

# Notes

The Newsletter  
of Readifolk

**Issue 20**

Reading's folk song  
and music club

**Winter 2013/14**



Folk music: mostly old men with grey beards.  
**Serpentyne will be at Readifolk on 23rd February**

# Folk Heroes

In 2011, 8 greying old geezers reformed the band of their heyday, from 25 years previously. By all accounts it was a triumphant success, and the Home Service gained the BBC Folk Award for best live act in 2012. This was the 6th Folk Award for frontman

## John Tams

by Steve Bingham

John Tams is best known by the general public for his work on television and in the theatre but he started as a folk musician. John was born in Holgate, Derbyshire, in 1949. He was the son of a publican and his family had a strong musical tradition. By the age of 11 he was playing the B flat horn in a local brass band. In 1970 he joined Roger and Helen Watson in the trio Muckram Wakes playing melodeon. Muckram Wakes' first album *A Map Of Derbyshire*, contains John's first hit, *The Pulling Down Song*. In this song John uses his personal experience as an itinerant fairground worker to capture the thoughts of roustabouts as they take down the rides in preparation for moving to the next town. The song became popular and has been recorded by many artists including June Tabor. Some of John's other early songs were recorded by another Derbyshire group the Druids.



In 1973 John started working with Ashley Hutchings in the Albion Band. He worked on many of their most successful albums including *Son of Morris On* which was the follow up to the iconic *Morris On*, an album which blended Morris tunes with a rock rhythm section. Another success was an early production of *Lark Rise to Candleford*. This musical stage show and the album produced from it paint a vivid picture of life in rural southern England at the turn of the 20th century. John had a few songs on Albion Band records but his main influence was as an arranger.

In the late 1970's John formed his own band, the Home Service, which retained the folk instrumentation and rock rhythms and added a brass section. This gave the band a very dramatic sound. They made a couple of successful albums.

In the 1990's John was appointed Musical Director of the National Theatre. He was responsible for some of their most successful productions of the period. *Lark Rise to Candleford* was a reworking of the musical that he had worked on with the Albion Band while *The Mysteries* was a dramatic interpretation of the York cycle of mystery plays featuring an augmented Home Service. His biggest success came in the new century with the musical production based on Michael Morpurgo's

novel *War Horse*. John wrote most of the music for this show which became the National Theatre's most successful show with a long run in London and several overseas versions including a Broadway production in New York. The touring version is still on the road in 2013.

Many of John's songs tell stories from the viewpoint of those involved. This had been the guiding principal behind Ewan McColl and John Parker's 1950s Radio Ballads. In these programmes McColl had taken the words of workers in various

industries and used them to create songs describing their lives. When the BBC wanted to celebrate the 50th anniversary of these groundbreaking programmes, John Tams was the natural choice to be the producer and lead writer. Unlike the original series, where all the songs were written by McColl, Tams gathered a collection of writers, mainly from the world of folk music, and set them to work to write songs for the new radio ballads. Again, workers were interviewed and writers such as Jez Lowe turned their words into songs. The series was successful and the CD of the songs from the shows has sold well.

John became a television actor playing ex-poacher rifleman Daniel Hagman in the ITV production of Bernard Cornwell's Sharpe series of novels. The series is set during the Napoleonic wars and required music to suit the situations. John was responsible for the selection and production of the music which was very effective. An album of the music was released and sold well.

Today John has established himself as a solo performer on the folk scene with three strong albums behind him. The triumphantly reformed Home Service continues to tour, and he can also be seen working in a duo with Barry Coope. In a way this duo has brought him full circle as Barry was a member of one of the later incarnations of Muckram Wakes.

The best place to find out about the availability of John's music is on his official web site [www.johntams.co.uk](http://www.johntams.co.uk) which has all his CDs as well as most of those he has had a hand in.

## News and Stuff

**Reading4U, Reading's community radio station**, which streamed over the internet, finally broadcast its last programme in October. Readifolk had been involved from the very first day of broadcasting, three years ago, contributing a weekly programme made by club members, and more recently helmed by Readifolk's very own broadcasting and t-shirt wearing legend, Ian Freedman. Ian is now a core member of a new team that hope to be bring a new community station to life in the near future. In the meantime, the **Readifolk Radio Show** has found a home on Reading College radio, Blast1386, in the same time slot of 6-8pm on Fridays. Tune in via their website <http://blast1386.reading-college.ac.uk>, or if you live fairly near to the college, you may be able to hear it on an AM receiver at 1386kHz.

**John Spires and Jon Boden** have announced that they will shortly stop touring as a duo, with their final dates in 2014 being their last. However, this, they assure us, will not stop them both continuing with the big band, Bellowhead, and other joint projects.

**46 years after his death**, Woody Guthrie was nominated for the Literary Review's **Bad Sex Award** - something rather less exciting than it sounds. After he died, the manuscript of an unpublished novel, **House of Earth**, was found, finally seeing light in 2013. It's the story of a young couple of subsistence farmers and contains some fairly explicit descriptions of their more passionate moments. Despite being favourite to win this dubious honour, it finally went to Manil Suri's novel **The City of Devi**.

**Regular readers of Notes** may notice some subtle differences to this edition. If you read the electronic version, available from our mailing list or website, you will see that the page size has changed. If you read the printed version, on old fashioned paper, available from libraries, shops and other outlets around Reading, you may notice that the text size is now easier to read. In the past, Notes had to be shrunk to fit the paper copy, making the text quite small, so we hope our reformatting may have

### Contact us:

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and coming events

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#### Readifolk Newsletter

Profuse thanks to the unnamed millions who continue to help with every edition of Notes; you know who you are.

"Folk music is the music that was there before music was invented" - Bob Copper

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



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

improved this. However, it does mean less room to fit stuff in. Let us know which version you prefer.

There is also a text-only version available, from our website, or by contacting Colin (see below), which should be suitable for many text reading devices.

### Farewells

**Phil Chevron - died 8/10/13 aged 56.** Guitarist and songwriter first with The Radiators, and then as a mainstay of The Pogues, he was also an interpreter of the works of Brecht and Weill, a record producer and a leading light of the Dublin music scene. He died of oesophageal cancer.

**Noel Harrison - died 19/10/13 aged 79.** Most widely known for his big hit *Windmills Of Your Mind*, and for being son of actor Rex, he started singing in the folk clubs of the late '50s. Earlier in life he had been an Olympic skier, and in the 1960s, secured parts as an actor in both film and TV. By the 1970s he became disillusioned, retreating to Nova Scotia, living off-grid and growing his own produce. In the '90s he moved to Devon, and occasionally continued to sing locally.

**Austin John Marshall - died 3/11/13 aged 76.**

Primarily a graphic designer, he also produced (and designed covers for) several innovative records of the folk archive, most notably with his one-time wife Shirley Collins. He also wrote an experimental anti-war folk musical **The Great Smudge** that he was finally able to produce when he moved to New York in the '80s, where he could also be seen as the performance poet John the Angel Fish.

**Al Kendrick - died 16/11/13 aged 60.** A retired fireman who was gradually making a name for himself on the folk scene, he also performed in a duo with Corrina, his daughter. A recent appearance at Wallingford Bunkfest led to a subsequent booking for Readifolk, where he was to have appeared in 2014.

# Shows Worth Seeing

Previewing the new season of guest nights coming to Readifolk.

Our first Guest Night of the year is on **5th January** when we welcome a return visit from **Magpie Lane**.

## What they say:

Magpie Lane perform traditional English music and song. They combine powerful vocals with vigorous dance tunes - inventive arrangements on acoustic instruments. Magpie Lane appear regularly at top national Festivals - including Sidmouth, Towersey, Fylde and Chippenham - and have recorded eight critically acclaimed CDs.

## What others say:

"What is so special and unusual about the band is their combination of strong stage presence, delivery, technical skill and instinctive verve, with a genuinely scholarly understanding of the music at its core" - *Jon Boden*. "We have had some superb feedback from audience members. The fact that each member is not only a fine singer but also an instrumentalist in many ways makes the band quite unique. We have been scratching our heads trying to think of another English act which is able to offer the same standard of performance!" - *Alan & Maggie, The Barn in Baston*.

## What we say:

Returning to Readifolk by popular demand, Magpie Lane will get the New Year off to a flying start.

## Hear more:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=stjBk0amoAM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stjBk0amoAM)  
<https://myspace.com/magpielane>



On **12th January** we have the return of one of our favourite singer/songwriters, **Pete Morton**.

## What he says:

Starting out as a busker on the streets of Europe, he has entertained all over the globe with his unique and involving style of song-writing and singing. Pete sings from the heart, delivering songs that tell compelling stories and speak of the human condition from a very unique perspective. With a passionate, strong voice and strident guitar style, traditional songs often rub shoulders with Pete's current writing with remarkable ease. His songs are an unruly mix



of humour, politics, love and social comment, wrapping their way around the folk tradition.

## What others say:

"Not only impressive but a revelation - totally original" - *The Guardian*. "The performance at the live radio show was nothing short of brilliant" - *Rich Warren, The Midnight Special, WFMT*.

## What we say:

Pete has a firm fan base at Readifolk. His past performances at the club have been enthralling. We anticipate another fabulous evening.

## Hear more:

[www.myspace.com/petemortonsongs](http://www.myspace.com/petemortonsongs)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=agtCQvIYqeQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agtCQvIYqeQ)



Scottish entertainer **Jim McLean** is no stranger to Readifolk. We welcome him back on **26th January**.

## What he says:

Acclaimed Scottish guitarist, singer and songwriter. His songwriting covers the whole genre from hard-hitting social comment to the tenderest of love songs. His passion and love for the music shines through every performance. Whether he is inspiring you with his own material, making your feet tap with Country Blues, moving you to song with Celtic and Traditional folk, or re-inventing fellow artistes' material, Jim McLean brings any club to life with pure entertainment and passion.

## What others say:

"He has a fine voice, a unique guitar style and an engaging stage presentation. We think he could be a name to watch for the future" - *Tudor Folk Club*. "His relaxed singing style and wonderful guitar accompaniments to songs from a wide range of sources, old, new and self-penned, have made Jim one of our most popular guests" - *Poppy's Folk Club*.

## What we say:

Jim hardly needs an introduction from us. He has appeared at the club many times and always entertains with his strong vocals, distinctive guitar playing and friendly banter with the audience. We guarantee an enjoyable evening.

## Hear more:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8OBtDF7B](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8OBtDF7B)  
[www.reverbNation.com/jimmclean](http://www.reverbNation.com/jimmclean)



On **9th February** the Irish legend **Kieran Halpin** returns to entertain us.

***What he says:***

Whilst his albums are always something to look forward to, it is live on stage where Halpin makes his mark. Powerful and passionate, intimate and intense, he is impossible to ignore. He has managed to marry his intelligent and thought-provoking lyrics with great melodies and has developed over the years into a writer with a unique style. All this is underscored by an incisive wit in his introductions which helps an audience understand where the song comes from and where it might be going.



***What others say:***

"He has that rare quality which connects with the listener during and between the songs. All his songs had relevance; many had an anecdote attached which gave the lyric context and more power" - *The Talk Magazine, York*. "Halpin left Otterton with the roof intact, and continued his endless tour, next to London, then Antwerp the next day. Judging by the rapturous applause that followed him down the stairs as he left, I'm sure it won't be too long before he's back here again" - *Otterton Mill Folk Club*.

***What we say:***

At his last visit Kieran really impressed the Readifolk audience. We look forward to another memorable performance.

***Hear more:***

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tDk60DxFTk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tDk60DxFTk)  
<http://myspace.com/halpinkieran>



**Serpentyne** entertain us with their brand of mediaeval folk-rock music on **23rd February**.

***What they say:***

A blend of mediaeval songs and dance tunes with new-world psychedelia, rock and dance... songs in Occitan, Old English and Latin with a combination of ancient and modern instruments, that will first uplift you, then get you down onto the dance floor.

***What others say:***

"Destined to become established favourites in British folk venues and concert halls" - *Jug of Punch Club*,

*Sutton Coldfield*. "Mediaeval and renaissance music becomes a living, breathing thing" - *Folk London*.

***What we say:***

Having seen Serpentyne perform at Sidmouth and Boars Bridge festivals, we are delighted to invite them to Readifolk. We are sure that you will not be disappointed.

***Hear more:***

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYbObyc9dQk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYbObyc9dQk)  
<https://myspace.com/serpentyнемusic>



The irrepressible Scottish folk band, **North Sea Gas**, perform at Readifolk on **16th March**.

***What they say:***

Thirty years and stronger than ever!! One of Scotland's most popular folk bands with great vocals and tremendous three part harmonies. Guitars, Mandolin, Fiddle, Bouzouki, Whistles, Bodhrans, Banjo and good humour are all part of the entertainment. They have received Gold and Silver disc awards from the Scottish Music Industry Association and regularly have sell-out shows at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe!!

***What others say:***

"No airs and graces just fantastic music" - *EdinburghGuide.com*. "Through their work they introduce audiences to the wider world of the folk tradition and its riches" - *John O'Regan, Living Tradition Magazine*.

***What we say:***

We have seen them before at Readifolk, so we look forward to another rip-roaring evening.

***Hear more:***

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zus0ulPFINl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zus0ulPFINl)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvmgh\\_MEJ8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvmgh_MEJ8)



A side-splitting evening of poems from **Les Barker** is on offer on **23rd March**.

***What he says:***

Les Barker writes strange poems and comes originally from Manchester, but he's now Welsh. He was an accountant before he became a professional idiot. He's written 77 books, which sell in large numbers at his gigs because people don't quite believe what they've just heard. His poems have spawned a number of folk heroes: Jason and the Arguments, Cosmo the Fairly Accurate Knife Thrower, Captain Indecisive and Spot of the Antarctic, to name but two.

### *What others say:*

"A genuine genius of comic rhyme. I have seen him reduce a whole marquee full of festival goers to a mass of helpless laughter" - *Port Lincoln Times, Australia*. "There are subtleties which you don't notice the first time round, and there are clever puns and turns of phrase so good you look forward to hearing them again" - *Folk Roots*.

### *What we say:*

Words cannot fully describe this man. You will have to come and see him for yourself to appreciate the brilliance of his poetry.

### *Hear more:*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=je4A6S2jYdA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=je4A6S2jYdA)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5oAAqv7kIE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5oAAqv7kIE)



The wonderful **Trio Threlfall** complete our Winter programme on **30th March**.



### *What they say:*

Jane and Amanda Threlfall, working with musician Roger Edwards, are universally acknowledged as natural ambassadors for English traditional song.

Their approach is endearingly self-effacing and commentators highlight the sisters' consummate ability to reinterpret from the English lexicon with freshness and vitality.

### *What others say:*

"Jane and Amanda's playing has a texture and colour that fit the song perfectly; but I do make a special mention of Roger Edwards' anglo concertina which underpins in a sensitive yet solid way" - *Folk North West*. "What's not to like about Trio Threlfalls' treatment of English traditional song? It's not a museum piece in their hands but something which lives and is relevant today. Long may they prosper; they are treasures" - *Wooden Horse Folk Club*.

### *What we say:*

We liked them last time, as is seen in our review of them then: "Trio Threlfall brought the kind of magic that comes when connections are made. It came from the way Amanda spoke between songs, from the interaction of the three, and also from the banter between performers and audience. In the songs it all came together, as something both tangible and magical. This was a night about commonality - betrayal, loss, madness, grief, venereal disease, love gone wrong, women done wrong by men - the stuff of folk songs, of course, but the stuff of Jeremy Kyle also. It was all there" - *Reading Folk Club*.

### *Hear more:*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6eL-NxNLAM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6eL-NxNLAM)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAgDRru1RWQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAgDRru1RWQ)

## *A Song Worth Singing*

The old English phrase **Wæs Hæl** simply means 'be you healthy', and is often said as a greeting, a toast, or other expression of good will. But there was also a winter ceremony of wassailing, in which good health was bid to the plants that will bear next year's crops. It had a particular association with apple trees, although other trees and crops were also wassailed. The ceremony was performed in mid winter, with the intention of driving out the bad spirits of the old year and welcoming in the good spirits of the new, to ensure healthy and productive trees. Bread was dipped in cider, usually mulled, or whatever the local wassailing beverage was, and placed on the boughs to encourage the good spirits to inhabit the trees. And if the good spirits ignored it, at least the local bird population may have enjoyed themselves.

In some parts of the country, the tradition, in some form, is still popular, although it seems less

## **The Wassailing Song**

to do with next year's crops, rather than general merry-making; these days, it may be more associated with the general festivities of Christmas-time, with its more profound pagan roots having been absorbed, as have other pre-Christian religious feasts, into the wider concept of today's more secular Christmas. This may have been helped by early Christians deliberately usurping some traditions of their pagan forebears.

The word's roots take us back to Anglo Saxon times, so it seems likely that some form of wassailing ceremony may have existed from at least then. With today's modern understanding of what can cause crop failure, exhortations to some vague concept of good and bad spirits seem, at best, amusing, and it's easy to dismiss such performances as simplistic and quaint. But it reflects a time when the workings of the natural world were profoundly mysterious, and crop failure could be catastrophic.

There are several songs that are often referred to simply as *The Wassailing Song*, though most are also known by other names. One of the most well known was used by Ralph Vaughan Williams, who set it for choir under the more formal title of *The Gloucestershire Wassail*. Of the many others, there is considerable liberty with the way melodies and verses have become interchangeable between them. The version presented here seems, in part, to bear some melodic resemblance to the carol *God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen*. However, although wassailing

songs are often incorporated into the canon of Christmas carols, they do not generally celebrate the nativity, rather than the changing seasons.

This version, it has to be said, has a fairly anaemic storyline, telling of a group of people who wassail around their local neighbourhood, asking, at the houses they visit, for food, drink and money. In return, they seem to offer little more than good wishes, and an excuse for a drink and a sing-song. But it does have a good tune, with a nice change in rhythm for the chorus.

Arrangement  
by Ed

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The first line of music is in 6/8 time and contains the lyrics: "Here we come a - wassailing, A - mong the leaves so green, Here we come a - wandering, So". Above the staff are guitar chords: C, Am, C, G, Am, C. The second line of music is in 4/4 time and contains the lyrics: "fa - ir to be seen. Love and joy come to you, And to you your wassail too; For - tune". Above the staff are guitar chords: Dm, F, C, F, C, Em, Am, G. The word "Chorus" is written below the staff at the start of this line. The third line of music is in 4/4 time and contains the lyrics: "bless you and bri - ng you a jo - lly New Year, Fortune bring you a jo - lly New Year". Above the staff are guitar chords: C, Am, Dm, F, C, F, C, Am, Dm, F, C.

1. Here we come a-wassailing,  
Among the leaves so green;  
Here we come a-wandering,  
So fair to be seen.

*Chorus:*

Love and joy come to you,  
And to you your wassail too;  
Fortune bless you and bring you a jolly New Year,  
Fortune bring you a jolly New Year

2. We are not daily beggars  
That beg from door to door;  
But we are neighbours' children  
Whom you have seen before.

*Chorus*

3. Call up the butler of this house,  
Put on his golden ring.  
Let him bring us up a glass of beer,  
And better we shall sing.

*Chorus*

4. We have a little purse  
Of stretching leather skin;  
We want a little money  
To line it well within.

*Chorus*

5. Bring us out a table  
And spread it with a cloth;  
Bring us out a mouldy cheese,  
And some of your Christmas loaf.

*Chorus*

6. God bless the master of this house,  
Likewise the mistress too,  
And all the little children  
That round the table go.

*Chorus*



# 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 JANUARY - MARCH 2014**

5 Jan	<b>Magpie Lane</b> <a href="http://www.magpielane.co.uk">www.magpielane.co.uk</a>	<i>A New Year concert featuring the very best in the English country song and dance tradition.</i>
12 Jan	<b>Pete Morton</b> <a href="http://www.petemorton.com">www.petemorton.com</a>	<i>Wonderfully crafted songs from one of England's finest songwriters.</i>
19 Jan	<b>Theme</b> <b>'Towns and Cities'</b>	<i>Let's see how many different towns and cities we can address in song.</i>
26 Jan	<b>Jim McClean</b> <a href="http://www.acousticvillage.co.uk">www.acousticvillage.co.uk</a>	<i>A welcome return for our favourite Scottish singer and songwriter. Great vocals and distinctive and original guitar accompaniment.</i>

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2 Feb	<b>Singers Night</b>	<i>The usual format – a song, a tune, a story, a poem, a joke or just come and be entertained by us. All welcome.</i>
9 Feb	<b>Kieran Halpin</b> <a href="http://www.kieranhalpin.com">www.kieranhalpin.com</a>	<i>One of Ireland's most-respected singer/songwriters. His performance is both witty and passionate.</i>
16 Feb	<b>Theme</b> <b>'Points of the Compass'</b>	<i>North, East, South or West – you decide which is best.</i>
23 Feb	<b>Serpentyne</b> <a href="http://www.serpentyne.com">www.serpentyne.com</a>	<i>An interesting blend of mediaeval songs and dance tunes played on ancient and modern instruments.</i>

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2 March	<b>Singers Night</b>	<i>Come and sing, play or just listen. A warm welcome is guaranteed.</i>
9 March	<b>Theme</b> <b>'Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor'</b>	<i>Lots of possibilities of songs to fit tonight's theme. No excuses for not sticking to the theme!</i>
16 March	<b>North Sea Gas</b> <a href="http://www.northseagas.co.uk">www.northseagas.co.uk</a>	<i>One of Scotland's most popular folk bands with great vocals and tremendous three-part harmonies.</i>
23 March	<b>Les Barker</b> <a href="http://www.mrsackroyd.com">www.mrsackroyd.com</a>	<i>Poet and songwriter Les combines the zaniness of Monty Python and The Goons with poetic, Edward Lear-like inanity.</i>
30 March	<b>Trio Threlfall</b> <a href="http://www.triothrelfall.net">www.triothrelfall.net</a>	<i>Jane &amp; Amanda Threlfall accompanied by Roger Edwards on concertina, fiddle &amp; guitar bring a fresh revitalised feel to traditional English song.</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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The Readifolk Radio Show is on the internet every Friday evening 6 - 8 p.m.

<http://blast1386.reading-college.ac.uk> click on 'Listen Live'.