singing
histories

Norfolk
# Contents

4 Foreword

**The Sea**
6 Windy Old Weather
8 On Board a Wherry
10 Waiting for the Day

**The Country**
12 Norfolk Harvest Song
16 The Thatcher
18 Farmer’s Boy

**Historical**
22 On Board a Ninety-Eight
26 Bungay Roger
28 Newton Flotman Train

**Love and Lust**
30 Bold Fisherman
34 Yarmouth Town

**Comic**
38 The Norfolk Turnippe
40 The Outing
44 Butter and Cheese and All
Foreword

During more daring flights of fancy I pinch my eyes shut, purse my moistened lips and pour my Norfolk heart into local compositions yet to be completed. Prepare for fragments of *Don’t Eat Yellow Snow*, *Not a Dry Seat in the House* and *Cromer Crab Boats Go Sideways.*

Right, now you can relax. They’re coming to take me away to a place of greater safety while the genuine articles demand voices to be raised in praise of a precious strand of our heritage.

This collection of mainly traditional songs, lovingly lined up by living folk legend, Alan Helsdon, and colleagues in tune with his passionate scholarship, gives our history on land and sea a timely curtain-call.

Fishing and agriculture have changed so much since most of these songs were penned. Hardship and humour held hands as trawlers pitched, scythes swished and frosts nipped. A good laugh together took some of the sting out of monotonous and arduous chores.

I feel privileged to have shared the same county stage – albeit a few years later – as performing giants like Sam Larner, Harry Cox and Walter Pardon.

My role as leader of the Press Gang entertainers for a quarter of a century from 1984 to 2008 brought ample opportunity to salute their lasting legacy.

Many a show opened with good friend Ian Prettyman sharing *Butter and Cheese and All*. And every programme in village hall, theatre or other community meeting place ended with Ian, rest of the cast and audience embracing *The Farmer’s Boy*.

Other songs featured in this vibrant selection also received airings on our extensive rounds. Let’s relish them afresh as they prepare to inspire a new generation with their ageless values.

Story-telling with joining-in bits... a perfect antidote to the horrors of a push-button age.

*Keith Skipper Cromer, 2009*
Windy Old Weather

Verse

2. We sighted a herring, the king of the sea, says he, Old skipper, you cannot catch me!

3. Along come a mackerel with stripes on his back, saying, Time, now skipper, to shift your main tack.

4. Up jumped the flatfish, they call him a skate; if you’ll be the Skipper then I’ll be the Mate.

5. Then up come the hake, he was black as a rook, says he, I’m no sailor, I’ll ship as the Cook!

6. Next came the shark with his two rows of teeth, Cook, you mind the cabbage and I’ll mind the beef!

7. Along come a conga, as long as a mile, Wind’s blowing easterly, he said with a smile.

8. Next came the eel with his slippery tail; he slid up the mast and he cast off each sail.

9. I think what these fishes are saying is right, we’ll haul in our nets and we’ll head for the Light.

There are no harbours for over 50 miles between Great Yarmouth and Blakeney so all the fishing was, and on a much smaller scale still is, done from beach-launched boats – a heavy and dangerous way of making a living. Lighthouses at Cromer and Happisburgh helped enormously, though the first light mentioned here may be the Haisboro Lightship.

Sam Larner (see Butter and Cheese and All) sings his own version of this, with different tune and words and some recollections of a tough life at sea and on land, on Now is the Time for Fishing (Topic TSCD 511).

This version comes from Stan Hugil’s Shanties of the Seven Seas where it takes its rightful place among other work songs of the sea. Hauling long, wet, and hopefully full nets in a rough sea on a dark night took some doing and a song may well have helped co-ordinate the pulling as well as relieving the drudgery. Good nonsense songs always bring a smile. Try making up some verses of your own.
On Board a Wherry

Wherries simply didn’t go to sea. They were brilliant at their job of carrying cargoes around the rivers and broads of Norfolk and north Suffolk when water transport was quicker than muddy or non-existent tracks, but they didn’t go to sea. They had no freeboard (height of hull above the water), a huge rudder moved only by hand and one enormous sail on a mast without stays. Any waves at all and they were done for.

However, when Lucas Brothers, Builders, of Lowestoft got the contract to build Gosport Barracks, near Portsmouth, in 1857 they wanted to take boats and men they knew for the work of fetching local materials, and so the Norfolk and Suffolk wherrymen they hired sailed into unknown waters.

Martin Wigg was only four when he went in his father’s wherry, and it was his interview in the Eastern Daily Press of 03.01.1927 – when he was nearly eighty – that provided many of the details of the song-cycle Blue Water Wherries written in 1986, from which this song is taken.

There are several wherries still sailing, the best known – Albion – being maintained by the Norfolk Wherry Trust.

Excellent books on the subject are: Black Sailed Traders by Roy Clark and Wherries and Waterways by Robert Malster, and there is a Song Cycle, in which the above is used as the Narrator’s song, called Blue Water Wherries.

2. I’ve always lived on board a boat; I’ve brought me children up afloat. And when that’s coming on to blow we send the children down below, but the tea-pot’s always on the go.

3. Just keep your eye on the wind and sky; there’s always some-one passing by. We don’t get time to say a lot, just ‘Where are you bound?’ and ‘What’ve you got?’ and then tha’s time for another pot.

4. To shoot a bridge is quite a trick; the sail and mast they come down quick. Tha’s easy if you’ve got the tide, then through the bridge you quickly glide and have a brew on the other side.

5. From Lowestoft to Harwich Bay, that’s not too far to go in a day; and with a breeze and a nice calm sea we’ll get to Harwich easily as long as I get me mugs of tea.

6. Oh we could sail all day and night without a lock or a bridge in sight. There’s lots of time to patch and sew, but all the time he wants to know ‘What’s the state of the pot below?’

7. We’re going now to cross the sea, to Gosport in good company. We’ll work along the channel shore and we’ll drink mugs of tea galore, then back to Norfolk sail once more.
1. The worst old brig that ever did weigh
sailed out of Harwich on a windy day.
And we’re waiting for the day, waiting for the day, waiting for the day that we get our pay.

2. She was built in Roman times;
held together with bits of twine.

3. Nothing in the galley, nothing in the hold,
but the skipper’s turned in with a bag of gold.

4. Off Orford Ness she sprang a leak;
hear her poor old timbers creak.

5. We pumped our way round Low’s toft Ness
when the wind backed round to the west-sou’west.

6. Through the Cockle to Cromer cliff,
steering like a waggon with a wheel adrift.

7. Up the Humber, up to the town;
Pump all night or you will drown.

8. The coal was shot by a Keadby crew;
her bottom was rotten and it went right through.

Thames barges carried everything to and from London,
and called anywhere on the east coast they could get into.
They frequently sailed into some tiny creek, sat on the bottom when the tide went out and from there proceeded to (un)load bricks, sand, hay, manure, wood, sugar beet, coal, pianos – anything.

Bob Roberts was Skipper of the Cambria, the last of them operating on sail alone up to 1972 and he sings this and other songs from the east coast on Sea Songs and Shanties.

With a crew of three, occasionally two, there was a lot of hard work to be done and this could have been used as a work song, though with its comic verses and endless possibilities for extension it is just as likely to have taken its part in an evening’s entertainment at some quayside pub in Great Yarmouth or the Butt and Oyster at Pin Mill on the Orwell where Bob lived for a while.
Norfolk Harvest Song

Verse

1. We have a young lad who is reaping the corn; his master will say, You are welcome, brave boy. We will broach the old ale-tub and box it along, and then we will sing the old Harvest Song.

2. We have an old man that is tilling the land; his back it is bent and he scarcely can stand; he will get up in the morning and do all he can, and pray god to reward the old harvest man.

3. A man that is lazy and will not come in, he will hinder his master and likewise the men.

4. Now harvest is ended we will make a great noise and our master will say, You are welcome, brave boys. We will broach the old ale-tub and box it along and then we will sing the old Harvest Song.

Chorus

2. We have an old man that is tilling the land; his back it is bent and he scarcely can stand; he will get up in the morning and do all he can, and pray god to reward the old harvest man.

3. A man that is lazy and will not come in, he will hinder his master and likewise the men.

We will pay him his wages and bid him be gone, for what shall we do, lads, with such lazy one?

4. Now harvest is ended we will make a great noise and our master will say, You are welcome, brave boys.

We will broach the old ale-tub and box it along and then we will sing the old Harvest Song.
Farming in Norfolk goes back a long way. ‘... the earliest clearances of the primeval wildwood began... in the early ninth millenium BC’ (Tom Williamson, The Origins of Norfolk) and that’s about 11,000 years ago! This song isn’t quite that old, being included in William Andrews’ Bygone Norfolk of 1898, and repeated in Ballads, Songs and Rhymes of East Anglia by A S Harvey in 1936. As they didn’t include a tune, that’s the most modern part.

George Ewart Evans wrote in Ask the Fellows Who Cut the Hay: ‘Under the old community the harvest was the climax of the rural year, not merely an incident in the more mechanical and depersonalised round on the farm as it has become today. The whole village was involved and there was a carefully laid down ritual which had long roots far back in medieval times.’

Even school attendance gave way to harvest. In Knapton Remembered, Philip Almey remembers ‘work on the farm, and plenty of it while he was still at school’ in 1946–7, and Kathleen Suckling (née Johnson), born in 1936, recalls the men scything round the edge of the field to let the horse-drawn binder start and then waiting with dogs and sticks for the rats and rabbits as the uncut area in the middle of the field got smaller.
16

The Thatcher

Verse

2. When I was but a young lad
of no more than thirteen years
I was then bound Apprentice,
my heart was full of fears.
My Master was a hard man;
he taught me all he knew
of thraves, combs, of withynecks,
of shingling-hammer too.

3. I learned about the beetle
to beat the end of reeds;
of how to hone the sheep-shears
as sharp as you would need.
I made the sturdy holder
of hazel, sometimes ash;
I made myself a carrier
for holding reeds well lashed.

4. ‘Twas soon that I was put to work
a-helping with my trade;
my days were spent a-matching reeds
until the thraves were made.
The sound of shingling-hammer
on withynecks was heard
until the roofs were strong and safe
and storms could be endured.

5. My youthful years passed
quickly by soon I was on my own;
master of my own thatch
to a craftsman I had grown.
To work with God’s and Nature’s
gifts; to bend them to a task;
to spend your life beneath the sky
is more than most would ask.

Written by Mike King for a TV programme that was never broadcast, this gives a detailed account of a craftsman’s training and his love for his job.

In Harrod’s 1876 Directory of Norfolk the village of East Ruston (pop 750) boasted a church, a chapel and a school. Occupations included tailors, wheelwrights, carpenters, boot & shoemakers, grocers, a coal merchant, a wherry owner, blacksmiths, publicans, drapers, a machinist, a bailiff and millers. There are also 25 farmers listed. Small wonder people didn’t go far from home – they didn’t have to.

Today there’s a school and a pub but the church is un-used and the mill is derelict. However there’s an egg producer, a photographer, an importer, and a garden.

Also, home-brewing was much more common than today so the two pubs, the Butcher’s Arms (still there) and the Chequers were not the only sources of beer. Another reason not to stir too far.

Mind you, if your thatched roof needed replacing in 1876 you had to go 3 miles to Happisburgh (William Suffling) or 4 miles to Sutton (John Annison) to find a thatcher. Once they’d done the job though you could be sure it would last. Norfolk reed was the best there was and would be good for 60 years or so.
Farmer’s Boy

Verse

2. For my father is dead and
my mother is left
with five children great and small,
and what is worse for my mother
yet;
I’m the oldest of them all.
Though small I’ll work as hard
as a horse
if you will me employ:
to plough and sow, to reap and mow,
to be a farmer’s boy, to be a farmer’s boy.

3. And if that you won’t me employ
one favour I’ve to ask,
that’s to shelter me till break of day
from this cold winter’s blast.
At break of day I’ll trudge away:
elsewhere to seek employ;
to plough and sow, to reap and mow,
to be a farmer’s boy, to be a farmer’s boy.

4. Come try the lad, the mistress
said,
let him no further seek.
Oh father do, the daughter cried,
as the tears ran down her cheek.
He’d work if he could;
it’s hard to want food
and wander for employ;
don’t turn him away, but let him stay
and be a farmer’s boy, and be
a farmer’s boy.

5. They tried the lad and found
that he
was worth his weight in gold,
for he could work with all his might
and do what he was told.
Right glad, the farmer asked the lad
to stay in his employ
to plough and sow, to reap and mow;
to be a farmer’s boy.

6. In course of time the lad grew up
and the good old farmer died;
he left the lad the farm he had
and his daughter for his bride.
The lad that was; the farm now has;
oft smiles and thinks with joy
of the lucky day he came that way
to be a farmer’s boy, to be a farmer’s boy.
From A Garland of English Folk Songs by Frank Kidson (1926) and noted at Driffield, Yorks.

Everybody likes a good story and if the orphan ends up with the farm and the farmer’s daughter that’s the best tale of all – one that would bring a tear to the eye of even the stoutest Victorian who heard this song in their drawing room.

George Edwards was a child labourer on a Norfolk farm and dedicated his later long life to preaching in Primitive Methodist Chapels on Sundays and to forming the ‘Eastern Counties Agricultural Labourers’ and Small Holders’ Union’ on the other days. When George entered Parliament in 1920 this song was sung by ecstatic MPs as he took his seat, re-enacting the success of the Farmer’s Boy in real life.

This song was sung by Walter Pardon of Knapton who sang regularly at the Orchard Gardens in North Walsham in the 1970s – where I went to hear him. That was, for me, the last link in a chain: ‘Three of Walter’s mother’s brothers were specially fine singers... but it was Uncle Billy Gee, who lodged with Walter and his parents, who gave Walter the bulk of his songs. In the late 1920s and early 1930s when the Depression was at its worst, Uncle Billy and Walter found themselves with time on their hands... so the couple would spend their afternoons in the garden shed sipping cider or beer and singing songs together. Walter was never sure if Billy had picked up his songs at the Mitre Tavern in North Walsham, or if they were handed down from Billy’s parents who were born in 1827 and 1831.’ (From the notes by Michael Yates to A World without Horses.)

So some of the songs Walter sang to us enthralled young revival singers in 1975 could have been learnt by his Great Uncle in the same town in 1845 – 130 years earlier. But then Norfolk’s like that.
On Board a Ninety-Eight

2. A bold Press Gang surrounded me,
their Warrant they did show,
and swore that I should go
to sea and face the daring foe.
And so they lugged me to the boat,
oh how I cursed my fate;
‘twas then I found that I must float
on board of a ninety-eight.

3. When first I put my foot on board,
how I began to stare;
our Admiral he gave the word;
There is no time to spare.
They weighed their anchor, shook out sail,
and off they bore me straight
to watch the foe in storm and gale
on board of a ninety-eight.

4. Before we reached Americay
they gave me many a drill;
they soon learnt me a nimble way
to handle an iron pill.
In course of time a fight began
when bold Jack Tars laid straight.
What would I give if I could run
from on board a ninety-eight.

5. But as time fled I bolder grew
and hardened was to war.
I’d run aloft with my ship’s crew
and valued not a scar.
So well I did my duty do
I soon made Bosun’s Mate,
and damne soon got Bosun too
on board of a ninety-eight.

6. So years rolled by; at Trafalgar
bold Nelson fought and fell;
as they capsized that hardy tar
I caught a rap as well.
To Greenwich college I came back
because I saved my pate;
they only knocked one wing off Jack
on board of a ninety-eight.

7. So now my cocoa I can take;
my pouch with baccy stored;
with my blue clothes and three-cocked hat
I’m as happy as a Lord.
I’ve done my duty, served my King,
and now I bless my fate;
but damne, I’m too old to sing;
I’m nearly ninety-eight.
A ‘Ninety-Eight’ was a 98-gun Man o’ War – a very big, rather slow, ship which only fulfilled its function by being in the thick of any battle.

Sung, with 4 other songs, by Mr Leatherday, an ex sailor of the North End, King’s Lynn to Vaughan Williams on January 9th 1905.

The young Ralph Vaughan Williams visited the fishing community of the North End of King’s Lynn in 1905 and it changed his life. He had heard Folk Song before but here, and in the King’s Lynn Workhouse, he noted about 78 songs in two ‘magnificently productive days’. (Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*). RVW went on to include some of these tunes in *The English Hymnal* published the next year, and in several of his later classical works.

This song featured in the 2005 concerts to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the visit. Nelson was very popular with the Fleet and with the Norfolk members of it in particular. He was born in the County and was brought up and educated there. His love of the sea was demonstrated when he was a boy by his many visits to Burnham Overy Staithes to watch the shipping. He ensured the loyalty of his men and officers by considering their well-being and earned their admiration by his bold offensives. He reckoned one Norfolk sailor to be worth any two others, never lost his Norfolk accent and once said, ‘I am myself a Norfolk man, and I glory in being so.’

Norfolk people, though, could have been more tactful with their Hero. When Nelson was presented with the freedom of the Borough of Yarmouth in 1800 after the Battle of the Nile, the Clerk was about to administer the oath when he noticed Nelson’s left hand on the Bible. ‘Your right hand, my Lord,’ he said. ‘That,’ replied Nelson, ‘is at Teneriffe.’ (Yarmouth is an Antient Town, A A C Hedges, 1959)
Bungay Roger

Verse

2. They marched us round the barrack square
a-doing of our duty proud, sir;
the Sergeant-Major, he was there,
and he was a-hollering loud, sir.
Eyes right! Eyes left!
Cor blast you hold yer head up,
and if I don’t do what they say
they buggers I in the lock-up.

3. They march I to the Dining Hall
as hungry as a hunter;
the Orderly Officer, he come round,
Now are there any complaints here?
Well up jumps I and with a cry
I says, There bein’t enough of it!
For the meat is high and the taters are dry.
You can tell the cook to stuff it!

4. Now I be doing thirty-odd days
in my little-old cell sir,
and they be trying thirty-odd ways
to make my life like hell, sir.
They make I run with a blooder great gun
until I’m nearly dropping.
When me time is through I’m away off home;
there ain’t no fear of me stopping.

5. I wish I was back on the farm
a-pushing of the blooder old plough sir;
I wish I was back on the farm
a-milking of the blooder old cow sir.
I wish I was back on the farm
with bags of beef and mutton;
with a dirty old fork and a rusty old knife
cor blast I’d be a glutton.

Bungay is in Suffolk, but this is a song that has travelled a lot anyway, and one version, from Cornwall, is called Muddlin’ Barracks. It has travelled in time too. I learned this song from my mother in about 1965, and she had got it from her brother who had been in the Army in North Africa in WW2. This was, of course, long after the end of the King’s Shilling which had been offered as an inducement to enlisting in earlier wars.

I think she ‘cleaned it up’ a bit before singing it to me. Curiously, I’ve never heard anyone else sing verse four and often wonder if it’s unique to our family. That’s how the oral tradition works, even today.
2. I’m going to Geldeston
and when the journey’s done
I’ll go in the Wherry and come out merry;
I’m going to Geldeston.

3. I’m getting off at Guestwick Green;
a smaller place you’ve never seen;
two people, a cat, and that is that;
I’m getting off at Guestwick Green.

4. I’m leaving for Lowestoft town,
I’m taking the railway down.
I’m going to see the East extremity;
I’m leaving for Lowestoft town.

5. I’m bumping to Berney Arms Halt,
a station with only one fault;
when you get out there tha’s the middle of nowhere;
I’m bumping to Berney Arms Halt.

6. I’m wending to Wells-next-Sea;
I’m taking the 9.23,
and if it should rain I’ll come back again;
I’m wending to Wells-next-Sea.

7. I’m steaming to City Station,
that is my destination;
nor Thorpe nor Victori-a ends my story;
I’m steaming to City Station.

There are about 80 disused railway stations in Norfolk so there’s plenty of scope for you to make up some more verses yourself. There never was one at Newton Flotman though – you alighted at Flordon and walked 2 miles! Getting out at Berney Arms Halt (between Reedham and Yarmouth) really does put you in the middle of nowhere, with a 5-mile walk along the Yare or Breydon Water as a bonus. There used to be three termini in Norwich, all just outside the old City walls. Thorpe Station was the first, built by the Norwich and Yarmouth Railway in 1844. It was rebuilt in 1886 and is the only one still there. Victoria (Queen’s Road) was next, built by the Eastern Union Railway in 1849, and lastly came City Station (Barn Road) which was the terminus of the Midland and Great Northern or Muddle and Get Nowhere as it was affectionately known.
Bold Fisherman

2. ‘Morning to you bold fisherman. How came you fishing here?’
   ‘I come a-fishing for your sweet sake upon this river clear.
Refrain
Upon this river clear. I come a-fishing for your sweet sake upon this river clear.’

3. He lashed his boat up by the stem and to the lady went. He took her by the milk-white hand, for it was his intent.
Refrain
For it was his intent, he took her by the milk-white hand, for it was his intent.

4. Then he pulled off his morning gown and gently laid it down. There she beheld three chains of gold hang dangling three times round.
Refrain
Hang dangling three times round. There she beheld three chains of gold hang dangling three times round.

5. Down on her bending knee she fell; so loud for mercy called. ‘I’m calling you some bold fisherman; I see you are some lord.
Refrain
But I see you are some lord. I’m calling you some bold fisherman; But I see you are some lord.’

6. ‘Get up, get up, get up,’ he cried, ‘from off your bending knee. You have not said one single word hath least offended me.
Refrain
At least offended me. You have not said one single word hath least offended me.’

7. ‘I will take you to my father’s hall and there make you my bride, then you will have a bold fisherman to row you on the tide.
Refrain
To row you on the tide. Then you will have a bold fisherman to row you on the tide.’
From the sleeve notes by Paul Marsh and Steve Roud to *The Bonny Labouring Boy* which includes the above:

This song was probably only 150 years old when Harry Cox sang it for Leslie Shepard on October 10th 1965 but by then Harry had been gathering songs himself for 60 years and since his first meeting with E J Moeran in the early 1920s had been singing them for others to note, and later to record, for over 40 years.

Harry learned many songs from his father but actively sought out other singers who had songs that interested him. "Many a time, when I’ve heard of a man in another village who had a song I didn’t know, I’ve walked over to see him, and paid him sixpence to teach it to me. I’ve walked as far as fifteen miles for a song."

His daughter Myrtle recalled, ‘Because my father was not brilliant at writing... he got his sisters to write songs out for him. Rose was the one that would do a lot of the writing... He’d sing ’em over and she’s copy ’em down.’

Bob Thomson wrote in 2000, ‘... written on loose sheets of paper and in two or three school-type exercise books... Overall the collection was quite sizeable – I suppose about 300/400 songs...’

Peter Coleman of Norwich was the last person other than the family to see Harry, visiting him two days before he died (1971). Although Harry was desperately ill he managed to lift himself slightly from the bed and asked Peter to promise not to let the old songs die out. Peter has been singing some of them ever since and later said, ‘There were other singers, but Harry strode like a colossus above them all.’
2. Now to this tavern come a wherryman and asked this daughter for her hand. Why should I marry you, she said, I get all I want without being wed.

3. She said, If with me you want to linger I’ll tie a bit of string all around my finger: as you pass by just pull on the string and I’ll come down and I’ll let you in.

4. So at closing time the wherryman he went to the tavern by the strand, and then he went and he pulled on the string, and she come down and she let him in.

5. Well he’d never seen such a sight before, ’cause the string around her finger was all she wore. So they went upstairs and he tugged again and she pulled back the sheets and she let him in.

6. The sailorman stayed till the cock did crow, then down to the harbour he did go where he told them all about the maiden fair; the plump little thing with the golden hair.

7. Now the story that very soon got around and the very next night in Yarmouth town there were fifteen wherrymen pulling on the string and she come down and she let them all in.

8. So all you young men who to Yarmouth do go, see a plump little thing with her hair hanging low; all you gotta do is pull on the string and she’ll come down and she’ll let you in!
Every port had its 'Sailortown' where various needs would be supplied, and there are many songs, often bawdy, sometimes comical, that tell stories of them. Yarmouth, of course, could not compete with London, Liverpool, Hamburg or Yokohama, but there were certain taverns that were used by sailors in preference to those where he would feel, and be, out of place. Substituting a wherryman for a sailorman brings a sense of scale to proceedings.

From Wherries and Wherrymen, Robert Maister:

To combat some of this the Norfolk and Suffolk Wherrymen’s Mission started on North Quay in 1858 and expanded into the ex Globe public house which had been ‘notorious for the peculiar infamy and variety of the sins which found a congenial theatre there.’ There was later a Wherrymen’s and Working Men’s Institute on North Quay and a Mission boat working up and down the rivers three times a week. Further work was done in Norwich and Aylsham, the latter having a chapel built for wherrymen’s use.

St Andrew’s Church, Great Yarmouth, was consecrated in 1860 and was always known as the ‘Wherrymen’s Church’.
The Norfolk Turnippe

2. This tale an old nurse told to me, which I relate to you; and well I know what nurses say is sacred and is true.

3. At midnight hour a hardy Knight was walking o’er the ley; the stars and moon had lost their light, and he had lost his way.

4. The wind full loud and sharp did blow; the clouds so strong did pour; and such a night, as stories show, was never seen before.

5. In vain he fought for half the night; no shelter could he spy; Pity it was so bold a Knight because of cold should die.

6. Now voices strange assail his ear, and yet no house was nigh. Thought he the devil himself is here, Preserve me God on High!

7. Then summoned he his courage high and thus aloud did call, Giants, demons, come not nigh, for I defy you all!

8. Then from a hollow turnip near there came a sudden light; a friendly voice with accent clear did thus address the Knight:

9. Sir Knight, no demon lives in here; no giant keeps this house, but two poor drovers, goodman Vere and honest Robin Rouse.

10. We two have taken shelter here with oxen, ninety-two, and if you’ll enter, never fear, there’s room enough for you!

From the Town and Country Magazine of September 1770. Modern tune. Spelling and occasional words updated for this book.

‘The reputation of Norfolk for turnips dates from the time of ‘Turnip’ of Rainham (1674 – 1738) who introduced the cultivation of turnips on a large scale, and devoted himself to the improvement of agriculture.’ – Ballads, Songs and Rhymes of East Anglia.
The Outing

Verse

2. Us drives in a wagon to Thetford town
and us gets off at six by the train.
‘Is any for breakfast?’ a bloke come and says.
‘Ah yes, us be hungry, tha’s plain.’
So us had such a feed and us gets up to go
when this bloke says, ‘Pay up, two pound, one.’
I say, ‘You go on, us has paid for our fare,
tw as you asked us for breakfast, my son.’

3. Well us gets up to Town and
us goes to the Zoo, ’cause us heard as how there we ought.
And Sam had an uncle that worked there beside,
us though t us ’ould get in
for nought.
But I say to the bloke, ‘Just count us and see
if us all come back out safe
and sound,
for I’ve heard as some blokes get lost
in the Zoo
and when time to come home, can’t be found.’

4. Next, us go to a place called
Trafalgar Square,
and the beautiful fountains to see.
And Fred say to me, ‘Can us paddle in here?’
I say, ‘And that fare to be free.’
So us takes off our boots and
us takes off our socks
and us paddles about in the sun,
and a crowd gathers round and
they cheer
and they laugh,
and they seem to think suffin were fun.
You can personalise the comic chorus of ‘The Outing’ by substituting your own selection of names.

This song was a favourite of Ray Hubbard. We know about the life of Ray from the notes of John Halliday, who interviewed Ray in 2008 before issuing the CD *Horsemen’s Harvest*. Ray Hubbard was born born at Langmere near Dickleborough, south Norfolk, in 1933. His family was steeped in music; his parents and grandparents all played a variety of instruments (concertina, mouth-organs, accordions) and sang. In addition, his father and grandfather were both horsemen.

Ray started playing at 6 years and had music lessons. He got a local Saturday job when only 8 years old with Mr Saunders at Langmere Hall Farm, working with Suffolk Shire horses. He passed the exam for Diss Grammar School, wanting to become a Vet but the school wanted £400 which was beyond his family. He got a full-time job at 14 on Langmere Farm and was told that when he was 21 he could take over the farm. This he duly did in 1954.

When the farm was sold in 1966, Ray was still there working only with horses, the last man to do so.

Ray played church organ at Rushall and was choirmaster at Dickleborough where an appeal for funds for the bells produced a Concert Party which toured Norfolk for 10 years.
East Anglia is generally considered to be the part of England most rich in folk songs and folk singers. Sam Larner learned many of his songs from his father and sang in public from the age of 9. Later in life he sang at many fishermen’s concerts all the way from Shetland to Cornwall – as well as his local pub, the Fisherman’s Return.

“We used to have some good old times when we used to come home from sea. We used to get in the old pub, have a pint or two around, give them a drink, a song and a four-handed reel. Round we’d go and up we’d go and we used to have a rare old, good old time. That’s all there was for our enjoyment.”

Sam was born in Winterton in 1878 when the population was almost 900 and its chief industry was fishing. He first went to sea aged 8 in a sailing lugger and made his first trip under steam in 1899. By the time he was 55 he had many times visited the Faroe Islands, the Norwegian Deeps and the Channel Grounds as well as much of the Northern Sea and had, according to his doctor, “worn himself out with hard work”. He made his first recording in 1957 aged 79 and became well-known in the Folk Song Revival. 65 songs were collected from Sam: traditional ballads, broadsides, sea-songs, music hall pieces etc.
Acknowledgements

Notes about songs by Alan Helsdon of Norwich except where otherwise credited.

Alan Helsdon is Norwich born and bred and has been involved with many folk activities in Norfolk including running the Norwich Folk Club and various Singarounds, Sessions and Ceilidh bands. He has taught in the County’s schools since 1978 and has recently published ‘Hawk & Harriers’ – a collection of Norfolk dance tunes.

All songs are traditional except:
- Blue Water Wherries
- Newton Flotman Train
- The Thatcher
- Tunes for Norfolk Harvest Song
- The Norfolk Turnippe

by Alan Helsdon

Thanks to staff at Norfolk Heritage Centre, Norfolk Record Office, Great Yarmouth Library, BBC Radio Norfolk, Eastern Daily Press and to John Halliday.

Historical photographs courtesy of the Norfolk Record Office and Norfolk County Council Library & Information Service.

Further resources
Further copies, teachers’ notes and teaching resources can be downloaded free of charge from www.norfolk.gov.uk/musicservice
Sing your way through local history! From milling songs in Manchester to hop-picking songs from Kent, *Singing Histories* uses traditional song and their stories to bring history to life.

The project has been produced by Sing London – the arts organisation whose mission is to unite the nation in song.

The *Singing Histories* series includes eight regions: Plymouth, Birmingham, Kent, London, Manchester, Norfolk, Oxfordshire, Sunderland.

Produced by Sing London in partnership with Alan Helsden, Norfolk Arts Service, Norfolk County Council Library & Information Service, Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service and Norfolk Record Office.

Further copies, teachers’ notes and teaching resources can be downloaded free of charge at www.norfolk.gov.uk/musicservice
At the English Folk Dance and Song Society, we champion the folk arts at the heart of England’s rich and diverse cultural landscape.

Our award-winning Resource Bank contains over 100 resources – incorporating hundreds of audio files, videos and supporting documents, all free to download. They offer endless practical ways to use folk song, music, dance, drama and more in all sorts of community settings, as well as in formal education.

efdss.org/resourcebank

Please help us keep our learning resources freely available for all!

Support us now: efdss.org/donate

Registered Charity in England & Wales, no. 305999