

Folk ballads and other songs of the Isle of Wight. Updated but not finished.

There are hundreds of epic ballads/folk songs that were popular throughout England and Scotland. Like butterfly, wild flower and geological collectors there were folk song collectors in the Victorian and Edwardian times. Collections were made in Hampshire, Dorset, Sussex, Somerset and elsewhere. Lucy Broadwood, Cecil Sharp, Sabine Baring-Gould, Vaughan Williams, Percy Grainger, Hammond and Gardiner were important collectors. There are the Child Ballads collated by Francis Child, an American folklorist, in the later half of the 19th century.

We lived and worked in London in the late 1960's early 70's. We sang in a number of folk clubs and were members of the Herga Folk Song Club in Harrow. We did visit Cecil Sharp House a few times but it did seem a strange place to us then. The good thing were the books that they were producing.

From the Hammond and Gardiner manuscripts selected by Frank Purslow came;
Marrow Bones English Folk Songs (1965)
The Wanton Seed (1968)
The Constant Lovers (1972)
The Foggy Dew (1974)

They were full of songs from Hampshire but nothing as I recall directly from the IOW. The collectors probably never went there although there is a hint they may have visited Ryde, maybe for a stick of rock! The IOW only had a separate identity from Hampshire in 1890. The songs almost certainly made a trip across the water and it was common to localise the song. The singer would give the names of local people, towns and pubs. The other thing about the books was the bindings which fell apart very quickly! They are full of great songs and plenty of information. Some songmen new hundreds of songs.

There were also many other books produced at this time;
The Seeds of Love Stephen Sedley 1967
English Country Song Book Roy Palmer 1979 etc

Singing long epic ballads is not easy. Some singers are unaccompanied whilst others prefer a slight backing, there are some rock backings. In our day they attracted a certain following. Some of the great performers of ballads included Shirley Collins, Jean Ritchie, Anne Briggs, Nic Jones, Peggy Seeger, Cilla Fisher (and her mum), Martin Carthy, Joan Baez

The songs I remember sung included : Sir Patrick Spens, Annan Water, The Outlandish Knight, Matty Groves, Little Musgrave, Queen Eleanor's Confession, Geordie, Long Lankin, Blackwaterside, Wiily O'Winsbury..... Even I had a go at Long Lankin!

The Isle of Wight does have a few specific ballads.

The first ballad relates to a duel between Henry Hartlove and William Martin, living in the Isle of Wight. It was over a beautiful maid called Ann Scarborough. The tune is "Aim not too high" or your variant.

As with most ballads certain verses can be left out and the story can be in several parts. The presentation is up to the singer.

A Looking Glass for Maids (The Downfall of two most Desperate Lovers)

Unhappy I whom in the prime of youth,
Unkind to him with whom I broke my truth,
Mark well my words you that are maids and wives,
I was the cause that two men lost their lives.

In the Isle of Wight, Ann Scarborough was my name
There did I live in credit, wealth and fame,
My parents rich, I nothing then did lack,
But grace and truth, the which did go to wrack.

A gentleman, a suitor to me came
With whom I might have lived a gallant dame
But wantonness and pride did seize my heart
Was sure to him and yet from him did part.

He broke a piece of gold and gave it me
Then bid I seemingly to him agree
But O my heart was never rightly placed
Another man I afterward embraced.

Which when he knew, he fell into despair
He beat his breast, and tore his curled hair:
O who would trust a woman, then said he
That seldom are what they seem to be.

Now I do find that all a man can do,
His best endeavours makes not a woman true,
Yet he that hath an interest in your heart,
Shall buy you dearly, 'fore that we do part.

The came the other, whom I loved so well
But now behold a heavy hap befell,
When first my love his rival had beheld,
He cast his glove and challenged him the field.

To answer him the other thought it fit,
He said he ne'er was known a coward yet,
He for my favour so then so much did strive
He said he'd fight with any man alive.

Next morning then these gentlemen did meet,
And manfully they did each other greet
Each other wounded in most piteous sort
Ere any man to them did resort.

As last they made a strong and desperate close
Both fell to ground and never after rose
Cursed be the place where these brave men did fall
And cursed be I who was the cause of all.

.....
When word was brought to me I quietly went
There I came the lives alas was spent
Then did I tear the hair from off my head
And wished a thousand times that I were dead.

When I came there these gallants then I found
Both of the lifeless, bleeding on the ground
My conscience told me, I was cause of this,
Sweet Jesus now forgive me for amiss.

I buried them and laid them in my grave
For grant their souls a resting place may have
More rest than I, whose restless conscience now
Accuses me for breaking of my vow.

If I walk near the place where now they lie
It troubleth my mind exceedingly
If to the place where they did fight I go
It fills my guilty conscience full of woe.

If I to bed do go, I cannot sleep
And if I do my dreams do make me weep
Methinks I see them bleeding in my sight,
My thoughts by day and eke my dreams by night.

My rich apparel I have laid aside
My cloth of gold, and other things of pride
In sable will I mourn, while I have breath
And every day expect and look for death.

A dead man's skull my silver cup shall be,
In which I'll drink, too good a cup for me
Instead of meat, on roots and herbs I'll feed
To put me still in mind of my foul deed.

You woody nymphs that welcome in the day
Come hear a discontented virgin sing
O that I might my time now with you spend
In silent groves, until my life doth end.

You country maids, in country and in city,
That now have heard my discontented ditty
Be constant, ever true to one alone
For if you do prove false it will be known.

If you will know where sorrow doth abide
Repair to me, no other place beside
Grief and despair both daily now attend me
And there is naught but death that can befriend me.

This discontented damsel now she keeps
Her chamber, where she sits and daily weeps
And suitors come to her tis said
But only one and that is her father's maid.

The meat and drink her father to her sends
She lends the poor them which she calls her friends
She feeds on roots and herbs and such like things
Sometimes on bread which she counts food form kings.

So here the fruits of wantonness and pride
And let us pray that God may be our guide
There's lets of us but have our time ill spent
Too well brought us that do forwill repent.

You damsels all, now have a special care
Forget not her that did these things declare
Be to your sweet-hearts forever just and true
And to fair pride, she bid you all adieu.

The Outlandish Lady's Love to an English sailor in the Isle of Wight
(Various tunes used.)

From the Isle of Wight I have brought to light
A gallant virgin born of noble blood
Dressed in maid's attire, and she did enquire
After her true love, 'tis understood.

Now this gallant dame from fair France she came,
And hath took upon her for to rove:
And I heard her say, lamenting night and day
Cruel father to separate our love!

He was too severe to thee, my dearest dear!
Because that he belongs to the main
I have travelled around to each sea port town,
Thinking for to meet my love again.

When I first beheld my dear English Will
I was wounded to the heart I swear.
Although he was bound, guarded through our town,
Taken prisoner by our privateer.

When he passed by, on him I cast an eye,
With a trembling heart, I could not stand
Then these words I said to our chambermaid,
Oh how I could love that Englishman!

I could find no rest, 'till I had expressed,
So then I goes to our chambermaid.
With my trembling quill there I wrote my fill,
And to him my sorrows did relate.

The daughter of a knight, Sir, these words I do write,
Sir, to you a stranger unto me,
Tho' your person's mean, still it shall be seen,
That the good Cupid he hath wounded me.

If my father knew, then we both should rue
And in a passion kill us both, I fear.
But to what is penned straight an answer send,
Here in private to your dearest dear.

Not Finished

The Dunkey's Egg
(Have tune somewhere)

Come round my mates and masters,
Bring along your mugs of ale,
I'll tell you about Newpert Market
Wreckins you'll like my tale.

Six months ago last Michaelmas
I goes to the hiring fair,
To do a bit of courting
With a girl I knows there.

I takes her in a nice young goose
And a gallon of blackberries,
A bunch of Michaelmas Daisies,
Some butter and some cheese.

She's a barmaid at the "Bell Inn"
Just in the market place,
"A cheeky wench" some might call her
But that's a matter of taste.

She weren't particular friendly.
Turned up her nose at goose,
Said I was a bird of that feather,
Fair let her tongue run loose.

I sets me down to eat Nammet
Then orders brandy too,
For me courage was oozing out mates,
In love that will never do.

The bar was getting crowded soon,
So after suns gone down,
I goes to do me errands round,
The streets of Newpert Town.

In one of they grocer's shops, mates,
I sees all in a ring,
A sight of gurt red balls, as like
Swede turnips as anything.

“What thee call them gurt round red things?”
Says I to young shop chap,
“ They be dunkey's eggs, my master,”
And he gives to me one bright slap.

So I scratches me head a good bit,
And does some thinking hard,
“ You wants a little moke young feller
For to work in your farmyard.”

“But how do we hatch they eggs like
What bird can sit on they?”
“You roll them along into a gorse bush,
Easy as making hay.”

So next morn at top of gorse down
I tries to hatch out moke
Though had half a hazy notion
It only be a joke.

Old red ball soon goes out of sight
In clump of gorse half way,
And out of gorse a young brown thing
I see fast run away.

“Whoa! Whoa! There whoa!” I shouts, “ I be
“Your father, little Neddy,
“Whoa! Steady now and softish, whoa!
“Farther be he already.”

Why then of course it ain't a moke
But a young frisky hare,
And that red ball be made of cheese,
That chap he got me fair.

Second Part

Every week I take the pigs
For sale in market place,
And sticks to me bit of courting
Gets lots of slaps in face.

Old Zooks, she called me cabbage head,
And Bill of the Rose and Crown
Seems long way smartest chap about
Least ways in Newport Town.

One time she seemed more friendly like
Said she was getting thin,
Fresh country air might suit her
Ah! drat my scrubby chin.

Then it comed into my brain like
If and me bolder be,
Perhaps that smart chap young potman Bill
Plays second fiddle to me.

And tomorrow mates and masters
You'll see me fine and gay,
With gorse bloom in me Sunday coat
For it be our wedding day.

Possible chorus

Fill up the glasses, fill up the yards
Fill up the tankards, listen to this bard.

The Southern Farmer from Brighstone, traditional collected by F. Black.
Tune standard.

I reckon its going to rain, missus
Before long, one of these days,
But not before we cuts our corn
Or does our best least ways.
Ch.
Singing diddle um derri, derri um down.

Last year you minds the time we had
Parson mind lost in books
But all his crops was carted in
Before our own was up in stooks.

His glebe lands about the very best
There be around these parts,
And sight of parson's full ripe crop

Does good to farmer's hearts.

But soon as his own crops safe in barn
His memory took on bad
He ups and makes a prayer for rain
And rain come down like made.

Parson preaches in the church
"Don't ee go and watch the sky
You pray and trust the lord," says he
"And corn will come home dry."

We were well sure to say our prayers
If he don't intervene.
That's what we said to Lord Bishop
When he comes visiting here.

Bishop he laughed a goodish bit
And putting off his sleeves
"Your parson's bright enough - but you
Make hurry with your sheeves."

Old bird ain't nabbed a second time,
If I reckon its gonna rain
I means to get my corn home dry
Before parson prays again!