

FOLK SESSION January 2016 – Howard Arms, Brampton

An excellent turnout marked the first session of the New Year on 19th January, as we tucked ourselves into the breakfast room at the Howard Arms. We also had the pleasure of an unusually large number of instrumentalists, including performers on guitar, whistle, pipes, mandola and fiddle.

The theme was 'firsts' and prompted lots of musical memories: Maddy sang us 'the first song she ever sang on stage', complete with chicken imitations and 'the first song for which she ever bought the music' (*The Man from Laramie*); Alan Clark sang 'the first song he ever liked' (*A Four-legged Friend*); Mary sang 'the first song her husband made a bootleg recording of for her' (*Black Pearl*). We also heard *Me and Bobbie McGee* (the first song Sam learned to play); the Beggar's Opera version of *Over the Hills and Far Away* (one of the first songs Eliza ever learned) and, from Terry, *Frying Tonight*, the first song he ever wrote – a dark satire on nuclear war.

On the instrumental side, Charlie on fiddle played *Cradle Song* and *Soldier's Joy*, respectively the first tune and the first reel he learned to play, 40 years ago. Ruth bravely made her public debut on recorder with *When the Saints go marching in*. Les and Di showed the proper creative spirit when they chose to play *Railway Bill* on guitar and fiddle because it was 'one of the first tunes they played that had anything to do with railways'.

Naturally, many of the items were chosen because they had the word 'first' tucked away somewhere. Terry on mandola played *When first unto this country*, Ruth read a poem about creation starting with 'First on' and Steve sang *Isle of Hope* because it begins with 'the first day of January'. 'Firsts' appeared in the lyrics of *Maggie May* (Alan Jefferson), *Farewell and Adieu to you Spanish Ladies* (Phil) and *Johnnie o' Braidislee* (Katy).

One or two of the evening's contributions were there not because of the theme but just for the pleasure of the music: Dave played *Mount, ye baggage* and *Pawkie Adam Glen* on English small pipes, and Steph and Terry sang together an exquisitely interwoven duet of *Autumn Leaves* and *Golden Leaves*.

And finally, the instrumentalists played us out on guitars, fiddles, whistle and mandola, with a medley of *My Darling Asleep*, *Out on the Ocean* and the *Kesh Jig*.

We next meet in The Howard Arms, Brampton, still in the small room downstairs, on 16th February, starting at 8.30pm. The theme will be love/marriage. ALL WELCOME!

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

Although bad weather and ill-health had reduced our numbers, we still had a thoroughly enjoyable evening when we met in The Howard Arms on 16th February to sing, play and recite on the theme of 'love and marriage'. Thank you to Frank Lee on diatonic accordion and Mike Round on guitar for providing the evening's instrumental music.

Sam started us off with his own song, *Love can bend a woman's heart*, about faithless love, which set the tone for rather a lot of the evening! Mike Round followed on the theme of heartlessness with *Greensleeves*, Mary complained of a jilting fiancée in *Rough Diamond*, Steve's heroine *Magdalen McGillivray* returns to Scotland, leaving her unfaithful husband in Canada. Maddy's *Heart like a wheel* was about the pain of love.

Frank played the great fiddle tune *Neil Gow's Lament for his Second Wife* (on accordion). Steve's *Absent Friends* was about missing a person one loves - lover, friend, sibling etc. *I know my love* (Mary) expresses all the hurt of putting up with a lover's callous behaviour for fear of losing him altogether.

Before we could all sink in gloom and despair, Frank cheered us up with *I lost my love and I care not*. Alan Jefferson recited Sir Walter Scott's stirring poem of border gallantry, *Lochinvar*. Ruth's choice of poem, *Atlas*, by U A Fanthorpe, was about 'a love called maintenance...the sensible side of love'. Katy's song, *Kissing in the dark*, ended happily with marriage, as did Mary's poem *Box supper*. And for sheer exuberant fun, what could be better than *You are my sunshine* (Maddy) and *Oh, you beautiful Doll* (Frank). To which we might add the mildly risqué *Never on a Sunday* (Ruth).

Getting into more ingenious connections, Mike played *Queen Elizabeth's Galliard* as a guitar instrumental (because Elizabeth had many suitors) and Alan sang *Dirty Old Town* (because he met his wife in Salford).

We next meet in **The Howard Arms, Brampton** on **Tuesday 15th March at 8.30pm**. The theme (as we shall still be in Lent) is 'temptation' – money, or beer, or temper, or tobacco, or....yes, well, you get the idea. Anyone know any songs about chocolate?

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

The Brampton folk session met on Tuesday, 15th March with the theme of ‘temptation’ (appropriate as we are in Lent). It was a pleasure to welcome Gary with his bluesy guitar style, visiting us from north Yorkshire, and to say ‘hello’ to Charles who dropped in with his fiddle.

Dave on small pipes and Charles on fiddle were our instrumentalists for the evening. It can be difficult to find instrumental music to fit a theme, but they showed the true creative spirit. Charles played the Shetland tune *Midnight on the water* ‘because I was in Shetland 40 years ago and I’ve never been tempted to go back’ and Dave played *Bobbing John* and Handel’s Water Music ‘because I’m tempted to play it instead of something more difficult’

Ruth got into the swing of things pretty comprehensively with *Cigareetes and whisky and wild, wild women*- three temptations in one song. Tobacco featured again in Mary’s *Just one more cigarette*, whisky in *Farewell to whisky* (Katy) and we had plenty of seduction and wild, wild people of **both** sexes in *Keep your hand on your ha’penny* (Mary); *Nutting girl* (Dave), *My resistance is low* (Ruth) and *The Raggle, Taggle Gypsies* (Eliza).

Steve sang poignantly about the deceptive lure of London and better money in *Clare to here* and *The reason I left Mullingar*. In the tragedy of *Sammy’s Bar*, Phil demonstrated the temptation of status symbols. Growing still darker, Eliza focussed on murder: motivated by jealousy in the ballad *The Cruel Sister* and by gain in *The Outlandish Knight*. Gary, commenting that his songs were about ‘people who’ve given in to temptation and are regretting it’, gave us *Hurt*, about drug addiction, and the eerie *Ballad of Cursed Anna*.

Not all was gloom and sombre warning, however: Phil warned light-heartedly about not chatting up your sister’s girlfriend (*The lass down on the quay*) and Mary -who relishes a challenge! - had found a poem about the temptations of *Chocolate cake*.

We next meet on **Tuesday 19th April at 8.30pm in The Howard Arms, Brampton, in the function room**. The theme will be ‘spring’. **All Welcome!**

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

We met in the Howard Arms on 19th April for an evening of music and song on the theme of ‘Spring’, interpreted with varying degrees of ingenuity.

Although May is the more famous month for inspiring folk song, several people found items in which April at least got a mention. Alan Jefferson led us all rousing in *The Manchester Rambler* (in which the hero loves his sweetheart ‘from April till June’); Dave sang *Copshawholme Fair* (which happened ‘in the month of April’) and in *Pitmen’s Union* (Katy) the young couple meet ‘on the fifth of April’. Not that May was neglected: Phil’s *The Nightingale* and Eliza’s *Searching for Lambs* both started with ‘as I walked out one May morning’-type scenarios, and May got a mention in Phil’s *Coshieville*.

Sam’s exuberant *Greening Up* celebrated the hearty enjoyment of springtime by animals and humans alike. Oblique references to spring popped up in *Freeborn Man* (Alan Jefferson); *Black against the snow* (Miriam) and *The glory of true love* (Sam). Mary worked her way round to the theme by devious means with *Rafferty’s motor car* (because it was ‘forty shades of green’!)

Birds and flowers proved a popular link to the theme. We heard about *The Swallow* and *The Skylark* (both Ruth), larks, thrushes and blackbirds (*All things are quite silent* – Eliza), the heron (*Follow the heron home* – Phil); *My Bonny cuckoo* (Eliza) and even owls (Mary) and ducks (Miriam). As for flowers, we had cowslips in *Where the bee sucks* (Ruth); *The Rose* (Sam) and Wordsworth’s *Daffodils* (Alan).

Thank you to Dave on small pipes for providing instrumental music: *Grind Hans Jasspod Polska*; *Never love me more* and *Fourpence ha’penny farthing*.

We next meet on **Tuesday 17th May at 8.30pm in The Howard Arms, Brampton**. No theme, for a change – come and play, sing or recite anything you like that is loosely ‘in the folk idiom’. **ALL WELCOME.**

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

We were packed and intercontinental this month at the folk session in the Howard Arms when visitors from Tasmania, New York and Calgary joined us to make music. It was also a great pleasure to see (and hear) newcomers to the session Philip Greenhalgh and Rob Brown, and to see Angus again after a long absence.

Songs and singers crossed national boundaries: Stuart from Calgary sang an old cockney music hall song, *Barrow Boy*; Bob from Tasmania sang *Derbyshire Shadow* (about the aftermath of the miners' strike) whereas Phil Harley sang the Australian *Now I'm Easy* as a compliment to our antipodean visitors.

We ranged from very traditional to very contemporary. Eliza's May Day song, *Hal and Tow*, is centuries old. Ruth's spring song, *The Swallow*, is modern. Philip Greenhalgh's *The Water is Wide* and Steve's *The Broom of the Cowdenknowes* are deep-rooted in tradition, while John from New York took us up to the 1960s with *Anyone can whistle* and Sam brought us right up to date with his new *Black and Bluegrass song*.

With such good turnout, rousing chorus songs became even more rousing, and we shook the rafters with shanties like *Rolling Down to Old Maui* (Dave) and *Liverpool Judies* (Alan Jefferson), and chorus songs such as *Heather on the Moor* (Phil Greenhalgh) and *Sammy's Bar* (Phil Harley).

Particular thanks to our instrumentalists for the evening – to Angus for *Egon's Polka* and *John Ryan's polka* on ukulele; to Rob Brown for *King of the Fairies* and *Si Bheag Si Mhor* on whistle, accompanied by Phil Greenhalgh on guitar; to Charlie for *Harvest Home* and *The Trumpet Hornpipe* on fiddle. And finally, to Dave (small pipes) and Charlie (fiddle) for playing us out with *Tune of Morfydd's Pipes*.

We next meet on **Tuesday, 21st June in The Howard Arms, Brampton at 8.30pm**. As it is midsummer's day, the theme will be 'midsummer'. **ALL WELCOME!**

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

The 21st June saw the usual gathering of folkies and friends in the upstairs room of the Howard Arms, Brampton. The theme of “summer” was grabbed with great alacrity, Terry kicking us off in a “*Sunny Afternoon*”. Naturally this theme led to some predictable songs, “*Keep on the Sunny Side of Life*” from Maddy, and Sam’s, “*The Summer of my Dreams*”. Alan Clark’s, “*Summertime*” guitar rendering was joined by the voices of Steph, Terry’s guitar, together with Philip’s fiddle. Ruth sang the soporific “*Lazy Bones*”, while Alan Jefferson, took the theme in a traditional British manner, “*It Might as well Rain until September*”. Terry’s “*Summer in the City*” had us all wiping the sweat from our brows as the sun belted down. Steve Hubball took advantage of an early slot to beat others to performing Francis McPeake’s, “*Wild Mountain Thyme*” in anticipation this would be in the repertoire of many present.

It’s unusual for the night to have two references to accidents on railway level crossings, but guess what? Mary’s “*Little Aggie*” (an elephant run over by an express train), and Alan Clark’s “*Don’t Blame the Motorman*”, proved the exception. Still on a sombre note, Phil’s “*Home Lads Home*” spoke of the longest day, despite its reflective underlying WW1 message. Philip echoed this theme in Dominic Williams’ “*Tommy’s Lot*”, accompanied on his concertina. Steve Hubball, reminding us that the anniversary of the Battle of The Somme was near, sang Keith Hancock’s, “*The Strangest of Lands*”.

Reminiscences: Terry, a wet Port Patrick Festival, where a visiting exchange student sang “*Je Veux du Soleil*”, every day. Maddy envisaged a summer holiday excursion in the Isle of White for “*Four Drunken Maidens*”; A stroll up the River Gelt reminded Ruth of “*The Cuckoo*”; Alan Jefferson remembered steam hauled summer holiday outings to Silloth through Malvina Reynolds’, “*Morningtown Ride*”; Sam about a sandy beach holiday in Cornwall (or should it be Blackpool!), in “*Poldhu Cove*”;

The evening was “*Blown Away*” in the usual raucous way, by all present.

We next meet on **Tuesday, 19th July in The Howard Arms, Brampton at 8.30pm**. The theme was agreed to be, “Comedy” and “Variety”. **Everyone WELCOME!**

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

The theme of ‘comedy and variety’ naturally made for a cheerful evening in The Howard Arms on 19th July. From the moment Maddy kicked us off with the riotous adventures of *Four drunken maidens* until Sam and Alan Clark played us out with the exhortation *Always look on the bright side*, we had few serious moments.

And how could we fail to welcome to Sam and Alan’s new musical partner, Jock MacTavish the...Welshman, as Alan assured us?... who sang *San Francisco Blues* so beguilingly.

We heard quite a lot of tall tales, from the surreal imagery of *As I was going to Banbury* (Philip Greenhalgh), through the unlikely adventures of *The Lancashire Toreador* (a George Formby song, contributed by Alan Jefferson), the unfortunate events “*When the Old Dun Cow caught fire*” (Phil Harley – and *relax*, animal lovers, it’s a *pub!*), the misadventures of the *Skyscraper Wean* (Katy) right through to the true story of *The Black and Bluegrass Band*, immortalised in song by Sam.

In this category we should probably include Alan Clark’s tune *I’m looking through the knothole in my Grandad’s wooden leg* -the title is a tall tale in itself! and the Les Barker poem *Stay, Go and Fetch* (Anne).

Norman’s *Shira Dam* made a serious point with grim humour. Philip Greenhalgh’s ballad *William Taylor* also ended with a moral – perhaps not quite so serious. And Eliza’s story of *The Barring of the Door* suggested a few morals about matrimonial harmony.

Several songs ran the gamut from risqué to ribald. Ruth’s *Riding down from Bangor* was decidedly daring in the 1890s! Sam described his encounter with a lady of the night in *Size of the Ship*, while Anne gave the woman’s perspective through *The Keyhole in the Door*, Mary warned girls to *Keep your hand on your ha’penny* and Eliza described what was certainly *not* a game of cards in *The Game of All Fours*.

We next meet on **Tuesday 16th August at 8.30pm in The Howard Arms, Brampton**. The theme will be ‘names’ – songs, tunes, poems etc that include a man’s or woman’s name. ALL WELCOME!

FOLK SESSION - Howard Arms, Brampton

As the evenings grow darker and cooler, what could be more snug than a night of music and song in The Howard Arms? We had an excellent turn-out, with a good array of instrumentalists, pitting our wits against the theme of 'trades and professions' on 20th September.

Some jobs have always been popular as musical inspiration. Ploughing and farming were well-represented – *Song of the Plough* (Les with Di on fiddle); *The Seasons* (Eliza); *Treat my Daughter Kindly* (Alan Jefferson). So were soldiers and sailors – *Soldier's Joy* (Charlie on fiddle); *The Blue Cockade* (Steve); *Old Clipper Man* (Dave); *The Weary Cutters* and *Captain Bover* (Frank Lee on accordion) – and millers – *The Miller of Dee* (Ruth).

Never let it be said that folk music is predictable, however. There was a trumpeter in *Mill o'Tifty's Annie* (Eliza); an innkeeper in *The Merry Hostess* (Katy); tailors in *Deil amang the tailors* (Charlie on fiddle); a doctor (sort of) in *Doctor Jazz* and *John Henry the steel-driving man* (both instrumentals on steel guitar by Geoff). Mary's poem *Cyril the Centipede* related the woes of a footballer who was too good at his job. Terry worked in a mention of an engineer in *Follow my tears*, then a matador and a bus conductress in *Manuel*. Phil found some unexpected trades in *Champion at Keeping them Rolling* (an HGV driver); *I'm Glad that I'm Working Down Below* (a sewerman) and *The First Man on the Moon was a Cumbrian* (the unlikely tale of a plumber turned astronaut).

Les achieved the highest number of jobs with *The Dublin Jack-of-all-Trades*, which listed 64 different trades and professions. For grandeur, however, who could beat being *King of the Fairies?* (Charlie on fiddle). Steve, on the other hand, sang about not any one particular job, but about the stress, back-stabbing and disillusionment of working life in his new song *Water under the Bridge*.

We also heard some rousing instrumental duets on fiddle and guitar from Di and Les: *Marney Swanson of the Grey Coast*; *Sophie's Dancing Feet* and *Andy Broom's Reel*.

We next meet on **Tuesday 18th October at 8.30pm in The Howard Arms, Brampton**. The theme will be 'Crime and Punishment'. (If anyone likes to prepare well ahead, November's theme will be 'War and Peace'...from Dostoyevsky to Tolstoy!). **ALL WELCOME!**

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

We had an excellent turn-out when we met in the Howard Arms on 18th October. It was a particular pleasure to greet Alec Somerville, passing through from Co Donegal with his banjo, and Charlie Chomse, joining us for the first time.

Our theme was ‘crime and punishment’. On the ‘crime’ side, we had an inventive variety. Eliza’s *Cruel Mother* committed infanticide. Geoff on steel guitar played instrumental versions of *Hey Joe* and *Streets of Laredo* (both feature murder). Alec sang his own satirical *Streets of the City*, about mugging (‘crime and no punishment’, as he expressed it). We also heard songs and tunes about drunkenness (*The Drunken Parson* – Charlie Carr on fiddle); poaching (*The Lincolnshire poacher* – Geoff on steel guitar); brewing illicit liquor (*Darlin’ Corey* – Alec); tax evasion (*The Fiddle* – Charlie Chomse); theft (*Maggie May* – Dave) and desertion (*The Deserter* – also Dave).

Political activism was represented by Sam with *Pancho Villa* (about the Mexican revolutionary leader, assassinated in 1923); by Steve with *Calling Joe Hill* (about the Swedish-American labour activist, executed for a crime he probably didn’t commit); and by Angus with *The Manchester Rambler* (about the mass trespass on Kinder Scout in 1932).

As for punishment, there was a hanging in *Long Black Veil* (Sam); exile in *Un Canadien Errant* (Katy). Ruth’s *A Stitch in Time* described how a wife turned the tables on her violent husband and Charlie Carr’s fiddle tune commemorated *The Stool of Repentance*.

Transportation and prison vied with one another for first place: *Black Velvet Band* (Alan Jefferson); *Adieu to Old England* (Eliza) and *Fields of Athenry* (Phil) were all about ‘transports’. But prison was equally popular – as an inspiration for song, that is! Alan and Phil told it from the prisoner’s viewpoint in, respectively, *San Quentin* and *The Old Triangle*. Charlie Chomse gave the other side of the picture in his own song, *Who’d be a Screw in Durham Gaol?*

The folk session next meets on **Tuesday 15th November from 8.30pm onward in The Howard Arms, Brampton**. The theme will be **War and Peace**. **ALL WELCOME!**

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

We had an excellent turn-out when we met in The Howard Arms on 15th November with the theme of 'War and Peace'. Perhaps it wasn't surprising that 'war' (or *anti-war*) predominated.

For anyone wanting a potted history lesson, it was a very educational evening. Charlie Chomse took us furthest back with *Heavenfield to Paradise*, about King Oswald's death in battle in the 7th Century. Alan Jefferson was next on the timeline with *King Dunmail* (10th Century). Anne's *Finsthwaite Princess* was based on a legend from the Jacobite Risings. The Napoleonic wars were popular: *The Labouring Man* (Dave) was called to fight in them; the eponymous hero of *Sam, pick up thy musket* (Mary) delayed the battle of Waterloo; Charlie Chomse's song proclaimed simply *My Name's Napoleon Bonaparte*. Geoff's medley of tunes on steel guitar (*Yankee Doodle/Mine Eyes have seen the Glory/Star Spangled Banner*) echoed the American civil war.

Reaching 1916, Charlie Carr played *The Battle of the Somme* on fiddle while Terry's song *Grace* commemorated the brief marriage of Joseph Plunkett, executed for his role in the Easter Risings. Steve sorrowfully described the war cemeteries of Normandy in *Strangest of Lands*. Steph took us up to the late 20th Century with the heartbreaking *My Youngest Son Came Home Today*, and Sam brought us up to the present day with Kris Kristoffersen's angry *In the News*, about GI atrocities in Iraq.

One or two people went for a more metaphorical treatment of the theme. The hero of Alan Clark's *Gotta get out of this neighbourhood* was coping with a very local conflict, and Steve's *Crying from the back of my eyes* described internal war in one's own psyche.

Not that all the material was sad: Phil cheerfully romped home *Coming in on a wing and a prayer*, Eliza's *Female Drummer* thoroughly enjoyed her adventures, as did Phil's *Stoutest Man in the Forty-Twa*.

So did 'peace' get a look in at all? Yes: Ruth 'ain't gonna study war no more' (*Down by the Riverside*); Katy celebrated *George Fox*, founder of Quakerism and Mary embraced *The Family of Man* – appropriately enough, the latter song ended up as a communal effort!

We next meet in **The Howard Arms, Brampton** on **Tuesday 20th December at 8.30pm**. The theme will be **Christmas/Winter. ALL WELCOME!**

FOLK SESSION – Howard Arms, Brampton

The cold, the dark and the damp did not discourage stalwart folk lovers from gathering on 20th December in The Howard Arms to celebrate the theme of Christmas/winter. Congratulations to Peter on his public debut with two narrative poems about life in the frozen Yukon!

Our instrumentalists for the evening were Frank Lee on melodeon and Charlie Carr on fiddle. Frank's *Snowy Monday* took up the 'winter' theme, then moved on to Christmas with *Gaudete*. Charlie played the strathspey *Gloomy Winter* and then, in memory of the tragedy that took place on 21st December twenty-eight years ago, the *Lament for Lockerbie*.

Eliza was strongly seasonal with her songs *Hunting the Wren* and *The Gower Wassail*. Mary and Alan Jefferson got us singing along with (respectively) *While Shepherds Watched* and *Good King Wenceslas*. Ruth chose the less well-known *Wither's Rocking Hymn*.

Some items referred obliquely to the season: Steve sang the poignant *Doon the Line* because it mentions Christmas Day; *The Road to Dundee* (Phil) begins with 'cauld winter was howling'; the action of *Arthur McBride* (Terry) takes place on Christmas morning; *The Massacre of Glencoe* (Alan) refers to the freezing weather that killed more MacDonalds than actually died by the sword. Steph neatly included the cycle of all the seasons in *Circle Game*. David, getting creative, sang *Tarry Wool* (the connection being 'shepherds').

We had a number of non-musical items. Peter, as indicated above, read two poems by Robert Service, *The Cremation of Sam McGee* and *The Shooting of Dan McGrew*, all against a backdrop of snow, northern lights and temperatures of -50. Ruth entertained us with a reading from Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree* about some aggressive carol singing, and Katy told the story of *The Standing Stones of Plouhinec*.

We next meet in **The Howard Arms, Brampton, on 17th January 2017 at 8.30pm**. The theme will be 'new beginnings'. **ALL WELCOME!**