hilarious form with *It went all right at home* (a song cataloguing excuses for singing badly).

Some of us were in poetic mood: Maddy read us *Walking* – which is about the inconveniences of advancing age – and *Ho Hum* (about stage fright). Mary recited the tale of *Herbert the Hedgehog*, while Ruth, appropriately enough in view of the weather, read *Three ha'pence a foot* – a humorous look at Noah's ark.

The next folk session meets in **The Railway Inn, Low Row, on 17th August from 8.30pm** onwards. The theme will be 'water'. **ALL WELCOME**

FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

We were very pleased to welcome several visitors to the folk session in The Railway Inn on 17th August. Thanks go in particular to Stuart, John and Ed, who contributed (respectively) with voice, viola and concertina and 'cello.

The theme was 'water'. Some of the songs and tunes had titles that were obviously 'wet'. Thus, *The Song of Artesian Waters* from Phil; *The Loch Tay Boat Song* from John, accompanying himself on concertina; *The Water is wide* from Frank; *Sweet Thames flow softly* from Mary; *I will put my Ship in order* from Alison. On the instrumental side, Ed gave us *My Bonny lies over the Ocean* and a hornpipe (in which all the other instrumentalists joined enthusiastically), and John played *The Green Banks of Yarrow* on viola.

Other songs worked in 'water' in less obvious ways: Stuart sang *The Working Chap* because the opening verse mentions Nelson, and *The Maginot Waltz* because the action takes place in Brighton and Brighton is by the sea! Miriam and Lizzy sang a grim environmental number, *Woke up this Morning*, about rising sea levels due to global warming. Mary's song, *All my Trials*, invoked the image of the River Jordan.

Not surprisingly, several of the songs were tragic: *Phil's Annan Water* and Miriam's *Martha went down to the Well* spoke of tragic love; Katy's *Threescore and Ten* recalled a shipping disaster on the Lincolnshire coast; Ruth's *The Mermaid* told of shipwreck. On the other hand, the theme was treated humorously in the poem *Daddy fell into the pond* (Ruth); *The Hippopotamus Song* (Frank) and *Jack Tar* (Alison).

Our next session meets in **The Railway Inn, Low Row** on **Tuesday, 21st September from 8.30pm onwards**. The theme will be 'earth' (which falls at the right time for harvest, but could also be developed in other directions, eg environment). **ALL WELCOME!**

FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

After a summer of welcoming visitors and enjoying their musical contributions, our numbers were down when we met on 21st September. However, we were very pleased to welcome Maddy Prior back to the session, and between us, we managed to sing and play for two hours, covering laughter and sorrow and harmony and history.

The theme this month was 'earth' – we are working our way through the four elements: water; earth; air; fire. Frank had done some serious research and managed to come up with two songs about geology, *The Geologist's Song* and *Geology Rocks!* Other ways of developing the theme included, not surprisingly, working the land/farming/harvest. [Phil gave us *The Seasons*](#) and the terribly poignant [Home, lads, home](#); Alison sang *Oats and Beans and Barley Grow*; Ruth recited *Pulling out weeds* and Maddy celebrated sheepshearing in *Rosebud in June*. We also heard about *The Mower*; met in *The Garden where the Praties Grow*; went *Prancing with Ewes* and followed the *Plooman Laddie*.

Alison and Miriam identified a more sombre connotation of earth, in *Clerk Saunders* and *The Border Widow's Lament* respectively, both dealing with murder, bereavement and laying the 'deid corpse in the clay'. Whereas Katy lowered the tone with *The Cuckold's Cap*, a song which was 'earthy' in another sense!

But of course the possibilities spun out much more widely. Frank sang *The last thing on my mind* because the lesson was 'made of sand'. Miriam sang *Katie* because the heroine travelled round the earth. Maddy teased us with *Immoral, Impossible* – a parody of the well-known hymn (the connection was church=harvest festival=earth). We touched on environmentalism, on refugees, on London buses and on bricklaying!

We next meet on **Tuesday 19th October** in **The Railway Inn, Low Row** from **8.30pm onwards**. The theme (continuing through the elements) will be 'air'. A tricky one. Songs about the wind, perhaps, or about wind instruments? Bagpipes? Flutes? Hairdryers? Be creative! Be devious! **ALL WELCOME**

FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

The Low Row folk session met on 16th November in The Railway Inn, with the theme of 'fire'. We were delighted to see Jimmy and Val (who sing together as Jiva), all the way from Blyth in Northumberland. They brought not only their 6- and 12-string guitars, on which they weave gentle and delicate harmonies, but tenor ukuleles, their new instruments.

Our numbers were down compared with last month, so many thanks to those who came and dug deep in their musical repertoires. The theme of fire lent itself to development in all sorts of directions. Looking over my notes, I am struck by how many songs were about the destructive power of fire: some in very stark, tragic ways, as with Frank's Land of the Pennine God (about the Settle-Carlisle rail disaster in 1910) and Jiva's Tommy, others treating the subject as black comedy - Steve's The Old Orange Flute and Mary's Ee bah goom but it's cold. [Phil really went to town with Little Tim McGuire](#) (who loved to play with fire); [When the Old Dun Cow Caught Fire](#) (a pub, not an animal – relax, all animal rights activists!) and [The Pawn-Shop's Blazing](#). Ruth proved that catastrophe can still make a good singalong song when she got us all joining in London's Burning and Fire Down Below. Only one song could be said to be unequivocally about the beneficent aspect of fire – The Peat-fire Flame.

Lots of the songs mentioned fire in passing: Durham County (Jiva); The Pub with no Beer (Frank); Dirty Old Town (Mary); Ghost Riders (Frank) or metaphorically: Oh Thou, Who camest from above (Ruth); When the Kye comes hame (Katy). Other songs involved mining life, or blacksmiths, or gunpowder, or tobacco, all of which have a connection with fire.

Our next month's session will be on Tuesday 21st December from 8.30pm onwards in The Railway Inn, Low Row. Our theme will be Christmas/winter – an excellent opportunity to enjoy some of the best-known and loved traditional music. ALL WELCOME!

FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

Well done to the nine stalwart singers and instrumentalists who turned out in spite of icy roads and several degrees of frost to make music at the Railway Inn on 21st December, on the theme of 'Christmas and Winter'. We were pleased to welcome back Terry and Stephanie, and hope to see them again.

We had some excellent renderings of well-known and well-loved carols, which invited joining in: Frank sang *Deck the Halls* and *The Virgin Mary had a baby boy*; Ruth sang *The Sussex Carol* ('*On Christmas Night all Christians sing*'); Miriam sang *As I sat on a sunny bank* and *O come, o come Immanuel*. Les gave us several new and haunting songs about the Nativity, such as *Mary, did you know?* and *From the squalor of a borrowed stable*. Alison, dipping deep into time, sang the early *This is the truth sent from above*, *The Cherry Tree Carol* and *Adam lay y-bounden*.

The winter/Christmas theme appeared obliquely in [Phil's Farewell Regality](#) and [The Road to Dundee](#) and in Terry's *Arthur MacBride*. It appeared still more obliquely in Phil's entertaining parody [The Hard Cheese of Old England](#) ('because people eat a lot of cheese at Christmas'). Stephanie treated us to a charming version of *Cornflower Blue*, while Terry gave us the pleasure of hearing old favourites such as *The Lakes of Ponchartrain* and *The Rolling Hills of the Borders*.

Not all the contributions were musical: Ruth and Les read mischievously satirical poems on the non-joys of *Christmas Thankyous* and post-Christmas bills (*Not the night before Christmas*). Katy told the story of *The Standing Stones of Plouhinec*.

We next meet on Tuesday, **18th January 2011 in The Railway Inn, Low Row**, from **8.30pm onwards**. The theme is 'anything that mentions, or is connected with, colour'. **ALL WELCOME!**