

## FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

Our January 2009 session was made outstanding by the presence of three visitors: Jimmy and Val, who perform together as Jiva, came all the way from Blythe in Northumberland, and Maddy Prior. What a wealth of music for a small folk session!

Jiva play 6- and 12-stringed guitars with delicate and dexterous harmonies, and treated us to ten songs, mostly (as they freely admitted!) sad – *Love at the five-and-dime* (dedicated to all those who lost their jobs with Woolworths); *Two Old Friends*; *Louise*..one of their songs, *Different Dreams*, reduced two of the audience to tears. But they did manage a comic one of their own writing, *A Yorkshire Romance*, which showed great ingenuity in finding rhymes for such unromantic places as Huddersfield, Keithley and Bingley.

Maddy's glorious voice gave us *Lily Flower*, *Billy Boy* and *All Through the Night*.

Our regular attenders focussed on a Scottish theme – Steve sang various songs of attempted or successful seduction (*The Mill-oh*, *The Beggarman*, and *The Bonnie Shepherd Lad*) which were appropriate in view of Burns' notorious habits. Will Higgs riposted with a poem Burns himself wrote, *A reply to a trimming epistle from a tailor*, in defence of said notorious habits. Other Scottish songs ranged far and wide in mood and subject: the tragic and eerie ballad *Clerk Saunders*, (Alison); *The Mingulay Boat Song* and *The Skye Boat Song* (both Frank); Burns in sentimental mood with *Robin Adair* (Ruth); *Mountainside* (Isabella); to the Highlands with *Fhir a bhata* (Katy) and the industrialised Lowlands with *The Jute Mill Song* (Steve again).

We must not forget our oldest and youngest regulars: Miriam (13) sang Kipling's *Smuggler's Song* and Matt, (89 and recovering from a bad attack of flu) sang *I'll walk beside you*.

Our next session will be on 17<sup>th</sup> February at The Railway Inn. The theme (so close to Valentine's Day) will be love songs – happy, sad or however you want to sing them! All Welcome!

## FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

Since we last met in January 2009, we have lost our oldest and one of our most faithful performers. Matt died on 8<sup>th</sup> February while driving to church. His last song in January, *Ave Maria*, was also his last song for us.

The theme of our evening on 17<sup>th</sup> February was (in honour of St Valentine's Day), love and romance. After listening to 27 songs on the subject, it became evident that tragedy and unrequited affection make for better songs (or at any rate more of them!) than fidelity and happiness. Exactly two songs ended happily in marriage – *Strawberry Fair* (Frank) and *Bodmin Town* (Katy). Two more described how the singer planned to court and marry the woman he loved – *The Yellow Rose of Texas* and *The Star of the County Down*. Alison sang *Dark-Eyed Sailor*, a classic broken-token song in which all ends well after years of separation.

However, the theme of unhappiness in love can be tackled in many different moods. Steve gave us the darkest song of the evening, *The Butcher Boy*, where courtship becomes murder, but love and death were linked in several songs. Miriam and Alison linked them seriously in the *Lament of the Border Widow*, *Nelly was a Lady* and *Biscay Bay*. Ruth linked them comically, in the tongue-in-cheek *Under the Lilacs* and the old Cockney mock-tragedy *Wilkins and his Dinah* (and the 'cup of cold pison').

A great many songs grieved for faithless or unrequited love, from the man's point of view in *False-hearted Lover*; from the woman's in *A Blacksmith courted me* and *Waters of Tyne*. Though this, too, is a subject that can be given a humorous twist, as in *My Good-looking Man* (in which the woman takes vigorous revenge on her straying husband) and *Macfarlane o' the Sprots o' Birnie Bouzle*.

Our next folk session will be in The Railway Inn, Low Row, on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> March from 8.30pm. The theme is 'open' – come and sing, play or recite anything 'in the folk idiom'. ALL WELCOME!

## FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

We met in The Railway Inn on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2009. Some of our regular contributors were missing, but we were pleased to welcome Eileen on concertina and Denis on recorder after an absence of a couple of months, and Tony who read us some poems.

Some of the songs and tunes paid their respects to the fact that it was St Patrick's Day: Denis and Eileen started us off with two slip jigs, *Boys of Ballysadare* and *The Rocky Road to Dublin*, and later wound down for the evening with *Planxty Fanny Powers*. Mary picked up the Irish theme with *I'll tell me Ma* and *Fiddler's Green*.

Tony, on the other hand, marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the miners' strike with two poems, *Pitricide* and *The Miner's Lifeguard*.

Aside from these topics suggested by the dates, we ranged over a wide spectrum of song and music. Frank showed us his regional loyalties in *The Terrible Knitters of Dent* and *Visions of Cumbria*, and gave a clue about one of his interests in *Land of the Pennine God* (a grimly effective song about a railway disaster in 1910) and *Settle-Carlisle Railway*. In song, we visited Australia in *The Overlanders*; the USA in *Nelly was a Lady* (Miriam) and *Clementine* (Mary); central Glasgow in *Skyscraper Wean* and the Highlands in *The Skye Boat Song*. In music, we took *The Road to Alston*, climbed *The Wild Hills of Wannie* and danced a French *Mazurka*. Mary got us singing the irreverent *Isn't it grand (to be blooming well dead)*. Denis laid aside his recorder to sing *Lovely Joan*.

We discussed whether to have a theme next month and agreed we would try to find one song each (no more) involving weather (I suspect this may produce some unseasonal songs about hills clad in snow...)

Next session will be on **21<sup>st</sup> April** in **The Railway Inn, Low Row**, starting at **8.30pm**. **All Welcome!**

## FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

We had an excellent evening of music and song and the odd poem at The Railway Inn on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2009, and were particularly pleased to welcome a visitor from Barrow, Anne, who specialises in songs of the area (Borders/Cumbria) and writes and sings a lot of her own material. It was also good to have some visitors who just came to listen – we hope they enjoyed it and will come again.

Okay, so I lived to be proved wrong when I predicted that this month's theme of songs mentioning the weather would produce lots of references to 'hills clad in snow'! Our folk evening at The Railway Inn on 21<sup>st</sup> April showed the ingenuity of singers in spotting mentions of mist, rain, wind, drought and even sunshine. Frank celebrated fine weather when he led us in *Messing about on the River*; mist in *Mull of Kintyre*; snow in the parody of *Excelsior, Yupidee* (with a hilarious chorus that is strictly for the uninhibited). Mary found wind, rain and hail in *I'll tell me Ma*; Katy found drought, flood and fire in the Australian *Now I'm Easy*. In rather less extreme weather conditions, Mary rejoiced that *Summer suns are glowing* and Katy sang in praise of the *South Wind*. Ruth sang a series of spring songs such as *Where Primroses Grew*; *To the Maypole Haste Away*.

Ruth and Tony varied the evening with two short poems (Tony) and a monologue *The Hen-Cote* (Ruth).

Anne played guitar and gave us some fine atmospheric songs focussing on south Cumbria: *Mist over Water*, *Tups* and *Long Meg and her Daughters*. Alison, also on guitar, sang (among other songs) two ballads, the bawdy *Keech in the Creel* (don't ask) and the haunting *Wife of Usher's Well*. Miriam specialised as always in sad songs, *Come Away Death* and *The Border Widow's Lament*.

Denis and Eileen on recorder and concertina played *Greensleeves* to mark the accession of Henry VIII; a *Kerchief Dance*; *Sheep-shearing* and *The Shepherd's Wife*.

Our next session is on **Tuesday, 19th May** at **8.30pm** in the **Railway Inn**. The theme will be spring and May. **All welcome!**

## FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

We had an outstandingly good folk evening at The Railway Inn on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2009. The theme, needless to say, was May/spring, though some performers reached the theme by circuitous routes!

We were delighted to welcome again Jiva (Jimmy and Val) from Blythe in the north-east, and Anne from Barrow, who contributed their distinctive styles, repertoires and musical expertise to the session. Welcome also to Peter, a new performer, who after hesitating modestly turned out to be both guitarist and accordionist.

Some of the songs had strong traditional roots: Tom sang *Now is the month of Maying*; Anne sang *The Nightingale*; Frank ventured into the field of balladry with *Barbara Allen*. Steve and Ruth both gave us very funny parodies of 'the folk tradition', Ruth with *The Ballad of Bethnal Green* (set in the fifties, with a spiv hero in 'drainpipe trousers') and Steve with his own spoof composition *As I roved out on a May morning/On a May morning in June*.

Some of the songs, on the other hand, were pure contemporary: Jiva sang the gentle and melancholy *Some Way Home* and *When* (about romance on the internet, which must be as contemporary as it comes). They also sent us out singing with *One more song* – all of their own composition.

Anne bridged the gap between tradition and modernity with *Bluebells*, a song she wrote herself about the sorrowful story of Lady Jane Grey. In fact, the spring seems to inspire as much sadness as mirth: Miriam sang *Where have all the flowers gone* and Steve in similar vein sang *Dancing at Whitsun*.

Of course, in spring a young man's thoughts turn to love (and related subjects) so we had songs of love – *Broom of the Cowdenknowes* (Hilary); *Eileen McManus* (Peter) – and seduction – *Bells and Baldricks* (Steve); *A wee bird's come to my apron* (Katy). We also heard poetry from Tony, who recited his own poem *Memory*, and Hilary, who read *The Lake Isle of Inisfree* and *Roman Wall Blues*.

We meet again on **Tuesday, 16<sup>th</sup> June in The Railway Inn, Low Row from 8.30pm**. Frank has set us a challenge: can we each find a nonsense song to sing then? **ALL WELCOME!**

## FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

We met on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2009 in The Railway Inn, and showed our ingenuity in finding songs about ‘nonsense’. We were thrilled to welcome Maddy Prior and her friend Nette as visitors and contributors to the session.

The theme of ‘nonsense’ turned out to be amazingly fruitful . Frank, who suggested the theme, started us off with *Lily the Pink*. The evening included nonsense in the purest sense, such as Maddy’s eerie *Tom o’Bedlam* and Nette’s *Fine Horseman*, as well as the classic rigmarole recited by Mary, *I went to the pictures tomorrow*, and the absurd *Walloping Window Blind* (Katy). It also covered parody and satire: *I’ve got little list* (Frank, on the subject of MPs’ expenses); *Four Pounds a Day* (Steve, with reference to the ethics of the British workman); *L’Anglais avec son sang-froid* (Ruth). It included sheer exuberant silliness, like the round *Black socks never get dirty* which Maddy taught us, and *Does your chewing gum lose its flavour?* (Frank).

Comic songs included Flanders and Swann’s *Ballad of Unending Domestic Upheaval* , sung by Anne; the macabre humour of *He jumped without a parachute* (Mary); *She died of a broken rib* (Nette); *Under the Lilacs* (Eileen) and *Mrs Bond* (Miriam); Steve had compiled a series of short songs –jokes, puns, dialect pieces - which he called *Scrapings from the Dustbin*.

Denis on recorder and harmonica and Eileen on concertina played cheerful tunes such as *The Keel Row*, *Navy on the Line* and *May Wedding* (written by themselves to celebrate their anniversary), these being the nearest they could get to nonsense in instrumental music, and they also sang the traditional comic duet *When shall we be wed, John?*

Poetry was more in evidence than usual: Anne read the bewildering play on words *Stay, Go and Fetch*; Miriam read *Have some Madeira, M’dear*; Mary recited *King Spider* ..

The next folk session will be on Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> July from 8.30pm at The Railway Inn, Low Row. Anne has suggested ‘themes from Shakespeare’ – in case anyone thinks that that sounds alarmingly literary, she points out that this includes love stories, murder, treason, fairies, witchcraft, battles...

ALL WELCOME!

## FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

We had a varied evening of music, song and poetry at the Railway Inn on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2009, and were pleased to welcome new visitors Liz and Sue. Charlotte had suggested the tricky theme of 'rocks and stones', and then cleverly returned to Barrow leaving us to do the work! I am proud to say that we rose to the challenge! Some people developed the theme in a fairly straightforward way, with songs about mining and mountains – *Clementine* (Mary); *Blackleg miner* (Phil); *Pit Boy* (Katy); *Fourpence a Day* (Steve) in the first category; *Manchester Rambler* (Phil); *As I was climbing the steep slopes of Gimmer* (Steve); *Wild Mountain Thyme* (Liz) and a tune, *The Wild Hills of Wannie*, (also Liz, on the flute).

Sue read us several poems that she had written herself, working in some suitable titles such as *Cretaceous* and *The Rock* – a tongue-in-cheek look at the collapse of Northern Rock. Frank, interestingly, had thought of a similar link in the parody *My old man's a banker*.

Eileen and Denis, on concertina and recorder, managed to find several stone-related (sort of!) tunes: *Rocky Road to Dublin*; *Bardon Mill* (millstones!); *Farewell to Aberdeen* (the granite city) etc.

Other singers exercised their ingenuity in spotting songs with references to stones and jewels. Ruth, for example, sang the hymn *They who tread the path of labour*. Some songs were quite well-known, such as *The Parting Glass* (mentions rubies); Paul Simon's *I am a Rock* (both by Anne); *Johnny Todd* (mentions a diamond ring – Mary); *Oh No, John* (jewels – Frank). Some were more unusual: *The Song of Artesian Waters* (Phil); *Fellman Hike* (Steve) and *George Ridler's Oven*.

We meet next month **in The Railway Inn, Low Row, on 20<sup>th</sup> October at 8.30pm**. The theme will be harvest/country life. **ALL WELCOME!**

## FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

The Railway Inn folk session met on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2009 for a lively evening of songs circling around the theme of harvest and country life. We were very pleased to welcome visitors from Alston, Di and Les, on flute, recorder and guitar. Alison, Phil and Anne had also brought guitars and Miriam had brought her flute, so we were quite well off for instrumentalists.

Alison started us off with *The Haltwhistle Burn* – an interesting reminder that country life isn't all about farming, as it noted the industries that flourished beside and because of the burn. Of course, a lot of the songs *were* about farming: we all joined in heartily when Frank sang *To be a farmer's boy*; Phil sang *The Seasons*; Katy sang *Drumdelgie*; Di and Les sang *The Song of the Plough*; Anne teased us with *Not the Pace-Egging Song* – a parody she had written herself, about sheep. Not all harvesting involves the land, of course, as Mary reminded us in *Molly Malone* and Anne in *Bread and Fishes*.

Ruth read us a passage from Brian Keenan's *An Evil Cradling*, a darkly moving reminder of the sheer beauty of harvest and the simplest of natural things. She followed it up with *The Manx Fishermen's Hymn*, and Frank sang the American hymn, *Bringing in the Sheaves*.

Other country pastimes were celebrated in song and music: Miriam played *Scarborough Fair*; Di and Les played us planxties, polkas and waltzes. Phil commemorated *The Noble Fox-Hunting* (to which Di and Les riposted with the parody *Dido, Fido*); Frank got us all joining in *The Lincolnshire Poacher*; Katy recalled *The North Lew Bell-ringing*; various songs delicately alluded to rural seduction, eg *The Maid gaed tae the Mill*; *The Shearing's no' for you* (both by Steve) and *The Blacksmith* (Alison).

Our next session will be on **Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November from 8.30pm in The Railway Inn, Low Row**. Our theme will be (by way of contrast) 'Towns and Industry' – see if you can find a song that mentions a town or a trade (other than farming/ploughing/shepherding!) **All welcome!**



## FOLK SESSION- LOW ROW

Our theme for November 2009 was 'Town and Industry', and we found an impressive range of songs and tunes that referred to both, often both in the same song.

Anne on guitar started us off with, most appropriately, *Dirty Old Town*. That particular song commemorates ('celebrates' is hardly the word!) Salford, and a number of other songs described the characteristics of particular towns: Frank, in particular, told us *I'm going to leave old Durham Town*, described what it is like *In my Liverpool Home*, and recited *Different*, an ode to his native Bradford. Anne added a *Postcard from Dublin* – a song she wrote herself about a spree she had there with friends (okay, Anne, come clean: which of you *did* 'abduct a barman'?) Phil did the rounds of a couple of dozen towns in *A View from One Night Stands* (no, *not* what you're thinking! It was a list of towns in which the singer had performed one-night concerts).

In many of the songs, the towns were incidental to the subject. Thus Manchester in *The Manchester Rambler* (Mary); Hexham in *Lord Derwentwater's Farewell* (Denis, with Eileen on concertina); Bampton, because the tune *Green Garters* (Denis on recorder and Eileen on concertina) comes from Bampton; Blackpool in *Albert and the Lion* (Ruth); Belfast in *I'll Tell Me Ma* (Miriam, with Anne accompanying her on guitar); Glasgow in *Skyscraper Wean* (Katy – who provided subtitles for southerners).

Industry was represented by Phil's *Generations of Change* (ploughing, fishing, oilmen); by Ruth in *Miller of Dee* and by Denis and Eileen playing *Bardon Mill*. Some songs ingeniously worked in both towns and trades, so *The Trysting Fair at Falkirk* is about a weaver, and *The Merry Hostess* is set in London and mentions five different trades.

As well as the theme, some contributors introduced seasonal items. Denis sang *The Souling Song*, to mark All Soul's Day (2<sup>nd</sup> November), and several songs touched movingly on aspects of war and remembrance. Anne sang *And Jesus Wept*, in memory of the 300 men shot for cowardice in WW1, Phil *Home, Lads, Home*, and Miriam *Crow on the Cradle*.

We next meet in **The Railway Inn, Low Row, on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2009 from 8.30pm onwards**. Our theme will be **Christmas/Winter/Joy. ALL WELCOME!**

## FOLK SESSION – LOW ROW

Our December 2009 theme, 'Christmas, Winter and Joy', produced an interestingly eclectic mixture of material. Some of our regular contributors had to be absent, owing to children's Christmas concerts and other seasonal commitments, but we had the pleasure of welcoming back Jimmy and Val, singing together as Jiva, all the way from Blyth in Northumberland. Their fine musicianship and delicate harmonies always enrich our evenings when they are able to come.

As Jimmy and Val were married this summer, they started us off with *Back home to you*, 'a song about the joy of being married', they explained. They followed this up at intervals with other songs of love, *Love at the five-and-dime* and *Dream on, dream on*, and Hilary added her contribution to this particular kind of joy with *The Apache Wedding Prayer*. Denis (on recorder and harmonica) and Eileen (on concertina) contributed joyful tunes such as *The Kerchief Dance* and *Drink your Tea, Love*.

Steve – who never lets himself be dictated to by a mere theme! – sang *The Gressford Disaster* in memory of a mining disaster that occurred in December, and Ewan MacColl's *Ballad of Accounting*.

Most of the other performers circled more closely around the Christmas and winter themes, but covered wide range of moods, periods and cultures. : Mary sang a contemporary song about the Nativity, *Two Thousand Years Ago*, while Miriam and Katy reached back into the Middle Ages with *O Come, o come Emmanuel* and across the oceans with *Doi Doi* (a lullaby for the Christ Child in Sinhalese). Frank made us laugh with *Upidee*, (a parody of *Excelsior* and therefore suitable for winter), Hilary picked up the winter theme with *Here we come a-wassailing*. Several people sang well-known Christmas carols and songs that were excellent for joining in: *Go tell it on the mountain* (Mary); *Deck the halls* (Frank); *Silent Night* (Jiva); *The First Nowell* (Miriam on flute).

Christmas also seemed to call out some rather good humorous poems, so Eileen recited *The Thirteenth Day of Christmas* (so what *did* the girl do with all those drummers drumming and geese a-laying?); Mary gave us the experience of a small boy acting a bit-part in a Nativity play in *Just doing my job*, and Hilary recalled the military experiences of *Sam's Christmas Pudding*.

We next meet in The Railway Inn, Low Row, on **Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> January at 8.30pm. Theme: Rogues and Vagabonds. ALL WELCOME!**