

Notes

The Newsletter of Readifolk

Issue 10

Reading's folk song
and music club

Spring 2011

Welcome

to another Readifolk
newsletter

Rumblings from the Roots

Welcome to the Spring edition of Notes. Despite the cold and frost our 2011 year has got off to a really good start. Attendances have held up well and we have all been rewarded with a host of memorable Guest Nights and equally enjoyable Singers and Theme Nights.



Kieran Halpin: from darkest Ireland to
Readifolk, on 8th May

It is always good to get feedback from the audience - especially if it is complimentary! Here is an example of a genuine e-mail that we received recently - *"I went to Readifolk last Sunday for the first time. It was a lovely evening; great atmosphere, positive ambience, warm and friendly welcome. I'll definitely be coming back - every week if I can"*. We will not embarrass the writer by printing a name, but we are delighted to welcome yet another satisfied customer.

We are sure that you will not be disappointed with the programme of events that you will find printed on the back of this newsletter. For our Guest Nights we have the usual mix of excellent well established performers as well as a number of carefully selected newcomers. In addition, for the DIY enthusiasts, we have several Singers Nights and some interesting new themes to get your brain cells in action. Of particular note is the charity concert on 29 May. This is part of a weekend festival organised by supporters of the EvaB foundation - a local group raising funds for mental health charities. We have a super triple-bill of Jim McLean, Anthea Neads & Andy Prince, and The Westlanders. Admission to our concert is just £5 and all proceeds will go to the supported charities. We hope that you will all come along and give your support.

We trust that you have all by now logged on to our new impressive website www.readifolk.org.uk, developed by Ali McNamara. Ali is now in charge of the website maintenance as well as our Facebook and Twitter sites.

A further recent development has been in our community internet radio broadcasts. Readifolk now has a two hour broadcast from 6 - 8 pm on Friday evenings on www.reading4u.co.uk. You can listen to two whole hours of folk music, news and comment brought to you by a team of Readifolk presenters. If you fancy joining the team to produce your own programme/s speak to Colin. Full support and training is available.

Una & Colin

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Instruments of Joy

Taking a look at the instruments of the folk idiom.
This issue:

The Penny Whistle

Cheap, but not *that* cheap...

It was probably a fairly brief period in history when the penny whistle actually cost a penny (for people younger than 40, who have never experienced 'old money', this would have been 1/240th of a pound, or slightly more than 0.41 of a p).

In fact, so one version of history would have it, when Robert Clarke, a farm labourer and skilful musician from Coney Weston in Suffolk, made his first whistles in 1843 out of thin tin plate, he sold them for a halfpenny each, from a handcart which he pushed from market to market. Eventually he pushed it all the way to Manchester, where he set up the Clarke company, operating from a small workshop behind his house. The business still exists, and still makes a version of his original instrument, amongst other designs of whistle. No longer just a halfpenny, some are available for just a few pounds, and so are still probably one of the cheapest instruments you can buy.

On the other hand, if you want something more exotic, it's not too difficult to search further afield and pay several hundred pounds for a short pipe with holes in it.

But Clarke didn't invent the fipple flute, as it may properly be called, and probably not even the tin whistle. Historically, whistles of some sort date back many thousand years - in China, at least 5,000 years, and an example of a bone whistle discovered in France is reported to date back some 25,000 years. In the UK we don't seem to have any examples before the Iron Age, and in Ireland, where it is so closely associated with their traditional music, it does not seem to appear until the 11th century.

Cheap sources of thin tin plate were only fairly recently available in Clarke's time, but there is some evidence that whistles made of tin plate may have existed by 1825. The material is malleable, and easily soldered, so Clarke would cut out a shape, punch holes in it, and then roll it around a mandrel, or former, to make a tube, before soldering a seam down the back of it. The fipple, or plug, which goes into the end to form the channelled airway which directs the player's breath onto the blade of the whistle, was made of wood, cut with a saw. Clarke made himself one of his wife's corset stays.

The antecedent of Clarke's instrument was the flageolet, and some tin whistles are still called by that name. The original flageolet was a wind instrument made in various forms, originally of bone, and later of wood, usually with six finger holes. Its exponents have included Samuel Pepys, Henry Purcell and Robert Louis Stevenson. In common with Clarke's original design, and its fipple flute cousin, the recorder, the flageolet had a tapering bore, narrowing along its length from the mouthpiece to the open end. This is said to contribute to an instrument's individual tone and timbre, or its 'chiff', and some models of modern whistle still do likewise.

As instruments go, the design and playing of a whistle couldn't be much simpler. Usually, it follows the English flageolet's form of having six holes, all at the front of the instrument. These can enable nearly two octaves to be played thus: blow into the mouthpiece with three fingers from each hand covering the holes; work up from all six holes being covered, lifting one

finger at a time until none is covered. This gives the seven tonic notes of a scale. Then, cover all the holes again and blow harder (lifting the top finger can help) to produce the octave note, and the second octave can be played.

In terms of physics, when the stream of air leaves the fipple duct and strikes the blade, or 'labium lip' of the whistle, unlike the reed of other woodwind instruments, it doesn't cause the blade to vibrate; rather, it sets up rapid oscillations in the air, and these cause a harmonic wave in the bore of the pipe which we hear as a musical note. The wavelength of that harmonic, and hence the pitch of the note, is changed by opening or closing the finger holes.

Since Clarke's time, there have been several notable innovations to the whistle. Most obvious is the common use of plastic for the mouthpiece, which incorporates the fipple plug, the air channel and the blade all into a one-piece moulding. This has made it easier to use seamless tubing for the body of the instrument, which is now most often parallel-sided, rather than tapering. The resulting tone is often described as being 'pure' or 'sweet' and generally has less of the 'chiff' that a tapered whistle has.

A more recent development is the low whistle. In the 1970s, maker Bernard Overton decided to address the issue of whistles not being available in a range of sizes. He set about making what may best be described as a tenor whistle. The low whistle is both longer and wider than the high whistle, playing an octave lower than its high counterpart, with an evocative, mellow tone. In fact, the low whistle could be regarded as a relation to the traditional side-blown flute, and some low whistles are available with alternative heads, so that one body can be played as either a flute or a whistle. Overton went on to develop whistles in the entire range of soprano down to bass baritone, but it is the original tenor that has come to be known simply as the low whistle, its popularity increasing since its use in Riverdance and by Davy Spillane and others.

As whistles are limited to six holes and the tonic scale, they are available in many keys, though most players are able to play accidentals by 'half-holing', and so may be able to play in a couple of keys or more on one instrument. The most popular instruments are in D and G, the D whistle being most common in Celtic music.

In Europe, the whistle is probably most closely associated with Irish traditional music and its derivatives, but it has also notably become a folk instrument in parts of Africa, particularly in South Africa, where street musicians in the townships of the 1950s used whistles in the lively 'kwela' form of music. Usually, there would be a group of three or more whistlers, with one playing the melody, while the others played rhythmical chords behind.

It's interesting to note that, not only does the whistle naturally tend to be a cheap instrument to buy, but very seldom will even the cheapest of these be dismissed by a player as inferior. Even the most proficient and celebrated of players will often be seen using a model that you can buy for just a few pounds at your local music emporium.

Whistle made by Generation, in F, with plastic mouthpiece and brass tube body



Guest Night Reviews

**Were you there? Tell us what you think.
If you weren't, this is what you missed.**

The views expressed here are entirely those of the reviewers, and are independent of the Readifolk organising team.



Patty Vetta & Alan Franks

9th January

They don't make 'em like they used to. When you take the Vetta & Franks for a spin you have to remember that you are in a classic, and things are different here. It's true that a modern classic like a Tickell has more sporting pretensions (especially in fully blown form), and a highly strung Grand Tourer like a Boden may have more popular appeal when on song. But the Vetta & Franks has all the qualities of being carefully crafted, where attention to detail and considered design results in long term, enduring satisfaction.

But, like many things of lasting quality, you have to take your time to realise this; the Vetta & Franks is a masterpiece of understatement. People whose attention is only caught by modern styling and shiny trim may pass by in favour of a Talbot or a Dillon, both good enough to transport you to places of delight and interest, but they lack the two features that make a Vetta & Franks special - the background that has focused on a simple design that works well, rather than one that is fully featured and overly complicated, and the sheer quality and experience of the craftsmanship that meticulously pieces the parts together.

On first appearance, the Vetta & Franks is a fairly basic, two seater tourer of the kind that was popular a few generations ago. People's attention may not be immediately grabbed, as it stands unassumingly before them; from one side, it even appears as if the instruments may be mounted rather awkwardly. But they all work rather well, and once started, people's interest can't help but be drawn in, as it purrs in a way that sends some listeners into paroxysms of delight.

When it's fully warmed up, things become more interesting, and its performance, whilst always restrained, becomes a delight. Keeping an eye on the various instruments can be not only revealing, but add a distinct enhancement to things.

If you prefer style without flash, quality without pretension, and interest without excess, then the Vetta & Franks may be just what you are looking for. "O poop-poop!"

Mr Toad

Quality Street

23rd January

Sunday 23rd of January saw the welcome return of Quality Street to Readifolk. John and Kay Quinn together with Sylvia

www.readifolk.org.uk

Watts are Bracknell based vocal harmony group. John sings and plays fine guitar in classical style while Sylvia plays whistle and sings. We are told that Kay plays mandolin but on this particular evening she confined herself to singing only.

Our MC for the evening was Janet Kent who was in both fine spirit and fine form. Her self penned comic song about a road rage incident was given from the point of view of an innocent abroad. Mike, from Yelverton, was up next, singing unaccompanied and was followed by Bob Watson, singing one of his own songs. He never fails to judge his audience, getting everyone to join in with the chorus almost straight away. Allan Moore completed the first set of floor spots with a rendition of *Fruit & Flowers*. I am always surprised by how much Allan's style reminds me of Martin Carthy.

Quality Street deliver a mix of traditional and more modern songs in both a cappella style, and accompanied by John's polished guitar work. He is very obviously classically trained, but is just as at home using a flat pick. The surprise of the evening was their performance of the 1983 XCT song *Love on a Farm Boy's Wages*, which stood up very well transmuted to the folk genre. Given the subject matter this may not be so surprising, but even so that does not detract from the fact that it was Quality Street's arrangement that made it work.

Individually, Quality street are all fine musicians; however there were times when their harmony tuning was less than spot on, although John's guitar playing and Sylvia's fine voice more than made up for this. Their selection of material was neither predictable nor dull and they are to be congratulated for daring to step outside several boxes in both their choice and delivery.

Floor spots in the second half were given by accordion trio 3 2 1, who were joined for the evening by Dave on fiddle. Malcolm Smith treated us to a Ralph McTell song while Doug and Pam's performance of *The Bold Butcher* was a high spot.

We were treated to more of Sylvia's strong voice in the second half where she also treated us to her



whistle playing. Their rendition of the song *Reconciliation* was, for me, the highlight of the evening.

This was Quality Street's third performance at Readifolk. Let us hope it will not be the last.

lan

Acushla

6th February

The techi-bit first: Acushla comes from the Celtic *a chuisle* - "O pulse (of my heart)"; as a noun it means "darling".

Acushla is a four piece band comprised of Jim Carrol (vocals, guitar, cittern, uilleann pipes), Patrick Gray (fiddle), Emmett Lenaghan (button accordion, bass guitar), and Steve Whiteley (vocals, mandolin, tenor banjo, guitar). These four musicians are amiable and pleasant men from Nottingham - skilful and talented.

The uilleann pipes are an instrument which has developed over 13 centuries. It comprises three drones (bass, baritone and tenor) and a chanter. The drones have valves which allow a harmonic or chord, by using the underside of the arm while playing notes on the chanter. Air is pumped into the



instrument via bellows strapped around the body and arm.

If you think the look of this instrument suggests that it will make an overpowering sound akin to a cat with its tale being trodden on, you will be very much mistaken; Jim plays the pipes with subtlety, by which I mean that they were lost, sadly, behind the other instruments. I would like to have heard a solo from this instrument which would have given a haunting feel to a song such as *The Minstrel Boy*.

Jim made the pipes he plays himself, even folding the metal to make the tubes. And when his son asked him for some he taught him how to make them.

Alas, I found it difficult to tell one tune in the melodies from another, but when I closed my eyes, and just absorbed the music without trying to pick the different pieces, then I derived pleasure from the skilful instrumentals and the energy of the tunes. The two vocalists had nice voices, but for me, they were overpowered by the four instruments. It could have been the acoustics in our venue or maybe they should have dropped one instrument out until the bridge, to allow the vocals to come through.

Acushla played to a good sized audience who were appreciative of their talents, although communication with the audience didn't really happen much until the second half - then it was good.

In summary, not my cup of tea; but they are very good musicians, and you should see them for yourselves, so you can make your own mind up.

Graham

Damien Barber & Mike Wilson

13th February

Damien Barber is from Norfolk and part of the all-singing-all-dancing Demon Barbers who are, according to their website, pushing the boundaries of English traditions. Mike Wilson is the youngest member of the Wilson Family from Teesside, described by Peter Bellamy as the Northern Wilsonia - a vocal orchestra.

Damien is heavily influenced by earlier Norfolk singers such as Walter Pardon and Peter Bellamy, sounding equally fine with or without concertina or guitar. Mike's powerful and earthy singing draws on a rich heritage from the rural and industrial North East.

The duo treated a packed Readifolk audience with selections from their vast combined repertoire, several of which feature on their album *Under the Influence*. They entertained us with



depth, humour and tons of chat (but no chat back, as requested.)

One of the songs was *Heather Down the Moor*, performed as a floor spot the previous week. Damien and Mike's version was slower but just as lovely,

though personally I preferred the faster, local version.

One can learn a lot by going to a Readifolk night and agreeing to write a review. For example, that some people believe Nostradamus accurately predicted the future, and that Al Stewart was part of the late sixties folk revival. I'd never heard his *Nostradamus* before hearing Damien and Mike sing it. But I'm still a novice who doesn't know much, but knows well what she likes. Apart from the tunes, it's the stories about people that I love. Folk speaks to tradition, which is perhaps why it seems (to some) stuck in a bygone era, with nothing relevant to say. Wrong! For traditional, read timeless.

Take, for example, Ewan McColl's loving but unsentimental tribute to his dad, a fighting union man, sung beautifully and movingly by Damien and Mike. If you want what's yours by right, you'll have to struggle with all your might. As relevant today as ever, in my view.

Damien and Mike are currently working on their second album *The Old Songs*, to be launched this summer.

Debbie

Andy Smythe Band

27th February

Something that makes Readifolk special as a live venue is the club atmosphere, in which guests perform their sets as part of an evening that includes floor singers, club news and fundraising. Floorsingers vary from performers of professional standard to club regulars, to first-time performers. All are welcome, and it is the combination of these parts that makes a good evening, a substantial part of which always comes together on the night. Then the guests themselves are pretty varied, from old friends to rising stars, from local musicians to travellers from abroad, with all varieties of line-up and instruments.

Tonight there was very much a Readifolk audience, so The Andy Smythe Band were brought right into the heart of the club's community. The band formed the new element to the evening, being a relatively new lineup and certainly new to Readifolk. There was an amount of anticipation from the start as they brought on an electric piano and a stunning purple electric violin.



Pulling the show together on this occasion was MC Ian Freedman, who was swift to draw on familiar faces from the audience to provide floorspots. Ian kicked off the event together with Lance Burns on the didgeridoo, performing a favourite rendition of theirs at the club *She Moved through the Fair*, followed by a set of songs from myself before moving on to the guests.

The Andy Smythe Band brought a rare appearance of electric instruments. These they mixed in with acoustic sounds, kicking off their set with Andy's unamplified voice accompanied by his electric piano, before bringing on the full electric accompaniments from the bass guitar and that attention-grabbing purple fiddle.

Andy's friendly, relaxed style works well in a club venue. He has a light voice that suits a small, acoustic setting, and sounded particularly good with the easy-listening solos that he accompanied with the piano, and the jazzy numbers when his voice rose above Barry's stunning fiddle improvisations and the steady hand of Les on the bass guitar. As an ensemble I think it is with these pieces that their sound works best. The group also performed a handful of folk songs, with a couple of these

performed by Les, who has a more traditional folk voice and I think it would be interesting to hear both voices working together.

Each musician in the ensemble had his own strengths, and when Ian invited Barry, who takes a clear joy in improvisation, to play on the all-join-in number *Enjoy Yourself*, this set a great tone for the second half, in which the guests' second set was preceded by popular floor spots from club regular Annie London and (just off the plane from Glasgow) Danny McNamara.

For me, bringing together the elements of an evening, involving everyone and making the guests feel at home in the club is what makes for a good evening at Readifolk. Tonight's MC Ian Freedman certainly brought the best from everyone, making this a most enjoyable guest night.

Alison

Ewan McLennan

6th March



Ewan McLennan is this year's winner of the BBC 2011 Folk Horizon Award. Mike Harding described him as "...one of the most exciting new voices I've heard in years" and Ewan lived up to these high expectations. He gave us a broad selection of traditional Scottish and Irish songs, while the second set also featured two of his own songs, *The Yorkshire Regiment* and *Another Morning's Beggar*. All

these songs subtly show his passion for music, history and social change. Janet, our MC for the evening, was clearly smitten, saying as we broke for the interval, "His voice and guitar blend as one".

When Ewan takes the floor, you immediately notice the way he holds his guitar – classical training would be your first thought and you would be right. Your second thought would be, "Martin Simpson" and again, you are right, Martin was key in developing Ewan's guitar style. The sound is superb. His Martin Cole guitar is a steel string version of a classical guitar and complemented his style and voice perfectly. Most of the songs he played are on his Album, *Rags and Robes* while his web site has audio clips and cover notes.

Ewan opened with *Coorie Doon*, a Scottish miner's lullaby followed by an instrumental version of the tune commonly associated with *Auld Lang Syne*. Then, he gave us his arrangement of *Tramps and Hawkers*, the track that had so thrilled Mike Harding. As *I Roved Out*, *A Man's A Man*, *Joe Hill*, *Boots of Spanish Leather* (yes, Bob Dylan!), *Jute Mill Song* and others followed, including some fine unaccompanied singing. *Jock Stewart* was his encore. Asked if winning the Horizon Award had changed his life greatly, Ewan replied, "No, except I have a good run of bookings at clubs and festivals. That is how I want it. I want to learn my trade properly". He is clearly a musician of great integrity who will not take shortcuts. We expect to hear a lot more from this polite, humorous and understated Scotsman in the years to come.

Sandra

Jez Lowe

20th March

Jez Lowe's reputation and striped shirts go before him. He's a prolific song writer. But what is he like? Oh, he's like a Tyneside Ralph McTell, but doesn't go on about miserable childhoods.

The tone of the evening was established with the title of his opening song about an outlaw: *Will of the People* (groan). Many of Jez's songs are social commentary; not the "wring your hands and wear sack cloth" type, but tongue in cheek, witty songs which, nonetheless, make a serious comment. They are accompanied expertly on guitar (a left-handed Taylor), mandolin, mandola and even a harmonica.

Tonight, Jez was on his own - our venue is too small for his *Bad Pennies* - which led to a wonderful intimacy. Jez didn't so much introduce the songs as share them with us, revealing their secrets, telling anecdotes of how they were written, or odd circumstances in which they have been played. He built up a strong rapport with the audience who were keen to join in the choruses. Most of his music derives from the heavy industrial heritage of the North East. *Taking on Men* is one of his best known songs and exudes the optimism of a new ship building contract and the opportunities for work. *Small Coal* tells of the pain getting the last pieces out of the seam. His miner friends wondered why he wanted to write such a song: "If you were down there, you wouldn't want to write about it".

Then comes the reckoning of mass unemployment in the 80s, following the miner's strike, and the *Ex-Pitmen's Pot Holing Pub Quiz Team* is a country and western style celebration of how some miners spent their time when the mines closed. *That's What the Vikings Say*, celebrates the Nordic roots of the region and muses on how delighted they would be with today's world of war, pillage plunder, rape and violence.

Jez is a song writer grounded in reality with a self deprecating sense of humour, and the encore was about taking a terrible revenge on *Hartlepool Town* where a monkey was mistaken for a Frenchman and hanged. I caught up with Jez in the interval when he outlined his next projects. A one-man show, "Muse McColl" revisiting the songs he did as part of BBC's Radio Ballads and then the "Pitman Poets", with Bob Fox, Benny Graham and Billy Mitchell, inspired by the Pitman Painters.

Robert



Photo: Galena

You can help...

Fancy writing something for the newsletter?

We'll always need people who can review guest night performances with fresh insight. But alternatively, how about an article about an instrument you play or have a particular fondness for? Or perhaps you could transcribe a favourite song or two, giving us some background and history. Or maybe you could research the life and times of an essential folk singer.

And folk-related general interest articles, or other editorial could all help to enhance the Readifolk experience.

Whatever ideas you have we'd like to hear more, so contact Stewart - I'm often at guest nights, or you can email me - stewart@readifolk.org.uk

Recording History

What was once an oral tradition has now been supplemented by a recording tradition.

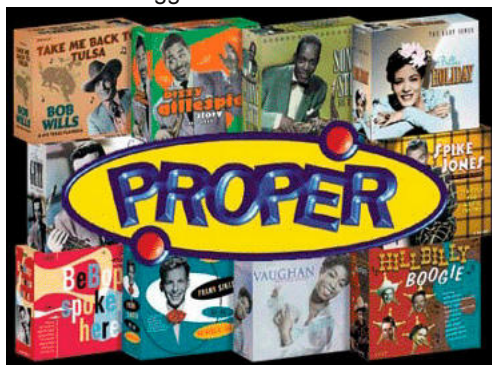
Steve Bingham looks into some favoured resources.

Why are there still folk record companies today? The process of getting music out of an artist's head and on to a listener's choice of listening device is a long and complicated one. It requires considerable skills and a lot of time. Some artists will be willing to learn the skills and others may be prepared to expend the time, but most will need help of some kind, and that is what the record company can provide.

Yes, an artist can sing their songs to their computer; upload the results to YouTube and let their friends know that they are available. If they provide a good listening experience word may spread and they may become well known, but it will take a long time, and there are an awful lot of 'ifs' involved. A well produced album, properly packaged and promoted, and sold through recognised music outlets, is much more likely to reach more people and consequently promote the artist, and help them to earn a better living.

The relationships between artists and record companies are as varied as there are artists and record companies. Some artists stick with the same label for many years. Others change company with every release. An increasing number of artists set up their own record labels. In some cases this may be for tax reasons, but in others it is because they believe that owning their own label gives them more control over all aspects of the process. They may still buy services from established record companies, but the end result goes out under their own name.

Who are these record companies and labels? The most significant, but probably least known, is a company called Proper Music www.propermusic.com. Many artists and even some of the bigger record labels in the folk world use Proper as their distributor.



They appear to have cornered the market in distributing independently produced music of several genres. They do occasionally release records in their own right. The annual compilation of the BBC Folk Awards nominees has been one of the biggest sellers in folk music for the last three years. This is a high profile release sold through record shops as a double CD and through iTunes and other music download sites. It contains tracks taken from the albums of those artists nominated for awards at the BBC Folk Awards held each February.

Topic Records www.topicrecords.co.uk operates as a more traditional record label. It claims to be the oldest independent record label in the world and has just celebrated its 70th



birthday with the release of a seven CD set showcasing its back catalogue. Topic has been responsible for issuing the majority of the music by traditional artists recorded in the second half of the 20th century. They have also recorded many of the best known singers and musicians from the revival. Their current catalogue includes names such as the whole of the Watsons clan, John Tamms and Martin Simpson. Much of their back catalogue is available to download.

Fellside Recordings Limited www.fellside.com Started life in 1976 when founders Paul & Linda Adams gave up performing and turned to recording. It operates two labels: Fellside, for folk music, and Lake, which concentrates on jazz. Paul has a reputation as an outstanding producer and this shows in the high quality of the recordings released by Fellside. Fellside also has a reputation for nurturing new talent and this is apparent from their catalogue which contains early releases by many of today's names in folk music. The company is based in the Lake District and consequently many of their artists are from the North of England and Scotland.



Wild Goose Records www.wildgoose.co.uk is similar to Fellside in that it provides a complete service to its artists.



Doug Bailey, who founded the Wild Goose label in the 1980s, has been involved in English music for most of his life and this interest is reflected in the output of the label. Many of the recordings feature music from specific areas of England including dance music and village band music from Hampshire where Wild Goose is based. Not all of the music is traditional; however in Mick Ryan and George Papavgeris, Wild Goose has two noted writers in the English tradition. The quality of Wild Goose productions is remarkable, rivalling the standards expected from a major record company.

Greentrax Recordings www.greentrax.com is Scotland's leading folk label. It produces records in all Scottish styles including material in Gaelic. Greentrax is unusual among British folk labels in that they also license music from a number of American recording companies. This American material is mainly in the Scottish and Irish styles.



There are many other folk labels but these are the ones that have served us well over the years and look like they will continue to do so.

A Song Worth Singing

Whiskey In The Jar

More than just an awkward rock song...

If you investigate this old Irish song on the internet, you'll discover that a vast number of people have recorded a version of it. You'll also come across countless irascible people who, when put out of the misery of believing that it was written by Metallica, are then confronted by those who think it originated with Thin Lizzy. No, despite Eric Bell's inspired guitar riff, we need to go back further than 1972 to find some possible explanations of what this song might be about.

On the face of it, it is simply the tale of an Irish outlaw who robs a captain or a colonel in the army, takes the loot back to his lover, but is betrayed by her, and ends up in jail, sometimes ending in either his hanging or his escape. Some variations may imply that his lover was having an affair with the officer he robbed, but she was certainly involved in his arrest, sabotaging his ammunition while he slept, to ensure his capture when he awoke. In at least one version, he escapes from jail and subsequently kills her.

It's an old song, with several versions and a plethora of variations. Its earliest form seems to be a ballad called *Patrick Flemming*, from the 17th century, and is also known under the titles of *The Irish Robber*, *Captain Devin*, *Gilgarrah Mountain*, and others.

Patrick Flemming was a real person; a highwayman who was hanged in 1650. Some commentators have him as a barbaric man who not only murdered several, but disfigured victims he didn't kill, and even engaged in child kidnapping. The song was possibly written as a broadside to mark his execution, though we can't definitely date its

origins as early as that, but known versions of it romanticise him a good deal, referring to him as a "valiant soldier".

But American folklorist Alan Lomax gives a hint of something more about the song: "...in Ireland, where the gentlemen of the roads robbed English landlords, they were regarded as national patriots".

This implies a historical context to consider. By the mid 17th century, Ireland had been under some form of English rule for a long time, and this inspired much resentment. It seems likely that even if the original perpetrator was nothing more than a thieving murderer, forms of the song evolved that represent him as something of a heroic freedom fighter; a republican, patriotically hoodwinking the English rulers.

The chorus has many variants, and may once have been a corruption of something in Gaelic. But what of the title? Maybe it is simply an expression of the idea that something good may yet happen - that while there is whiskey in the jar there is still hope (of reprieve or escape, or maybe a less deceitful lover). But by the time the phrase is used as its title, the song is about a romantic outlaw with an eye for the women, so perhaps the whiskey is akin to the cookies in the cookie jar that American philanderers are said to dip their hands in.

The version here is based on one performed by the Dubliners (who are apt to swap verses and lines around, or leave them out altogether). They have recorded it several times, and there are many examples of them singing it on YouTube.

As I was go-ing ov-er the far famed Ker-ry Mountains, I met with Captain Farrell and his first produced my pis-tol and then pro-duced my ra-pier, Saying "Sta-nd and de-li-ver, for you money he was counting. I are a bold de-ceiv-er". Musha ring dumma du dumma dah, Wack fol de dadd-i-o, wack fol de dadd-i-o, There's whiskey in the jar.

1. As I was going over the far famed Kerry Mountains,
I met with Captain Farrell and his money he was counting.
I first produced my pistol and I then produced my rapier,
Saying "Stand and deliver, for you are a bold deceiver".

Chorus:

Musha ring dumma du dumma dah,
Wack fol de daddi-o, wack fol de daddi-o,
There's whiskey in the jar.

2. I counted out his money and it made a pretty penny,
I put it in me pocket and I took it home to Jenny.
She sighed and she swore that she never would deceive me,
But the devil take the women for they never can be easy.
3. I went unto my chamber all for to take a slumber,
I dreamt of gold and jewels and for sure it was no wonder.

But Jenny drew me charges and she filled them up with water,
Then sent for Captain Farrell to be ready for the slaughter.

4. It was early in the morning just before I rose to travel,
Up comes a band of footmen and likewise Captain Farrell.
I first produced my pistol for she'd stolen away me rapier,
But I couldn't shoot the water, so a prisoner I was taken.
5. Now there's some take delight in the carriages a-rolling
And others take delight in the hurling and the bowling
But I take delight in the juice of the barley
And courting pretty fair maids in the morning bright and early
6. If anyone can aid me 'tis me brother in the army,
If I can find a station in Cork or in Killarney.
And if he'll go with me we'll go roaming in Kilkenny,
And I'm sure he'll treat me better than my only sporting Jenny

Readifolk Newsletter

In answer to a few queries: Notes is made entirely with open source software (with the exception of some fonts). We thank the countless developers and maintainers of Scribus, Openoffice, GIMP and Inkscape for graphics and layout; lilypond and Tuxguitar for music transcription; pdftk and pdfJAM for PDF manipulation; Liberation fonts; Ubuntu and other Linux operating systems. And, of course, all who have contributed to this issue in any way, whether you intended to, or not. Vive la revolution!



READIFOLK

READING'S FOLK SONG & MUSIC CLUB

Every Sunday 8:00 - 10:30 p.m.



Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC)

35-39 London Street, Reading RG1 4PS

PROGRAMME APRIL - JUNE 2011

3 April	Dick Miles www.dickmiles.com	<i>A fine singer of traditional songs with concertina accompaniment.</i>
10 April	Theme: 'Come Rain, Come Shine'	<i>Whatever the weather, come along and give us a song.</i>
17 April	Three Pressed Men www.steamage.co.uk/threepm.htm	<i>By popular demand, a return to the club for this entertaining trio. TPM perform wonders with voices, hammer dulcimer, guitar, melodeon, whistles, harmonica, and lots of concertinas!</i>
24 April	Singers Night	<i>It's the usual format – a song, a tune, a poem, a joke or just sit and be entertained. You will all be very welcome.</i>

1 May	Theme: 'Shoots and Leaves'	<i>Is it a horticultural or a homicidal theme? You decide.</i>
8 May	Kieran Halpin www.kieranhalpin.com	<i>One of Ireland's most respected singer/songwriters. His performance is both witty and passionate.</i>
15 May	Singers Night	<i>It's your turn to entertain us. Don't be shy, we want to hear you.</i>
22 May	Bram Taylor www.bramtaylor.com	<i>An entertaining artist with a distinctive voice and relaxed stage presence. Lots of opportunities for joining in with your favourite songs.</i>
29 May	Jim McLean www.acousticvillage.co.uk <i>In Support:-</i> Anthea Neads & Andy Prince www.antheaneads.com & The Westlanders	<i>Readifolk is supporting the weekend Music4Mental Health Festival which culminates in this terrific triple-bill, headed by the irrepressible Jim McLean, supported by the beautiful singing of Anthea Neads with Andy Prince on bass guitar, plus our local super group The Westlanders.</i>

5 June	Tim Laycock www.timlaycock.co.uk	<i>'Tim simply enjoys performing, and his entertaining style of music & song is enthralling. Musical excellence, you will not want the evening to end.'</i>
12 June	Theme: 'Body Count'	<i>Wanted Dead or Alive – songs with lots of bodies. We'll keep the score.</i>
19 June	Tattie Jam www.tattiejam.com	<i>A Scottish duo offering a brew of songs, from dark ballads and protest songs to off-the-wall humour, and tunes ranging from slow airs to driving Strathspeys and kinetic jigs and reels.</i>
26 June	Tom Kitching & Gren Bartley www.tomandgren.co.uk	<i>Tom & Gren are one of the brightest young acts on the folk scene today. They play and sing music from a range of sources, accompanied by superb fiddle, guitar and banjo playing.</i>

Admission: £5 Guest nights; £1 Singers & Theme nights

More information from our web site www.readifolk.org.uk

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Listen to the Readifolk Radio Show on Reading4U, the internet arm of Reading Community Radio, every Friday evening 6 - 8 p.m. www.reading4u.co.uk and click on 'Listen Live'.