

Notes

The Newsletter of Readifolk

Issue 8

Reading's folk song
and music club

Autumn 2010

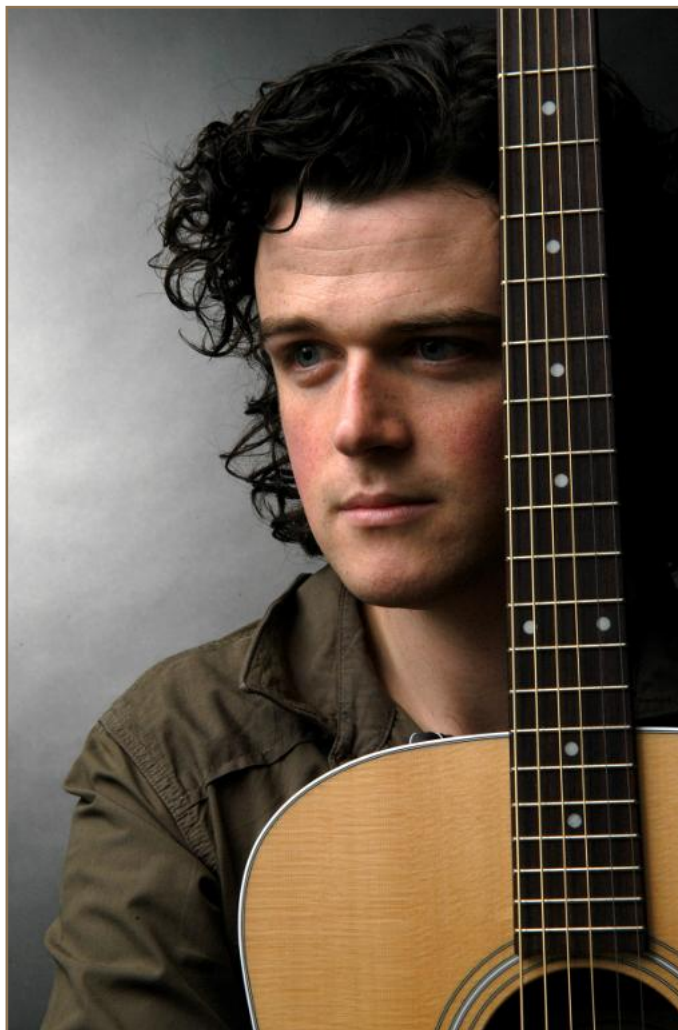
Welcome

to another Readifolk
newsletter

Rumblings from the Roots

Welcome to the autumn edition of Notes.

The summer seems to have flashed by and although the weather has been very mixed we look back on a very successful period for Readifolk. The club nights have generally



David Ferrard brings his guitar and some songs to Readifolk on 5th December

been well attended, with some excellent Guest Nights and equally excellent Singers and Theme Nights. You can read the very positive independent reviews of the Guest Nights inside this newsletter.

We are delighted to have recruited a very competent team of MCs to front the Guest Nights in the absence of Malcolm, our former regular MC, who, with Clare, has been travelling for much of the summer. We hope to retain the team of Alison, Janet, Danny and Ian on our MC rota.

We have been busy throughout the summer at various festivals, 'talent spotting' for future guests, and are pleased to have signed up several exciting newcomers to entertain us in the coming months.

The summer has seen the launch of the local community internet broadcasts on Reading4U. Readifolk now provides a weekly hour of Folk music, song, news and comment every Friday evening from 8 until 9 p.m. Our programme production team of Alison, Clare, Stewart, Ian, Danny and Malcolm have produced some really interesting and enjoyable shows - well done to all of them. If you have not listened in on www.reading4u.org then you have missed a treat. You can, however, still catch up on many of the programmes, as we have a library of CDs which you can borrow from the club on any club night.

You will find the Readifolk programme for the next quarter on the back page of this newsletter. We have some outstanding new arrivals at the club: Isambarde, David Ferrard and the new duo of Sylvia Barnes and Sandy Stanage, as well as return visits of several of our favourite artists, Moveable Feast, Leon Rosselson, Sara Grey & Kieron Means and Magpie Lane. In addition there are regular Singers and Theme Nights for all you DIY enthusiasts.

We look forward to seeing you at the club.

Una & Colin

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Instruments of Joy

Taking a look at the instruments of the folk idiom.

This issue: The Didgeridoo

It may not (yet) be a major part of the British folk scene, but it is undeniably an instrument of folk-culture, and has a growing following around the world. Ian Freedman, didge player with the Westlanders, tells us more...

Mention the didgeridoo and ten to one the reaction you will get will be some wag adopting an Australian accent and saying, "Can you tell what it is yet?" (Editor: Are you referring to me?). More often than not this is followed by a sardonic rendition of "Tie Me Kangaroo Down Sport". Rolf Harris is a fine player of the didgeridoo, or "didge" as proponents of the instrument tend to call it, but there is so much more to the instrument, even here in the UK, than Rolf Harris.

"Wait a minute," I hear you say, "what do you mean 'here in the UK'? Surely the didgeridoo is an Australian instrument?" Well yes it is, but most people would be surprised to learn of the sheer size of the European sub-culture that exists around the didgeridoo. It has hundreds, if not thousands of players around the UK and Europe and not just new-age and hippy types either, although it is fair to say it does attract more than its fair share of those! Businessmen, bank managers, my old dad who is 88, my daughter who is 9, and me. All of us see something special in the didge. Why? Because it has a primeval appeal that touches the parts other, more modern instruments, can't possibly hope to reach. But you have to be a player to feel that. Merely listening is not enough.

Blowing a didge is almost identical to blowing a trombone. That is, put your lips to the mouthpiece and blow a controlled raspberry into the tube. Circular breathing, the technique of using your cheeks like bag-pipe bellows takes longer to learn, but skilled practitioners can keep a drone going for hours at a time without stopping.

And as for the music, some of the rhythms I have heard from top players of the didge defy written description. When my band, The Westlanders, use the didge in a piece we deliberately allow the drone to carry on after the rest of the song has finished. One thing I have noticed is that when the didge stops there is often a sharp intake of breath before we get any applause. I think this is because the audience, without realising it, are listening to the didge more than the song! They get drawn into the drone, serotonin producing frequencies and rhythm of the didgeridoo and are affected when it ends. There is some historic precedence for using these instruments in western culture. The ancient Irish Celts used an instrument called the *dordiceal*. I have no idea if that is the correct spelling, sorry, but I can tell you it is pronounced door-deesh! This was a bronze instrument discovered in archaeological digs in Ireland. The only way reconstructions of the instrument can be sounded is to play them like a didgeridoo!

The name "didgeridoo" is controversial. You probably will never hear an Australian aborigine calling it by that name. There is some evidence to suggest that the word may even be a European invention applied to the instrument by early, especially Irish, settlers. Australian aborigines certainly do use a simple four syllable teaching rhythm that could be said to sound like a repetitive use of the word "didgeridoo". It was also common slang among Irish settlers in Australia to use the didgeridoo in the same way as we might say "thing-ummy-jig"! However insufficient evidence exists to say which came first! Did the Irish settlers hear the rhythm and invent a word around it, or

did the word exist already to be applied to the didge?

So what do aborigine people call this instrument? There are hundreds of languages and dialects, some still in use, some now dead, among the indigenous people of Australia, hence hundreds of different words are used to mean what we call the didgeridoo.

But the most common name is "Yidaki". The Yidaki is the pure Australian form of the instrument and is made from eucalyptus wood naturally hollowed out by termites. All the people of Australia have to do is cut a branch, or pick up a fallen limb, clean it up a bit and play. Of course there is much more to it than that. They spend many hours decorating their yidakis. Particularly fine examples will be kept and passed down from generation to generation.

A common misconception among non-aborigine people is that these instruments are sacred. Not so. In the same way that our church organ is not in itself a sacred instrument, but some of the music played upon it may be considered holy, it is the music, rhythms and the rituals surrounding the Yidaki that are sacred.

Here in Europe a didge may be an Australian eucalyptus instrument, or it may be manufactured from native hardwoods. This is done by splitting a suitable branch down its long axis, hollowing out and sticking it back together again. Great care must be taken to ensure the joint is air tight, and that the mouthpiece is just the right size. The best-manufactured didges tend to be made of yew, but fine results can be had from a variety of woods including oak, ash and holly. Beech tends to split too easily while pine never makes a satisfactory sound.

But why do so many European people take the time to learn this instrument? First of all it makes a fantastic sound! I have played at several venues where well-trained guide dogs have been present. I have been told on several separate occasions, and by several separate owners, that the didge is the only instrument that will make a guide dog react! I think that illustrates the primeval nature of the didge. Secondly I think that it is akin to meditation. When I hear practitioners of meditation describe how they are affected by the act of meditating, it sounds very similar to the results of playing a didge for an extended period. While I do not personally buy in to some of the new-age claims for the didgeridoo, connections to a higher plain and so on, I do know a family who have been signed off medication for asthma after all three learned to play the didge. In fact there is now enough anecdotal evidence to support the beneficial effects of playing the didge for asthma sufferers that I am of the opinion there should be a proper scientific investigation into the phenomenon. My own

opinion is that the controlled, circular breathing one has to learn to blow a didge somehow has a beneficial effect. There have been some scientific studies to show that the frequencies that are produced by playing a didgeridoo naturally stimulate the production of serotonin, which has a calming effect on both the player and anyone nearby.

Clubs exist all over the UK. If you want to learn to play there are plenty of people out there who can teach you. Just ask me at the next Readifolk!



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.

Mick Ryan & Paul Downes

27th June



Mick Ryan and Paul Downes treated us to a superb set of songs. Both equally accomplished performers, they relaxed and interested those present with a mix of traditional and self-penned numbers delivered with polished panache. It was clear to appreciate just why they had become a duo with such perfect vocal harmonising and natural empathy melding the pair.

The light repartee between songs, whilst not obviously humorous, was certainly amusing and listenable. The preamble to the songs showed us that

here we have a pair of musicians who can gather material from the most diverse sources (viz Devonish churches, council-estate 'travellers', not to forget the ubiquitous t*s'o.co.org.uk who I'm sure would have welcomed the mention Mick!), and who are also inventive and talented enough to originate quality song borne of their own personal interests.

Mick's wonderful voice was a revelation to the uninitiated such as myself and Paul's mastery of the strings showed us just why he has appeared at the Royal Albert Hall (according to the sleeve notes on their CD 'Grand Conversation' that I was happily persuaded to buy that evening). They were certainly worthy of a larger turnout of listeners, and for those present 10.30pm seemed to arrive all too soon. Well done lads, we'll look forward to seeing you again at Readifolk.

J.P.B

Larry Hanks with Deborah Robins

4th July

During the previous three weeks Larry and his partner Deborah Robins were entertaining folkies across the UK on their "The Boll Weevil Tour: UK Summer 2010", and on Sunday 4th July it was Readifolk's turn.

From Reading, Larry and Deborah were next heading for three days at the Furness Tradition Festival in the Lake District followed by a gig at Broadstairs Folk Club before returning to their home in Berkeley, California. It is Larry's first visit to the U.K in thirty years and he seemed to be enjoying it, the audience certainly did.

The duo were introduced by Martyn Wyndham-Read, the well known Sussex born Australian folk singer, who opened with the moving *Farewell to ANZAC*, his adaptation of the poem written by Cicely Fox Smith following the debacle that saw the landing of the Australian and New Zealand Forces at the incorrect location at Gallipoli in 1915 and the subsequent deaths of 11,000 Australian and New Zealand troops.

Martyn noted that the three of them were working on a 'Song Lines project' mapping the migration of tunes and themes across the oceans; and they sang about 'floating in a gum tree canoe' a theme relevant to both Australia and the U.S going back to the 1880's.

Following the initial joint offerings, Larry and Deborah moved into a programme covering an eclectic selection of American traditional folk

music combined with composed songs covering the realm of blues, cowboy songs, and labour issues, especially textile industry related, and including IWW (the Wobblies) protest songs.



Larry's bass tones and his prowess on guitar and Jews harp, well countered by Deborah's vocal, guitar, and occasional kazoo accompaniment made for a harmonious evening.

Memorable amongst the varied repertoire were songs by Malvina Reynolds (Andorra), probably best known for the Pete Seeger classic *Little Boxes*, Utah Phillips, Sam Hinton and Hank Snow and included *The Farmers Cursed Wife*, *Cotton Mill Girls*, *The Orphan Train*, and *The Rivers of Texas*.

Interesting diversions took us to a lively rendition of Frankie Vaughan's 1956 UK hit of *The Green Door*, previously made famous in the USA by Jim Lowe, and well known to many in the audience who joined in with gusto. Also we visited with Jimmy Rodgers, (The Yodelling Cowboy) for a version of the *Mississippi Blues*.

The evening ended with a version of *The Boll Weevil Song* based on Huddy Leadbelly's interpretation and the audience dispersed with a feeling of satisfaction of an evening extremely well spent.

Geoff

Mynott's Wing

11th July

Some time ago I trekked out to a remote village hall in the middle of nowhere to hear some folk star or other. The locals were hostile, the weather was foul, the heating was broken and the beer was rank. And to cap it all, on the way home I got a puncture and had to change the wheel on an unlit single track lane, with an unsympathetic queue of traffic building up behind me. Do I sound like I have bad memories of the evening?

Actually, though the star attraction has faded from my mind, I have a very clear and happy memory of the support act that night - one Richard Cox-Smith - who sat unassumingly on stage and played the most astoundingly brilliant guitar. As he now constitutes one half of Mynott's Wing, I was looking forward to hearing him again. Together with Guy Chant they brought along five acoustic guitars, which, the guitar geeks will be pleased to know, included a Guild 12 string, a Martin, a National steel and a Dobro. The other one escapes me, but I'm sure it was something you would nod knowingly about if I could remember. Talking to Guy after the show, he revealed he has several more Martins at home; clearly these are both people to whom playing is not just accompaniment.

Most of what they played was blues based, but it has always interested me how closely related the blues and folk are, and the cross-over, whether they played James Taylor, John Renbourn,



Photo: Andy Mathewson

Leadbelly or Blind Blake was seamless. I don't think anyone that evening were unappreciative of what they heard, though it has to be said that neither of these chaps has the strongest of singing voices. But their guitar work is utterly impeccable.

Just to confound all that, the second half of the show started with a floor spot from someone new to us all - a certain Mr. Ben Cox-Smith, son of the above mentioned, who, to all our amazement, quite possibly had the edge over his dad as a guitarist. Hard to be certain after only a couple of numbers, but I suspect dad is a proud man (I can also tell you that he lives locally and give lessons).

Stewart

Morrigan plus Emily Maguire 25th July

*(A family bereavement meant that the band booked for the evening, **The Kittiwakes**, were unable to appear, but band member Chris Harrison was able to bring along a new line-up of his band, **Morrigan**)*

What a Treat! I knew we were in for a good night when I saw the exciting range of instruments lined up at the start, and I wasn't disappointed. To start with we were entertained by a number of our regulars: 3 2 1, followed by Annie who gave us a lovely rendition of a very poignant song, and then Kathy who followed with a couple of nicely contrasting songs accompanying herself on guitar. Later on, despite a throat infection, Alison bravely started the second half with an entertaining song. What a trooper!

We were also lucky enough to hear the talented songwriter, singer and guitarist, Emily Maguire, who mesmerised us with her gentle, melodic delivery. From The Royal Albert Hall to Readifolk - what a contrast! Emily entertained us not only with her excellent songs, but also with her tales of life in Australia. Only a completely unmusical and soulless snake would bury its head in the woodpile while she was playing!

Of course the highlight of the evening was Morrigan, who performed a varied programme with their many instruments and voices - a veritable world tour as it turned out! They performed songs and tunes from England (several Geordie songs from the North East), Ireland, Scotland, France, Italy and New Zealand. It's not often that you hear a duet of Scottish small pipes and hurdy gurdy, given the tuning issues of both, but they managed it very well. Although the individual songs were well executed, and their a cappella singing in close harmony was very beautiful, for me the highlight was when Morrigan played tunes all together on melodeon, accordion, whistle (or flute or pipes) and guitar. This was when the party really started to swing and I'm sure I can't have been the only one with the urge to get up and dance when they romped through a set of slip jigs or let rip with an Italian tarantella!

All in all it was a varied, entertaining and fun evening and I'm sure we all went home with big smiles on our faces!

Anne

Liam Robinson 8th August

Increasing one's knowledge and understanding whilst also being entertained always adds value to an experience. This is precisely what happened to me when the club welcomed special guest Liam Robinson.

Liam is a young musician and singer who was born, bred and still lives in Lincolnshire. He plays the melodeon and the Anglo-concertina. He is very proud of his roots and used his performance to showcase songs originating in his part of the world. Liam put together a well structured programme setting each song in context in terms of place and time and where appropriate he gave his own personal take on it. He has considerable experience in working with young people to enthuse them in the tradition of their heritage - and it shows. He was passionate, articulate and had a very engaging stage presence, telling a story as he moved through his set. From the first few notes of *The*



Humber Belle we were all singing along.

The sad tale of *Betsy Walton* was nicely balanced by *Bold William Taylor* which told of an all too rare event in the folk tradition - a wronged young girl successfully managing to wreak vengeance on her two timing lover and his wife!

However the highlight for me (and I think for Liam himself judging by his reaction) was when he was persuaded to go 'off set' and sing *The Lincolnshire Poacher*. It was one of those wow moments when each person in a group contributes

as one and the result is greater than the sum of the parts - magical!

The evening was smoothly compered by Danny who with Chris started the proceedings with a folk version of Dr Feelgood's *Back in the Night*. Alison reminded us of the 65th anniversary of Hiroshima with her poignant selection, Annie continued the nautical theme with her choice of songs and Mike gave us a lively set full of variety. All contributed to an entertaining and informative programme.

I am so glad we decided to go to the club that night. I would have been very sorry to have missed this excellent evening.

Beryl

Cruel Folk 22nd August

Some evenings at Readifolk have a distinct flavour of one instrument or group of instruments, and others are characterised by the variety of instrument and voice presented by the guests and floorsingers. Starting with MC Ian Freedman's didgeridoo, followed by guitar, accordions and banjo, this was clearly going to be an evening of instrumental variety, and that was just the first flush of floorspots.

I confess here that I was looking forward to tonight's guests, Cruel Folk, having had a taste of their music at Readifolk's recent hiring fair. A duo hailing from Norfolk, Sean and Paul Holden entered folk music from the rock tradition, and have embraced acoustic instruments and a traditional English style, particularly when that means songs about darker traditional themes such as a murder, death and betrayal. Cruel Folk's music was a mixture of tradition, self-penned songs and covers, accompanied on guitars (including an octave 12 string guitar and a tenor guitar), mandolin and mandocello (or was it a bouzouki?)

A clear influence on their music is Show of Hands, and for me one of the highlights of the evening was a cover of Steve Knightley's dark take on *Widdecombe Fair*. There were some very good accompaniments, but some instrumentals were sadly lost (in particular Paul's guitar work), because, perhaps coming from an amplified background, Cruel Folk do not always have the best balance between the acoustic instruments; I look forward to them getting this right because the guitar flourishes are certainly worth hearing.

Sandwiched into Cruel Folk's set was another set of floorspots from local performers, including a popular chance to join in with two of Bob Watson's own songs and a performance of a piece in an exotic time signature that I shall not pretend to remember, played skilfully by Pam on concertina and



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Doug on guitar, plus topical humour from Readifolk regular Peter.

I should add that humour was a key ingredient in Cruel Folk's performance, with some the darkest themes leavened by an irrepressible sense of fun, and other songs, like the rhythmic rant about an ex-wife, *My Worst Nightmare*, performed simply for fun's sake. The humour was entertaining, but at times elicited a deserved groan from the audience. Overall this was an upbeat, lively session and combined with MC Ian Freedman's relaxed manner, the whole evening had a good-natured feel and the audience were certainly entertained.

Ali

Liz Simcock

plus Gary Edwards

12th September



In a World Of All The Loveliness, what features would you hold dearest? This evening we were visited by much loveliness - Liz Simcock, with her accompanist Warwick Jones, plus support from our own Gary Edwards. I'm not just saying this because when Liz arrived she chose to sit next to me, or because she laughed at one of my jokes.

I was a bit worried at first, when I saw the microphones and

plugged-in guitars - we seldom see amplification at Readifolk, not because we have a policy about it, but because we meet in a small room, and because if you pay attention, unamplified guitars and voices sound fine. But actually, from where I was sitting, their system seemed almost invisible, and didn't distract from their performance at all.

When Liz and Warwick played to us, all was transformed, and loveliness prevailed. It was like crystalised air. The audience were charmed by them. Liz isn't really a folk singer, and no traditional stuff was to be heard this evening, but her own clever songs fit in well to a format that suits many folk clubs. Neither of them are simply strummers, but have worked out some beautifully balanced counterpoints on their guitars.

Alarmingly, when Liz sang the impassioned parts of her songs, I found myself reminded of Cliff Richard - they both do the closed-eyes-and-screwed-up-face look in a similar way. However, the difference is that Sir Cliff doesn't feature in my personal World Of All The Loveliness...

Gary does; when he played, he braved it unaided, singing from a chair with no microphone. The chatterers at the back became silenced, listening to his quiet voice singing stuff that seemed suddenly to have become important to them. Of late, Gary's guitar playing has been a revelation; he has an expanding talent which I'm sure has involved many painful hours of practice, but the results are increasingly spellbinding, and his voice, whilst always a little fragile and lacking in simple volume, has gained in complex heart-on-his-sleeve vulnerable passion.

If you could bottle loveliness, this evening would have been a good well-spring; you'd make a fortune, and all the world's miseries would be solved. Until someone manages it, a Liz Simcock gig should suffice.

Stewart

John Conolly

19th September

Now, John Connolly is best known as the writer of that ubiquitous classic, *Fiddler's Green*, about the idyllic last resting place of "dead fishermen", to use his own phrase. I have never considered John the most polished of performers, or the greatest melodeon or guitar player, though he accompanies himself well with both. However, he has a relaxed, modest and engaging manner, a strong voice, and an approach to singing that has everybody joining in.



There were some great songs, most by John himself. However, one that went down really well (*Geneva and Rum*, otherwise known as *Bum Island*) was a "late-flowering" collaboration with his friend, Bill Meek. John finished the first half with *Grumpy Old Men*, a theme which recurred throughout the second half, with floor singers also contributing. However, songs on other themes had the last word. Inevitably, the encore was *Fiddler's Green*, but the song before it was *The Secret Love of the Wind and the Sea*, which John had translated from the French - a strange tale of how the wind fell in love with the sea, but when their passionate love-making caused storms and the loss of sailors' lives, they resolved never to make love again. It doesn't explain why there are still storms, but its French chorus appealed to everyone to shed a tear for the poor lovers.

Hearing *Old Men Sing Love Songs* after John's explanation (the death of George Butterworth in the Great War) gave me a new understanding of the song, and I felt as if I was hearing it for the first time, though it is so familiar.

All in all, this was an excellent folkies' evening, well managed by MC Danny, with lots of singing, laughing at ourselves, some good performances from the floor (3-2-1 get a special mention), and a really talented songwriter as guest artist.

Malcolm

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

What's that Skippy? Someone's in distress? You can hear the sound of ferocious stick whacking, vigorous bell tinkling and much whooping and screaming? Don't worry Skippy, it's just the sound of the local morris side having a great night out and upholding a very old tradition.

There are many different theories about the origins of morris dancing and it is not really certain how it evolved or where it originated, although it is clear that it has been going on and indeed survived over a number of centuries. There is evidence of morris dancing taking place in England in the early 16th century and some people speculate that it originated in Europe or possibly even further afield. Wherever it comes from, it is considered to be a celebration of the end of winter and the arrival of the warmth and fertility of summer, leading to a good harvest. By the time of the Industrial Revolution the morris had very nearly died out as people turned their backs on traditional folk customs, but over the course of time, assisted by collectors interested in saving the music and the dances, such as Percy Manning, Thomas Carter and Cecil Sharp, there was a gradual revival.

Today there are a number of different types of morris, each having its own style, its own unique costumes and its own music. Sides (or teams) can be male, female or mixed, and all age groups are encouraged. Possibly one of the best known styles is Cotswold morris, which originated in Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire. Their dances include handkerchief dances and stick dances and the dancers usually wear white shirts and white trousers along with a coloured baldric or waistcoat, with bells on their shins. Traditionally their music was provided by a pipe and tabor or a fiddle, although nowadays, as with most types of morris, melodeons, accordions and concertinas are also widely used.

Border morris is also very popular, originating from the Welsh border counties of Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire. This is a particularly vigorous form of dance, where both short and long sticks are used. The dancers wear rag coats or jackets, often in bright colours, and hats of many styles and colours, often with feathers or flowers. Black faces are common amongst border sides, as this was said to confer anonymity on the dancer at a

Morris Dancing

Why should we all be doing it?

Anne Edwards, melodeon player with the Shinfield Shambles and student of the Morris, tells all...

dance, where the figures are accompanied by a rant step. The dancers wear elaborate, colourful costumes, often decorated with beads, hats covered with flowers, and they dance in wooden clogs. The side usually has a leader with a whip and whistle who instructs the dancers and as well as the usual instruments they are often accompanied by a loud drum.

Another type of morris is Molly dancing, which is usually from the Eastern counties of England these days and considered one of the traditional dances of East Anglia. Historically it was performed by farm-workers on the first Monday after Epiphany (twelfth night), a day known as Plough Monday, and it was a mid-winter custom to extract money from local residents at a difficult time of year. Faces are blackened and costumes are often outlandish, with ribbons, feathers and bright colours.

From the north of England there are two distinct forms of sword dancing: Rapper dancing, originating in Northumberland and Durham, where dancers have flexible double-handed swords which they intertwine at high speed and Longsword dancing which comes from Yorkshire and involves the use of single-handed, rigid swords. This is a particularly exciting and high-energy form of dance, where the dancers hold the ends of each others' swords and perform circling and entwining figures without breaking the circle or letting go of the

swords. These movements culminate in the interlocked swords forming a pattern (or "lock") which is then held up for the admiration of the audience.

In our local area we are fortunate to have a variety of sides from these different traditions including Basingclog (www.basingclog.org.uk), OBJ (www.obj.org.uk), Hook Eagle (www.hookeagle.org.uk), Borderline (www.borderlinemorris.com), The Kennet Morris Men (www.kennetmorrismen.co.uk) and Shinfield Shambles (www.shinfieldshambles.org.uk). New members are always welcome so why not join us and help keep an ancient tradition alive for future generations. And the answer to the question in the title? Because it's FUN!!



The Shinfield Shambles, which feathure Anne on melodeon, plus some other Readifolk regulars

A Song Worth Singing

Mary Hamilton, The Four Marys & Mary Mild

A song with many variants and several titles, most people will know it best from the version made popular by Joan Baez in the 1960s, under the title *Mary Hamilton*.

There is a popular theory about the song; in brief, it suggests that, whilst being set in the court of Mary Queen of Scots, where there were four ladies-in-waiting all called Mary, the incident of a woman being hanged for the killing of her baby actually relates to an event which happened some time later, when a maid of honour to Empress Catherine, second wife of Peter The Great of Russia, was executed for infanticide. The theory suggests that, whilst unrelated, these two circumstances were concatenated in song, where the father of the murdered child becomes the Queen's philandering husband, Lord Darnley.

But Andrew Lang, writing in 1903, questions this popular belief.

We know that Mary Queen of Scots had four Marys in her court - daughters of various nobles, appointed to attend the child who became Queen at six days old, and grew up in exile in France. But beyond this, the problem with regarding the song as factual, is that none of them were called Hamilton, and none of them were executed for infanticide. In fact, where the song names the other three Marys, it is only correct about two of them. The real four were Seton, Beaton, Fleming and Livingstone. Thus the need for a theory to explain what the song is actually about.

We also know that, over 150 years later in 1719, a maid to Empress Catherine was executed for killing her baby. It seems, in fact, she and her lover were guilty of killing 3 illegitimate children. It is this woman who is popularly cited as the real subject of the song, though her surname was probably Hambledon, and her first name unknown. But she was not executed by hanging, as the perpetrator in the song was, but by decapitation. So there is some question whether this is actually the woman that the song is said to implicate.

It is also likely that the style and nature of the song are too early to have been written about the Russian murderer, and that the large number of versions (F.J. Child collected 28 variants, and other collectors have added to that) imply it is earlier than 1719.

There are also other points that bring into question the popular theory. For instance, in different versions of the song, the name of the executed woman is variously Mild, Moil, Maisry, amongst others, or she is not named at all. We should also consider whether her first name was Mary - in Mary Queen of Scots' court, which was heavily influenced by French custom, the name Marie is said to have been used as a general term for a maid. This must have been mightily confusing, with the Queen, plus four of her ladies-in-waiting all being called Mary, with the Queen's mother being Marie de Guise, and where a general term of reference to any important maid was also 'a Marie'. This confusion may have extended to a popular song passed on by oral tradition, which, perhaps, spoke simply of a maid.

And with this in mind, it appears that there was, in fact, a maid to the Queen, albeit a fairly lowly one, who had a fling with the Queen's apothecary, who killed the child she bore as a result, and who was hanged for her crime. There is also some suggestion that the apothecary was actually a cover for Lord Darnley, the Queen's husband. This perspective means that it is not an incident of child murder and execution that has been grafted on to a song about The Four Marys, rather it is The Four Marys who erroneously appear in a song about child murder.

Well, it's another theory, anyway.

The version of the song below, *Mary Mild*, comes from the Greig & Duncan collection, and seems to be fairly uncommon, with a different tune to that normally used. You can hear it sung by 2008 Young Folk Singer of the Year, Siobhan Miller, on YouTube; www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAWB_JRM6xk

Arrangement by Ed'n'Stew

Word went up, and word went doon, And word went through the ha', Th - at

Ma - ry Mild was great with child To the hi - gh - est Stewart o' a'

1. Word went up, and word went doon,
And word went through the ha',
That Mary Mild was great with child
To the highest Stewart o' a'.
2. They've sought it up, and so did they doon,
And in below the bed;
There they found the little babe,
Lyn' wallowin' in its blood.
3. Ye'll sit low doon by me, Mary Mild,
Ye'll sit low doon by me;
And there's nae a favour that ye will ask
But I will grant it thee.
4. It's seyven lang years I hae made the queen's bed,
And as lang dressed her hair,
But this is the reward that I'm to get,
The gallows tow to wear.
5. There is Mary Beaton, and Mary Seaton,
And there's Mary Carmichael and me;
This nicht there is four Marys-o,
But the morn there'll be but three.
6. Will ye pit on the black, the black,
Or will ye pit on the broon?
Or will ye pit on the sky-blue silk,
It would shine a' the toon?
7. I winna pit on the black, the black,
Nor will I pit on the broon,
But I'll pit on the sky-blue silk,
To shine owre Edinburgh toon.

Readifolk Newsletter

This edition has been made possible by a team untrained and unprepared volunteers who were unwittingly co-opted into place. My everlasting thanks to all of them. If you have been affected by any of the issues raised in this newsletter, you can call our help-line, or attend one of our Sunday evening sessions. Full details on page 8.



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 OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2010

<u>3 Oct</u>	Singers Night	<i>The usual format – a song, a tune, a poem, a joke or just sit and be entertained.</i>
<u>10 Oct</u>	Isambarde www.isambarde.co.uk	<i>Isambarde are a trio who play with a fabulous energy and an amazing array of musical talents.</i>
<u>17 Oct</u>	Theme 'Aims & Ambitions'	<i>It's International Festival time with this year's theme 'UN Millenium Development Goals' which includes poverty, primary education, women's rights and global partnership. Lots of scope there for a song!</i>
<u>24 Oct</u>	Moveable Feast www.moveablefeast.org.uk	<i>A welcome return for one of our favourite groups. A feast of world roots influences including folk, cajun, latin, reggae, bluegrass and flamenco.</i>
<u>31 Oct</u>	Singers Night	<i>An opportunity for you to make your own entertainment and contribute to a warm and friendly evening.</i>

<u>7 Nov</u>	Leon Rosselson www.leonrosselson.co.uk	<i>Writer of witty, thoughtful and contemporary songs performed in a style that is all his own.</i>
<u>14 Nov</u>	Sara Grey & Kieron Means www.maclurg.com	<i>Mother and son duo – Sara on vocals and banjo, Kieron on vocals and guitar, blend magically with old-time, blues and tradition-influenced contemporary songs.</i>
<u>21 Nov</u>	Theme 'What's my Line?'	<i>Hi Ho, Hi Ho it's off to work we go. Here's an opportunity for you to sing about your occupation.</i>
<u>28 Nov</u>	Sylvia Barnes & Sandy Stanage www.myspace.com/sylviabarnes	<i>'Scottish Singer of the Year' 2006, Sylvia Barnes, accompanied by the renowned guitar playing of Sandy Stanage are a superb duo. An evening not to be missed!</i>

<u>5 Dec</u>	David Ferrard www.davidferrard.com	<i>David is a Scottish – American singer-songwriter. His 'uncanny ability to fuse meaningful words with gorgeous melodies' (Sunday Herald) has won him wide acclaim.</i>
<u>12 Dec</u>	Magpie Lane www.magpielane.dsl.pipex.com	<i>This Oxfordshire sextet represents the very best in the English country song and dance tradition. They combine powerful vocals with vigorous dance tunes.</i>
<u>19 Dec</u>	Christmas Party	<i>The celebrations start here. Come and enjoy the music and the festive fare.</i>
<u>26 Dec</u>	Club Closed	<i>We're back again on 2nd January.</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 Hour on Reading4U, the internet arm of Reading Community Radio, every



Friday evening 8 - 9 p.m. www.reading4u.org and click on 'Listen Live'.

