

# Notes

## The Newsletter of Readifolk

Issue 14

Reading's folk song  
and music club

Summer 2012

*Welcome*  
to another Readifolk  
newsletter



Dave Ellis & Boo Howard bring songs and music to  
Readifolk on 22nd July.

*"Wonderful guitar, sublime harmonies and soulful vocals"*

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### Rumblings from the Roots

This edition of Notes marks the 30th anniversary of Readifolk, and we'd like to thank everyone who has contributed to its success, and attended club events over those years. We hope that Readifolk will continue to provide a place where you can share music, or listen to others, for many more years to come.

Unlike many clubs, Readifolk remains open on most Sundays during the summer months. We work on the assumption that you are not all on holiday at the same time. So do come along and support the club whenever you can.

We have an impressive range of events in our summer programme with several Guest Nights and including a number of newcomers to the club – all carefully selected and highly recommended!

You will find details of all our forthcoming events in July, August and September on the back cover of this newsletter and on pages 4 and 5 there are previews of all the Guest Nights in the same period.

We draw your attention to the special Charity concert on 8 July featuring Pete Orton, Wallingford's own writer and purveyor of hilarious original songs. All proceeds from this concert, including the artist's fee, will be donated to Water Aid. You can learn more about the work of Water Aid on their website [www.wateraid.org](http://www.wateraid.org). Do come along and give your support and help us achieve a bumper amount for this very worthy Charity.

Please make a note in your diary that the club is closed on Sunday 5 August. We, and several other club members, will be on holiday at the Sidmouth Folk Week where we will be talent-spotting for the club and having a good time in the process.

It's business as usual on the following Sunday (12th August) when we have one of our popular theme nights, coinciding with the end of the London Olympics.

The Readifolk Radio Show continues to broadcast on the internet ([www.reading4u.co.uk](http://www.reading4u.co.uk)) on Friday evenings from 6 pm to 8 pm. The show features some live performers and interviews with our guests and other celebrities. It is well worth a listen.

A new initiative from within the club is the launch of the Readifolk Roadshow. This show is made up from the many excellent singers and musicians who are regulars at Readifolk. They made their first public appearance recently at The Retreat in St John's Street, Reading and received a glowing reception. As well as advertising the club to a wider audience, the performers kindly donated their fee to the club funds – so many thanks and well done to you all. We look forward to your future outings.

Finally, we'd like to wish you all an enjoyable summer and we hope that you will spend some of it with us at Readifolk.

**Una & Colin**

## Folk Heroes

It's not only singers and musicians who have made a difference to folk music; collectors of traditional songs have also played a part in making folk the way it is today. Steve Bingham looks at the life of...

# Cecil Sharp

It is said that life begins at 40. This is certainly true for Cecil Sharp and his life in folk music. He was 40 when on Boxing Day 1899 he saw the Headington Quarry Morris dancers for the first time. Sharp realised that Morris dancing was part of English culture that was on the verge of extinction and determined to do something about it. It took a further three years before Sharp started his work of collecting folk dances and songs.

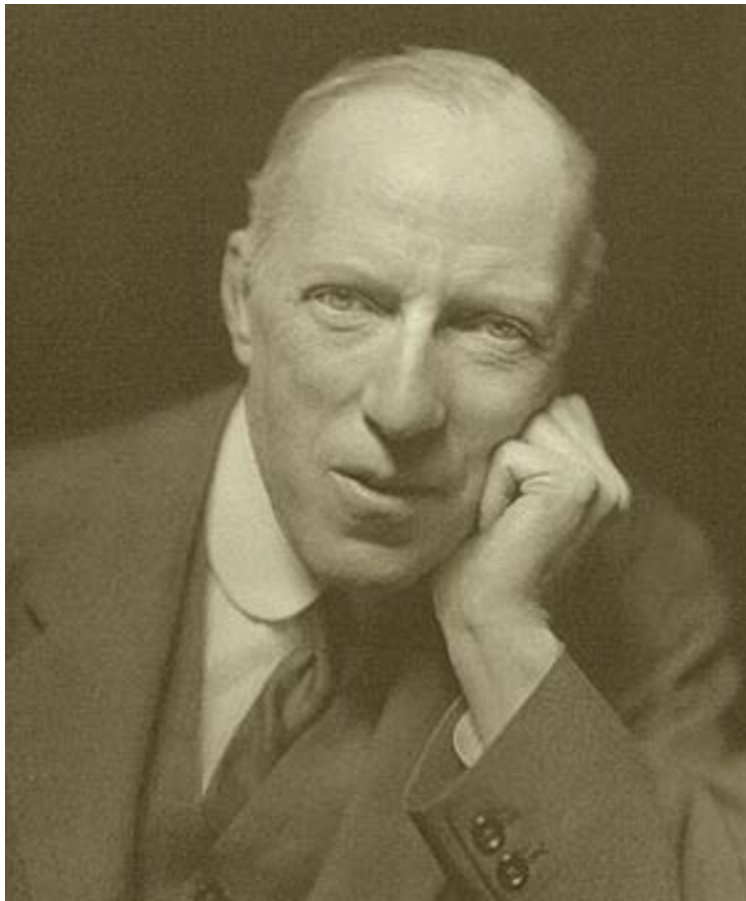
Sharp was born on 20th November 1859 into an upper middle class family. His father was a successful London merchant. Both his parents were cultured people with interests in the arts and particularly music.

Throughout his life Sharp suffered with ill health. This caused him to leave Uffington School at the age of 15 and receive private coaching for Cambridge. He left Cambridge with a good degree but seems to have spent as much time playing his violin and developing his skills as a composer as on his studies.

His father believed that young men should learn to stand on their own feet and that they should do this as independently as possible. Cecil was given £10 and a ticket to Adelaide in South Australia. In 1883 he got a job as a clerk in an Adelaide bank and the following year used his slight knowledge of law to obtain a post as secretary to the Chief Justice of South Australia.

Very soon after he arrived in Australia he was appointed assistant organist in Adelaide cathedral and over the next few years obtained various posts with local musical societies. In 1889 he resigned his post and became a partner in the Adelaide School of Music. He had some success as a composer with one light opera and some children's Christmas carols being performed.

In 1892 Sharp returned to England where he married Constance Birch – a girl he had met before he went to Cambridge. The following year he obtained the job of music teacher at the preparatory Ludgrove School in North London. He held this post until 1910. In 1896 he acquired a part-time post as director of the Hampstead Conservatoire of Music which he held for almost ten years but resigned following a dispute over his rights to take on students for extra tuition. By



this time he was deriving a small income from publishing folk music and now started to give lectures and demonstrations of the dances he had collected.

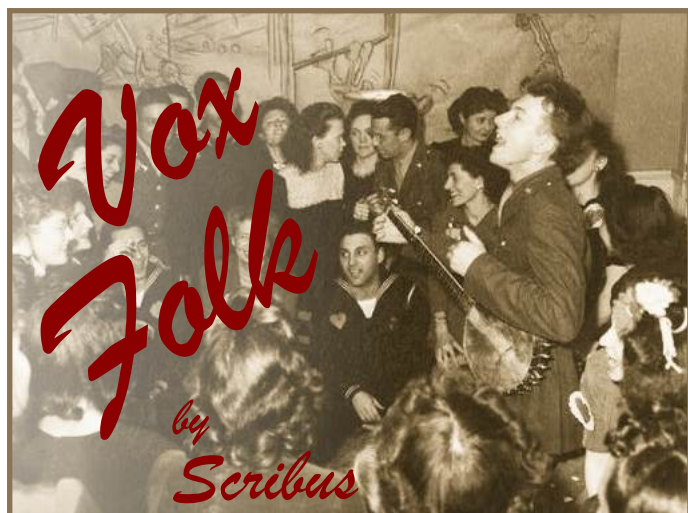
In 1903 Sharp had started using his weekends for trips to Somerset and other parts of England to collect songs and dances. He had developed a form of notation that enable him to record dances and publish them in a form that could be used for teaching. In 1907 he published his first book of Morris dances and between 1910 and 1913 he published a three volume work on the Sword Dances of Northern England.

With the outbreak of war in 1914 Sharp was at a loss for what to do. He was too old to join the forces and felt that he did not have skills appropriate to a country at war. He left England for America where he lectured on folk music and organised summer

schools where traditional dances were taught. He was joined by his assistant Maud Karpeles and together they went on field trips into the Appalachian Mountains where they collected many English folk songs that had crossed the Atlantic and been adapted to their new home. It should be pointed out that this was not a case of running away to America. Sharp crossed the Atlantic on six occasions facing the 'U-boat menace' on each trip. His work was also often interrupted by attacks of fever.

After the war Sharp returned to England and continued his work. He became an adviser to the Department of Education on the use of folk dance and songs in schools. However, much of his energy was taken up with dealing with the politics of the English Folk Dance Society that he had been instrumental in founding back in 1911. Sharp died of a heart attack on 23 June 1924.

Cecil Sharp is often criticised for the ways in which he 'tidied up' songs for publication. It is true that he cleaned up lyrics and ironed out quiriness in the tunes. However, it must be realised that the changes he made were in order to make the songs acceptable to the public and to enable them to be performed by everybody from school children to adults. He did ensure that his original texts were preserved and these can now be studied and used by performers in these more enlightened and tolerant times. Without the work of Cecil Sharp many of the dances and songs would just have vanished.



**A roundup of news snippets, information and disconnected folk jottings.**

## News and Stuff



To commemorate Woody Guthrie's centenary on 14th July, Nonesuch Records have released **Mermaid Avenue: The Complete Sessions**, featuring Billy Bragg and Wilco, who collaborated with Woody's daughter, Nora, to record previously unheard Woody Guthrie songs. This is a four disk set, comprising remastered versions of **Mermaid Avenue Volumes I and II** as well as a new collection of 17 songs from the original sessions, **Mermaid Avenue Volume III**. The fourth disk will contain **Man in the Sand**, Kim Hopkins' 1999 film, which documents the collaboration.

Japanese scientist Shigeyoshi Osaki has spent 35 years studying spider silk, and has devised a way of bundling the silk strands together into violin strings, each one requiring up to 15,000 filaments. Claimed advantages are higher tensile strength than nylon, which could lead to thinner and more responsive strings, and better harmonic properties, giving added complexity to the sound, described as "soft and more profound". You can judge the results for yourself at <http://bcove.me/n9ttxi42>



Despite Olympic chief, Lord Coe, joking that he wanted to see 5,000 Morris dancers at the Olympic opening ceremony, Morris dancers across the country are incensed at the complete lack of inclusion of this traditional English culture. The ceremony is usually seen as an opportunity for the host country to showcase its national culture, but artistic director Danny Boyle has said he wants to 're-think' tradition and represent it with pop and film. We wait with interest to see if the Morris Federation's promise of Morris Dance flashmobs during the Olympics will be realised.

Meantime, Scottish culture will be represented during the closing ceremony, and some of it comes from Reading in the form of the Reading Scottish Pipe Band, which has been appointed to play on August 12th, taking them to a potential worldwide audience of 4 billion. The band was established over fifty years ago, and currently consists of 44 pipers and ten drummers. They will also serenade the Olympic torch as it passes through Reading on the 10th and 11th of July. You can find out more about them at [www.readingscottish.org](http://www.readingscottish.org)

[www.readifolk.org.uk](http://www.readifolk.org.uk)

The BBC will be reprising the Radio Ballads on Radio 2 in the run up to the Olympics. Featuring 50 new songs composed by the likes of Jez Lowe, Chris Wood, Martin Simpson, Julie Matthews and Steve Tilston, the six one-hour long programmes focus on the Olympics Through The Ages, including the Berlin Games of 1936 and the Munich Massacre of 1972, involving not only the quest for Olympic glory, but also the controversies, boycotts and protests surrounding them. The original series of Radio Ballads from the 1950s was largely the work of Ewan MacColl, Peggy Seeger and Charles Parker, the music of which is still available on various CDs. Another series was made in 2006, and the new series is scheduled to run from the beginning of July.

There have been several box sets of Bob Dylan's work released in the past, assembling various parts of his back catalogue into one package, but there have been several suggestions in the music press recently that Columbia Records are preparing to release his entire canon of recorded work in one mega box set, which will comprise 40 or more CDs, including rarities and bootlegs. There is no official comment about the truth of this, but mean time, his Bobness is at work on his 35th studio album, which is said to have a Latin American feel to it. Apparently, he's also recently bought himself a set of Highland bagpipes.

Flutes made of bird bones and mammoth ivory, unearthed in caves in southern Germany, have been carbon dated to around 42,000 years old. There is now a total of eight flutes dating from 30,000 years old from the region, and so far these are the earliest known instruments to be made by modern human beings. Professor Nicholas Conard says that they show "... a very well established musical tradition in this early stage of modern humans occupying Europe." Some anthropologists reckon that the musical sensibilities of Homo Sapiens, resulting in social bonds and networks, is one reason that we eventually dominated over Neanderthals.



Photo: University of Tübingen

## Farewells

**Jerry McCain - died 28/3/12 aged 81.** American blues singer and harmonica player who plied a modest musical trade during the 60s and 70s before fading from view. He returned to the spotlight in the late 80s and made his first trip to Europe, which brought him a wider audience, and received the Alabama Folk Heritage award in 2007.

**Earl Scruggs - died 28/3/12 aged 88.** Seminal American banjo player, who developed a three finger banjo picking style ("Scruggs style") which is now a defining characteristic of bluegrass music. At the time, it was decried by some purists, and eventually his musical open-mindedness also led him to work with the likes of Leonard Cohen, Ravi Shankar and Elton John, as well as collaborating with Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, and other folk and rock musicians.



**Barney McKenna - died 5/4/12 aged 72.** The last original member of The Dubliners, his banjo playing was an indispensable part of the band's sound. As a boy, he wanted to play the mandolin, but could only afford a banjo, which he subsequently tuned to an octave below mandolin tuning, a method that has since become closely associated with Irish banjo playing.

**Greg Ham - died 19/4/12 aged 58.** Flautist with Australian band Men At Work, he used a riff from what most people thought of as a folk song in their biggest hit, which decades later lead to expensive litigation against the band.

**Levon Helm** - died 19/4/12 aged 71. Singer and drummer with The Band, who still have a far reaching influence on many musicians in the country-rock bracket, as well as wider areas of folk and blues. He later diversified into acting, but always remained active as a singer and drummer, both live, and on several albums recorded even after surgery for throat cancer, with which he fought a long battle.

**Bert Weedon** - died 20/4/12 aged 91. There may not be an aspiring guitarist in Britain who has not, at some point, owed a debt to Bert Weedon. Best known for creating the popular Play In A Day manual, he was also a regular on TV and radio in the 60s, inspiring many to pick up their first guitar.

**Chris Ethridge** - died 23/4/12 aged 65. American country-rock bass guitarist and one time member of The Flying Burrito Brothers, he co-wrote several songs with Gram Parsons, as

well as working with Judy Collins, Ry Cooder, Linda Ronstadt, The Byrds and Willie Nelson.

**Doug Dillard** - died 16/5/12 aged 75. From a musical family from Missouri, he popularised fingerpicking banjo playing in both bluegrass music, and later country and folk rock, by his appearances on many US radio and TV programmes.

**Doc Watson** - died 29/5/12 aged 89. Flat picking American roots guitarist and banjo player. Blind since a child, he managed to carry a vast repertoire in his head that ranged from mountain music, blues, folk, gospel, jazz and pop, delivered with a baritone voice. He rose to prominence on the wave of the folk revival of the 60s, and was a very prolific recording artist, with over 50 LPs to his name. He founded the Sugar Grove Folk Art Museum, and started the annual MerleFest to mark the death of his son Merle in 1985, also a popular guitar player.

## Shows Worth Seeing

Previewing the new season of guest nights coming to Readifolk.



**Pete Orton** will be trekking all the way down from Wallingford to Readifolk on **8th July**. You will laugh a lot, and be helping Water Aid at the same time.

### What he says:

Wallingford's own Writer and Purveyor of Hilarious Original Songs, Raconteur, and all round Good Egg.

### What others say:

"The poet Drosswort babbled 'All you need is love - Doopy Doopy Dah - Love is all you need... etc.' Well, let me tell you, Mr. scribbly-wibbly poet, no it jolly well isn't. There's Parsnips and Teapots and Black Puddings and Poodles and Albert Einstein and Gerbils and Mass Destruction and Cheese and all kinds of groovy things which are much more deserving of robust portrayal in song than soppy old Lurve. Mr Orton provides a show that does what it says on the bin... No love or smoochie stuff... no angst, no gloomy introspection... and no reality guitar solos either. Oh, and no origami either." - *Bunkfest, Wallingford* (actually, since no-one has admitted writing this, these are probably Pete's words!).

### What we say:

If you have seen Pete before, you'll know what to expect. If you haven't, you may get some idea from the above - definitely an experience not to be missed. Pete doesn't have a glitzy website but you can find various clips of his performances on YouTube. All proceeds from this concert, including the artist's fee, go to the very worthy charity Water Aid.

### Hear more:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kCf9\\_v8m6I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kCf9_v8m6I)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2YCFs0UFYc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2YCFs0UFYc)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=xX93mCaIyPU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xX93mCaIyPU)



The highly rated acoustic duo **Dave Ellis and Boo Howard** will be performing at Readifolk on **22nd July**.

### What they say:

Dave and Boo's present acoustic partnership began in 1998 with Dave's intricate guitar work and Boo's mellow vocal combining to create something entirely new and all their own to present to the folk and acoustic clubs. Songs are intelligently



constructed, elegantly articulated and never less than entertaining. The mix is eclectic, but the songs are at the heart of it all, served by imaginative and stylish arrangements and by the singing and playing of two seasoned, wholly in tune musicians.

### What others say:

"Dave Ellis and Boo Howard are a contemporary acoustic duo from London who invite comparisons to Clive Gregson and Christine Collister, although without quite so much doom and gloom in their repertoire." - *Dirty Linen*. "Dave is known for his unique guitar style and Boo for her great voice and exceptional bass playing. Some great original, sensitive and subtle songs, with guitar playing of the highest order. Acoustic rock, folk and blues at its best." - *Cambridge Folk Club*. "Boo Howard's breathy vocal harmonies complement Dave Ellis' smoothly slapped 'n' picked acoustic guitar and come together for a mellow sound that helped them stand out enough to receive national airplay." - *Andy Piper, Taplas*.

### What we say:

We have booked this well-respected duo on the strength of strong recommendations from club members. Listening to their demo CD we were mightily impressed by Boo's vocal talents and Dave's fine guitar playing. They play an entertaining mix of 'folk' styles including blues, jazz and bluegrass.

### Hear more:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cv7KWmBgATY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cv7KWmBgATY)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohjQ4if-hp4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohjQ4if-hp4)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=yL0Untzj0ug](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yL0Untzj0ug)



New young folk band **The Foxglove Trio** will be bringing their instruments and arrangements of traditional songs to Readifolk on **19th August**.

### What they say:

Ffion Mair sings in Welsh and English, plays whistle and bodhran. She has won several singing awards including Best Celtic Folk Singer at Llangollen

Eisteddfod 2011 and New Roots Finals 2010. Patrick Dean plays melodeon, cello and concertina and also sings. Cathy Mason is a multi-instrumentalist who plays guitar and cello and sings. She is currently employed as Musician in Residence at Lord Wandsworth College. The Foxglove Trio formed in 2010 and have since played at a number of Folk Clubs and Festivals around the UK.



#### What others say:

"Ffion Mair Thomas sings with a power and clarity I have not heard in folk music since Maddy Prior first sent shivers through me. Her low notes are disturbingly good, the high notes thrilling, and all sung with sufficient decoration to establish her as one of the finest singers around. Together with Patrick Dean and Catherine Mason they form The Foxglove Trio who offer a unique and very talented performance." - *John Timpany, Woburn Sands Folk Festival 2011*. "For one so young Ffion exuded maturity in her voice and stage presence." - *Jan, Redbourn Folk Club*. "Assured and confident. All the songs were captivating. A beautifully controlled voice - good support and technique." - *New Roots 2010 finals judges*.

#### What we say:

As soon as we heard their demo CD we knew we had to book this highly talented trio. They play a range of instruments including guitar, melodeon, cello and concertina. Lead singer Ffion Mair is an award winning Celtic folk singer and performs songs in English and her native Welsh - much to Una's delight!

#### Hear more:

[www.foxglovetrio.bandcamp.com](http://www.foxglovetrio.bandcamp.com)  
[www.reverbnation.com/foxglovetrio](http://www.reverbnation.com/foxglovetrio)



Singer and guitarist **Mike Nicholson**, will be performing at Readifolk on **9th September**.

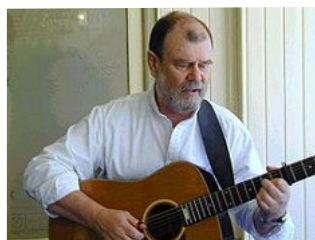


Photo by Pete Collins

#### What he says:

Mike Nicholson is one of those remarkable singers who manages to create an immediate and loyal following everywhere he goes. This is due in large part to his unrestrained passion for what he loves doing

the most - singing good songs! He draws his audience to him through an unassuming approach which only asks that the listener might share his love of singing and of the songs. Mike performs a wide spectrum of material, and generally speaking, it's material that has something to say. From his early acting days, he's retained an enthusiasm for utilising any format which can tell a story or which might stimulate the intellect.

#### What others say:

"Those who have heard Mike Nicholson sing will not need me to tell them what a delightful experience that is. When Mike sings a song it stays sung - and you won't forget it." - *Bob Copper, Copper Family*. "A voice to be proud of, songs to die for and a great personality." - *Bodmin FC, Cornwall*. "It wasn't just his rich, mellow baritone voice that struck home with us but his interpretation and capacity of contrast, his ability, on the one hand, to lead the singing of big chorus songs and, on the other to come back with the most subtle and gentle of ballads. A truly lovely singer." - *Wheaton Aston Festival, Staffordshire*.

#### What we say:

Mike will be known by many of the 'senior' members of Readifolk as he once lived in this area and was a regular at local folk clubs. Mike has a relaxed style of delivery and has amassed a really interesting collection of songs - some traditional and some from contemporary songwriters. We look forward to having Mike back at Readifolk.

#### Hear more:

[www.mikenicholson.me.uk/music.html](http://www.mikenicholson.me.uk/music.html)



On **16th September** Readifolk welcomes another trio of fine musicians - **Red Spirit** - with music ancient and modern.

#### What they say:

Take the first letters of their names REDmond SPicer RITson (Caroline's maiden name) and you have RED SPIRIT. Three of English folk music's high flyers - singer and fiddler Caroline Butler, cellist Gill Redmond, and oboist Charles Spicer of The Mellstock Band - spread their wings with a selection of music

on the theme of birds. Like magpies, they have collected the sparkliest songs and tunes from the middle ages to the twentieth century. Naughty cuckoos, spiralling skylarks, jolly robins, and dark mysterious ravens trill music from Henry Purcell to Hoagy Carmichael while their musical nest is lined with riches from the folk tradition.



#### What others say:

"A delight - you made even *The Birdie Song* sound sophisticated." - *Fee Lock, The Morris Federation*. "Tight." - *Andy Turner, Maggie Lane*. "The CD is lovely - it lightened my drive to Canterbury." - *Pete Cooper, Rattle on the Stovepipe*.

#### What we say:

This is another very talented trio - Gill Redmond on cello and vocals, Caroline Butler on fiddle and vocals and Charles Spicer on oboe, cor anglais and vocals. At Readifolk there will be a special performance of songs and music on the theme of 'Birds', ranging from 17th Century compositions through to the 1940's Johnny Mercer and Hoagy Carmichael classic *Skylark*. This promises to be a very memorable evening.

#### Website:

[www.redspirit.org.uk](http://www.redspirit.org.uk)



The exciting young band **Crownstreet** will be at Readifolk on **30th September**.



#### What they say:

Crownstreet came to be when Val decided she would like to form a girl band, an idea which very quickly shrank to a girl duo of Val and Bobby. They enlisted the help of their two compatriots Simon and Stuart and the band was born. These North Essex musicians have a wealth of experience in the local and national folk scene and in Crownstreet perform songs and tunes, old and new, on 4 voices and 14 different

instruments which they strum, strike, squeeze and blow. Their debut CD **Gardenaire** takes its name from music inspired by a summer afternoon in the garden drinking tea; other tracks include the traditional *Banks of the Sweet Primroses* and *Bold Fisherman* alongside some new songs inspired by vignettes of life, and a Crownstreet version of *Sharks and Bears* by Peterborough based Candlethieves. Tunes include a traditional set of English hornpipes and *Pigjig* which was written after a family visit to Jimmy's Farm.

#### What others say:

"A superbly entertaining ensemble who included a wide variety of instruments in their set." - *Tom Cunliffe*. "Very enjoyable - great tune and certainly lots of surprises." "A great evening. Great musicians all round." - *YouTube comments*.

#### What we say:

We are sure that you will be delighted by this recently formed four-piece band from Essex. Their impressive debut album includes an extraordinary range of instruments including bandoneon, saxophone, musical saw and bagpipes - but don't be put off, as their musical arrangements of traditional, contemporary and self-penned songs and tunes are absolutely delightful. This is another group which we think are capable of making the big time - see them first at Readifolk!

#### Hear more:

[www.myspace.com/crownstreetband/music](http://www.myspace.com/crownstreetband/music)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=82BTBeZIHII](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82BTBeZIHII)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=-i7m0qfJEv8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-i7m0qfJEv8)

# *A Song Worth Singing* England's Glory

*At a recent Readifolk Guest Night, Bob and Gill Berry sang "England's Glory", a modern anthem for the 1888 Match Girls' strike. It is the opening track on their "Bittersweet" album and was written by John Prosser. Sandra Buttrick wanted to find out more, and found there was lots to tell...*

## **"...the age of the smoke and the fire"**

Unrest had been smouldering in the match factories in London for over a decade but the catalyst for the 1888 strike was Annie Besant, socialist, feminist and journalist. She attended a lecture at the Fabian Society about female labour that kindled her interest in the Bryant and May works in the East End of London. Soon, she was at the factory gates, interviewing some of the predominantly female workforce from the poorest part of London. These teenage "daughters of empire" worked fourteen hour shifts, standing all day at workbenches where machinery was safeguarded rather than fingers. The weekly wage of five shillings was seldom received in total because of a draconian system of fines. Offences included talking, dropping matches and unauthorised visits to the toilet. The factory used cheap white phosphorus, causing hair loss, yellow skin and ultimately, "phossy jaw", a fatal type of bone cancer. Banned in Sweden and the USA, it was allowed in Britain, in the interest of free trade. Quakers, Theodore Bryant and Francis May, paid shareholders twenty per cent dividends while exploiting the poorest strata of society. Not all Quaker employers looked after their workers as well as others.

## **"...matches make fortunes"**

Annie wrote an article about the plight of the match girls for the radical newspaper "The Link", under the emotive heading, "White Slavery in London". It was a media sensation, rocking polite Victorian society's belief that slavery was practised only by "inferior races" and a spontaneous boycott of Bryant and May matches began. The company reacted by demanding employees sign a declaration, stating they were content with their working conditions. Some refused, and a pretext was found to fire the leader for "wilfully disobeying" a foreman, sparking a mass walk-out by the women. Management offered re-instatement. The workers demanded the abolition of fines. Management refused and virtually the whole workforce then went on strike.

## **"...sisters and daughters"**

Annie Besant was unaware of these events until a delegation of a hundred "pale, ... undersized and ragged" women marched to her office. Overcoming her initial shock, she pledged her support and used her considerable organisational skills, setting up a strike fund and networking with influential friends. Sympathetic newspapers followed the story avidly and readers made donations to the strike fund. Various socialist luminaries supported the cause. George Bernard Shaw distributed strike money; Charles Bradlaugh, MP (founder of the National Secular Society) made a speech in Parliament and a deputation of match girls met fifty other MPs to describe their grievances. Marches and rallies were held all



over London. The London Trades Council (an early Trades Union organisation) became involved and the Union of Women Match Makers was formed.

## **"...matches for men to fire"**

Bryant, too, used the press, giving interviews about happy factories disrupted by socialist agitators. His PR attempts backfired, although, ironically, he gave readers what they wanted; a dark pantomime villain to boo and hiss. Smouldering with anger, Bryant threatened to "make an example of the ringleaders", although he had already sacked them. He blustered about moving the factory to Sweden or bringing workers down from Glasgow and bullied Annie by threatening libel action. Even the tale of Gladstone's statue came back to haunt him. Six years earlier, Bryant, a leading Liberal light, erected a statue of the Prime Minister in Bow, paid for by a compulsory shilling deduction from each employee. At the opening ceremony, some workers jeered and threw stones at the marble figure.

Public support for the matchmakers gained momentum, forcing Bryant to negotiate. He offered to abolish fines and unfair deductions; grievances could be taken directly to the management, bypassing obstructive foremen; meals would be eaten in a separate room to prevent contamination. The terms were accepted and, after three weeks, the women returned to work, victorious.

## **"...fighting for justice"**

Annie continued her involvement with the matchmakers, becoming Secretary of the Matchmakers Union in 1917. She also helped set up the Salvation Army's "model factory", where workers were paid double the Bryant and May rates and only harmless red phosphorus was used.

Matches were made at Bryant and May's Bow site until 1979. The derelict factory was redeveloped in the eighties and is now a luxurious gated housing complex. A blue



plaque there states, "The Match Girls Strike of 1888 was led here by Annie Besant, Journalist and Lecturer". Annie would not approve, as she saw herself as a facilitator and always insisted that the strike was led by the women themselves.

Bryant and May survived as an independent company for almost eighty years. The registered trade name still exists but is owned by a Swedish company. At the time of the strike, however, England's Glory matches (from which the song takes its name) were not made at Bow but in Gloucester by another company, S J Moreland and Sons, which was later taken over by Bryant and May in 1913. Still, a little lyrical licence can be looked on leniently if it

leads to such an inspirational song. Another myth is that the match girls' walk out was the first time the word "strike" was used in this way. Sadly, this is not true, as this use of the word can be traced back to the previous century when sailors stopped work and "struck sails", to prevent the ships leaving port.

### "Fighting is hard for the rights of a woman"

Like many songwriters, John Prosser is a shadowy figure! The only internet reference is on a forum which describes him being heckled by a feminist when performing this song. She objected to the words, "It's hard to fight when you're a woman", which he promptly changed to, "Fighting is hard for

the rights of a woman".

### "...the flame will not die"

Yet, the match girls strike should not be viewed solely in feminist terms. Its historical significance is more than being simply the first all-women strike, as it led to the first trade union for unskilled workers. It was also the first time the media had been used to involve the public and gain support. Above all, the strike was a beacon to the exploited because it showed how a Victorian underclass could begin to take control of their own lives and the song is one of inspiration through the solidarity and bravery of a group of young women.

Words and music by  
John Prosser

Arrangement by  
Ed

Mist on the Thames and the young girls are ris - ing, Christians a - wake; the Lord gives you day,  
Phos-phor-us burns in the cold light of mor - ning, Ling - er - ing still in the air the girls breathe,

Down in the street see the daughters of em - pire, Tramping through Hackney, the fac - tor - y way.  
Matches for men to fire En - gland's glo - ry, Sis - ters and daughters, there is no re - lief.

This is the age of the smoke and the fi - re, This is the age of - free man and slave,  
Smoke stack and mill ris - ing high - er and high - er, This is the age that Vic - tor - i - a gave.

1. Mist on the Thames and the young girls are rising  
Christians awake; the Lord gives you day  
Down in the street see the daughters of empire  
Tramping through Hackney, the factory way  
Phosphorus burns in the cold light of morning  
Lingering still in the air the girls breathe  
Matches for men to fire England's glory  
Sisters and daughters, there is no relief

#### Chorus:

This is the age of the smoke and the fire  
This is the age of free man and slave  
Smoke stack and mill rising higher and higher  
This is the age that Victoria gave

2. Soon we will learn of the death and the danger  
All will be told of the price we must pay  
To carry their news to the friend or the stranger

Matches make fortunes at Bryant and May  
We are the strong for telling our story  
Sackings and fines are the price we must pay  
Losing the battle but winning the war  
We're fighting for justice the factory way

#### Chorus

3. Fighting is hard for the rights of a woman  
Powerless females, no franchise to gain  
But sisters and daughters who kneel before no man  
The strength of the union was born from your tale  
Alice, Kate, Jane, Eliza and Mary  
Sleeping alone in the graves where you lie  
Yours is the victory, you're England's glory  
Matches may fade but the flame will not die

#### Chorus

#### Readifolk Newsletter

It's Jubilee year - our Pearly Jubilee. Contributors to this edition should already have received my unbounded thanks; if you haven't had yours yet, consider this to be it.  
"The worst thing you can do to a traditional song is not sing it." - Martin Carthy



# 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 JULY - SEPTEMBER 2012

|         |  |   |
|---------|--|---|
| 1 July  | <b>Singers Night</b>   | <i>An opportunity for you to make a contribution to a warm and friendly evening.</i>  |
| 8 July  | <b>Pete Orton</b><br><a href="http://www.peteorton.co.uk">www.peteorton.co.uk</a>                | <i>A special Charity concert featuring Wallingford's own writer and purveyor of hilarious original songs. You can catch lots of clips of Pete on YouTube! All proceeds to WATER AID</i> |
| 15 July | <b>Theme<br/>'Names'</b>   | <i>An easy theme tonight. Any song which includes the name of a person, place or thing will do.</i>   |
| 22 July | <b>Dave Ellis &amp; Boo Howard</b><br><a href="http://www.daveandboo.com">www.daveandboo.com</a> | <i>A long-standing musical partnership providing superb harmony vocals, terrific guitar and stunning songs.</i>   |
| 29 July | <b>Singers Night</b>   | <i>The usual format – a song, a tune, a poem, a joke or just come and be entertained.</i>   |



|        |  |   |
|--------|--|---|
| 5 Aug  | <b>CLUB CLOSED</b>   | <i>It's the holiday weekend and Festival time. Business as usual next week.</i>   |
| 12 Aug | <b>Theme<br/>'Winners &amp; Losers'</b>  | <i>It's the end of the London Olympics so it's an appropriate time for tonight's theme.</i>                             |
| 19 Aug | <b>The Foxglove Trio</b><br><a href="http://www.foxglovetriobandcamp.com">www.foxglovetriobandcamp.com</a> | <i>A new young folk band, with lots of instruments, playing mainly traditional songs from around the British Isles.</i> |
| 26 Aug | <b>Singers Night</b>   | <i>Another opportunity for you to exercise your vocal chords.</i>   |



|         |  |  |
|---------|--|--|
| 2 Sept  | <b>Theme<br/>'In the News'</b>   | <i>What has been happening lately? Personal, Local, National or International events are all acceptable.</i>   |
| 9 Sept  | <b>Mike Nicholson</b><br><a href="http://www.mikenicholson.me.uk">www.mikenicholson.me.uk</a>              | <i>A superb voice, a relaxed guitar style, interesting repertoire and a warm presentation.</i>   |
| 16 Sept | <b>Red Spirit</b><br><a href="http://www.redspirit.org.uk">www.redspirit.org.uk</a>                        | <i>A trio of well-respected musicians - Gill Redmond on cello and vocals, Caroline Butler on fiddle and vocals and Charles Spicer on oboe, cor anglais and vocals. Their repertoire includes ancient and modern music.</i> |
| 23 Sept | <b>Singers Night</b>   | <i>Yet another of our popular Singers Nights. Come and add to the entertainment.</i>   |
| 30 Sept | <b>Crownstreet</b><br><a href="http://www.myspace.com/crownstreetband">www.myspace.com/crownstreetband</a> | <i>An exciting young band who perform songs and tunes, old and new – 4 voices and 14 different instruments!</i>  |

**Admission: £6 Guest nights; £2 Singers & Theme nights**

**More information from our web site [www.readifolk.org.uk](http://www.readifolk.org.uk)**

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