

singing histories

Oxfordshire



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Foreword

Oxfordshire is known worldwide for its great university city, yet the county's towns and villages are also rich in history – and especially in folk song. In this booklet we present a selection drawn from both Oxford and the surrounding countryside.

Folk songs are the songs of the people, chiefly handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. As people picked them up from their parents, friends or workmates they might make subtle alterations, either through mistakes or to make them more relevant to their own lives – to 'improve' them. They might vary the lyrics or the tune, or even make up a tune if they wanted to. So, folk songs are organic – they reflect the tastes and character of the people who have shaped them.

Many songs have a history going back hundreds of years, and were made up by people whose names are now lost in the mists of time. In other cases, we can trace a folk song back to a particular composer or to a printed ballad. From Tudor times words were being printed on broad sheets of paper known as broadsheets, or broadsides. By the 1600s, cheap printing had arrived and broadsides were sold in masses by travelling peddlers at markets and fairs. Ballads became the hit records of their day, and the most popular sold in tens of thousands. The ballad-seller would sing his or her wares, and could sometimes be seen wetting a thumb to detach a sheet from a bundle and hand it to a customer while still singing.

People would pin the ballads up on barn doors or cottage walls, learn their favourites by heart and sing them to others when they travelled the roads or moved home. So, through the ballad sellers and ordinary folk too, songs travelled around the country. An Oxfordshire song might take root in Devonshire, in Yorkshire – or even overseas, in the Americas.

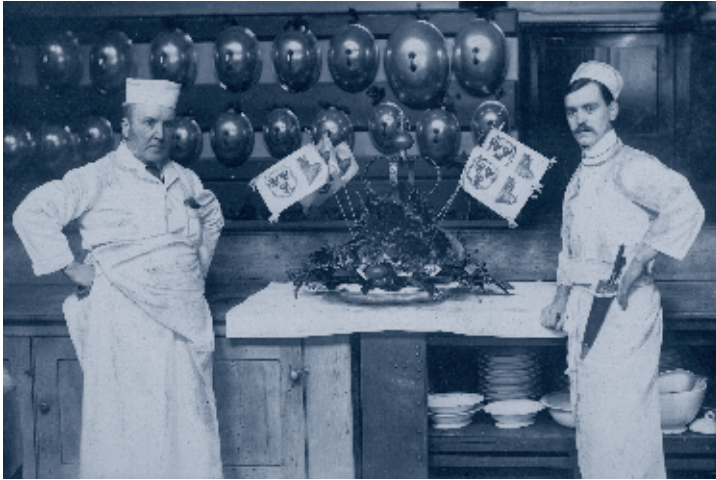
From Victorian times, people took an increasing interest in folk songs. And because they seemed to be dying out, 'collectors' went round the country finding the people who still sang them and noting what they sung. They discovered that the alehouse was a favourite place for people to swap songs, but there were many others. One item might be popular with ploughboys and get taught in the stables; others were chanted by sheep-shearers as they clipped fleeces in springtime. Alfred Williams, who collected many songs in Oxfordshire in the 1920s, wrote that serving girls in the kitchens of farms and country houses had regular musical evenings and taught each other new material there.

The selection includes several songs that were newsworthy in their day but never 'caught on' for long: 'The Oxford and Hampton Railway', and 'Dr Darwin' are examples. Others though have a simple strength and beauty that have made people want to go on singing them year after year, from the ancient 'Boar's Head Carol', 'Near Woodstock Town' and 'Early One Morning' to more recent favourites such as 'As I Was Going to Banbury' and 'The Eynsham Poaching Song'.

The test of all folk songs is to sing them – and we hope that you will enjoy doing so.

Tim Healey
Director, Oxford Folk Festival

The Boar's Head Carol (1521)



This carol, with its mixture of Latin and English words, is sung every Christmas at The Queen's College in Oxford as a boar's head is brought to the table. The college officials enter the hall to a trumpet call. After grace is said, the boar's head is carried in on a silver charger, stuck with flags and surrounded by sprigs of rosemary and bay. A solo singer pauses to sing the verses; then everyone joins in on the chorus while the procession moves forward.

Boar's head feasts were popular at Christmas in the Middle Ages, and are thought to go back earlier still. The pagan Norsemen had a custom of sacrificing a boar to Freyja, goddess of fertility, at her midwinter festivities. Other boar's head carols have survived around the country, though Oxford's is by far the best known. It reached a national audience when folk rock band Steeleye Span released their version in 1977.

If the Queen's College feast did have its origin in the old Norse celebrations, that is not the story told in Oxford. It is said at Queen's that it commemorates the bravery of a student at the college. The story goes that he was strolling in the neighbouring

forest of Shotover, reading the Greek philosopher Aristotle. Suddenly a wild boar burst from the trees and attacked him open-mouthed. Instead of running, the student boldly thrust the book he was reading down the boar's throat.

Queen's College's Boar's Head Carol was first published in the reign of Henry VIII. It is likely to have been older though, and could even have been sung in some form at the time of the college's founding in 1341. The ceremony may have changed over the years, but the one performed today still recalls its roots in ancient tradition.

The boar's head in hand bear I, be decked with bays and rose-ma-ry; and I
 pray you my mas-ters be mer-ry, Quot es-tis in con-vi-vi-o.

10 REFRAIN
 Ca-put ap-ri de-fe-ro Red-dens lau-des Do-mi-no.

2. The boar's head as I understand,
 Is the bravest dish in all the land
 When thus bedecked with a gay
 garland;
 Let us *servire cantico*.

Chorus: Caput apri defero, etc

3. Our steward hath provided this
 In honour of the King of Bliss,
 Which on this day to be served is
In Reginensi Atrio.

Chorus: Caput apri defero, etc

Banbury Ale (1609)



A four-part round from Thomas Ravenscroft's *Pammelia; Musicks Miscellanie*, published in 1609. This was the first collection of rounds and folk songs ever printed in English. (Later that year, he brought out a second book which included 'Three Blind Mice'). Ravenscroft was only about 17 at the time, and was attracted by anything that could be sung in lively fashion. It is not known how many of the songs he published were written by him, and how many were things he heard at the alehouse – the most popular venue for music-making. By his time the ballad industry was flourishing and printers started folding sheets into little volumes called chapbooks, garlands or miscellanies.

Brewing was a thriving industry in Oxfordshire, and Banbury¹ was one of the towns famous for it. In mediaeval times, making the drink was a household activity much like baking bread or weaving cloth, and many alehouses began as little more than family homes where ale might be served up by the women who made it - 'ale-wives' rather than landlords. To show her brew was ready the alewife just stuck a green bush up on a pole, which was the first type of pub sign. Perhaps the brewer in this song was a Banbury blacksmith, or his wife.

By Ravenscroft's time, anyone wanting to open an alehouse was supposed to get a licence. No gambling was allowed in pubs, which were supposed to shut down at 9pm. But the law was hard to enforce. Many unlicensed alehouses still flourished, taking no notice of the regulations. Men, women and children were all allowed in, and it was generally left to the parish constable to keep an eye on things and make sure they didn't become too rowdy.

The alehouse became like a community centre. Bowls and skittles were played there; plays and prize fights were staged,

and showmen exhibited giants, dwarves and exhibitions of wild animals. The village inn was often the place where coaches stopped to pick up and drop off passengers. People went to there to hear the news, keep in touch with the local gossip – and to sing.

1. Banbury is famous for the nursery rhyme 'Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross'. In fact the town had three crosses which were all torn down by Puritans in 1600. Banbury was a centre of the Puritans who felt that market crosses, statues of the Virgin Mary and so on amounted to the worship of stone idols. They also banned Maypoles, morris dancing and any kind of merrymaking on a Sunday.



Great Tom is Cast (1611)



This three-part round was composed in 1611 by Matthew White, organist at Christ Church in Oxford. It celebrates the biggest and most famous of the city's many bells. During the Middle Ages, Tom hung at Oseney Abbey but it was moved in 1546 after Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries. As it had become cracked, it was recast before being hung in Christ Church, Oxford's grandest college, in 1611. The huge bell weighs over 7 tons and had to be drawn on rollers to Christ Church where it still hangs today.

Great Tom was first set up in the church, but in 1683 it was rehung in Tom Tower, specially built for the purpose by Sir Christopher Wren. Great Tom is still rung 101 times every night at 9.05 to recall the original number of scholars at Christ Church. Until early in the 20th century, every college in Oxford used to close its gates at the sound – and any students coming in late had to pay 'gate money' to get in. So, the tolling of Great Tom was like a symbol of Christ Church presiding over the whole university with its curfew bell.

Another popular round, *Hark the Bonny Christchurch Bells*, was composed by Henry Aldridge, Dean of Christ Church from 1689–1710. It refers to drinkers finishing their drinks as soon as they hear the mighty Tom.



Vive le Roy (c.1650)



What though the zea - lots pull down the pre - lates, push at the pul-pit and kick at the
8 crown, Shall not the Round - head soon be con - foun - ded? Sa, sa, sa,
14 say boys ha, ha, ha, ha, boys then we'll re - turn with tri-umph and joy.

2. Shall we then never once more endeavour
And strive to purchase our ancient renown?
Then we'll be merry, drink claret and sherry
Then we will sing, boys
God bless the king, boys,
Cast up your caps, and cry *Vive le Roy*.

A Cavalier song from the time of the Civil War – *Vive le Roy* is French for Long Live the King! The 'zealots' were the Puritans siding with Parliament. The 'prelates' were high-ranking members of the Church of England which was on the Royalist side. The townsfolk of Oxford were divided in their loyalties, some supporting Cromwell, others supporting King Charles.

Both sides had their own songs, and a Puritan observer called Nehemiah Wallington wrote on 6 October 1644: 'At the last Lord's Day in the morning, some of the soldiers had appointed a merry meeting at a fiddler's profane taphouse near the Red Lion by the Fishmarket, with music, drink and tobacco, one drinking an health to the King, another to the next meeting of Parliament. Thus by drunkenness, music, scurrilous songs, cursing and swearing profaning God's holy day'.

The university was strongly for the king, however. And because it held sway over the city, Oxford supported the

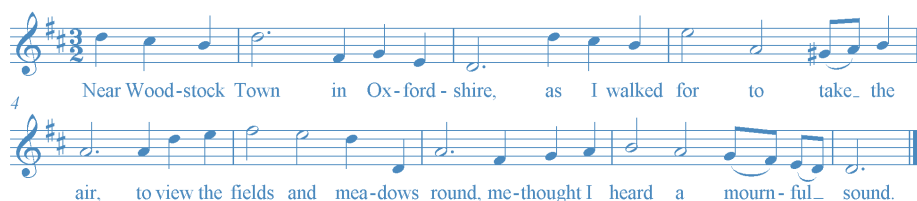
Royalists. When the Roundheads took London, Charles brought his court to the city for refuge, and Oxford became Charles's military headquarters. He set himself up in Christ Church, created his own parliament, and ordered fortifications to be built around the town. New College cloisters were used to store gunpowder; Magdalen College grove became an artillery park; much college silver was melted down to mint Royalist coinage. For three and a half years, from October 1642, Oxford was effectively the Royalist capital of Britain.

In April 1646, with defeat looming, the King fled Oxford with two companions. He went disguised as a serving man, wearing a false beard and a suit of ordinary clothes. The city surrendered to Parliament two months later. The precise date of 'Vive le Roy' is not known, but it clearly dates from the later period of the Civil War, when the Roundheads were either winning or had already won and were 'pushing at the prelates', that is, knocking the Royalist churchmen off their perches.

As soon as Parliament's victory was assured, Oxford was purged of many high-ranking churchmen, and Cromwell sent masses of Puritans to preach in their place. In 1650 he himself became Chancellor of the University. The song looks forward to a time when the Roundheads will be overthrown. The King referred to could be Prince Charles (later Charles II) rather than Charles I who was executed in 1648.



Near Woodstock Town (1736–63)



2. Down by a crystal river side,
A gallant bower I espied,
Where a fair lady made great moan,
With many a bitter sigh and groan.

3. Alas! quoth she, my love's unkind,
My sighs and tears he will not mind,
But he is cruel unto me,
Which causes all my misery.

4. Soon after he had gained my heart
He cruelly did from me part;
Another maid he does pursue,
And to his vows he bids adieu.

5. The green turf served her as a bed,
And flowers a pillow for her head;
She laid her down and nothing spoke,
Alas! For love her heart was broke.

6. Soon after was the squire possessed
With various thoughts that broke his
rest,
Sometimes he thought her groans he
heard,
Sometimes her ghastly ghost appeared.

7. 'Since my unkindness did destroy
My dearest love and only joy
My wretched life must ended be;
Now must I die and come to thee!'

8. His rapier from his side he drew
And pierced his body through and
through,
So he dropped down in purple gore
Just where she did some time before.

9. He buried was within the grave
Of his true love – and thus you have
A sad account of his hard fate,
Who died in Oxfordshire of late.

This tragic tale is from an 18th-century ballad sheet in Oxford's Bodleian Library, though the song itself is known to go back earlier. Also known as 'The Oxfordshire Tragedy', it tells of a girl who dies of a broken heart after she is abandoned by a cruel squire. The squire is haunted by her ghost and, in remorse, takes his own life. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of ballads were printed telling of murder and sudden death. Songs about executions were particularly popular. Huge crowds would gather around the scaffold, and ballad-sellers always did brisk trade there, selling their sheets for a penny or so.

Songs like these served the same need as crime dramas and sensational tabloids do today; to feed the public's fascination with the darker side of human nature. 'As I walked forth to take the air' is a line that countless folk songs have in common, and they often go on to tell of a seduction – or attempted seduction. (In other ballads, the girl will outwit the man trying to seduce her, and make a fool of him).

No one knows whether it is based on a true story, but the ghostly element in the tale has some affinities with the real life case of Amy Robsart, a noblewoman in Queen Elizabeth's time. She was found dead on 8 September 1560 at Cumnor Place, Oxfordshire - lying at the foot of the stairs with a broken neck. Some say that she died of a broken heart; others that she was murdered by her husband, the Queen's favourite, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Dudley owned Cornbury Park which is, as it happens, 'near Woodstock Town', and Amy's ghost is said to have appeared to him as he was hunting in the forest. Amy warned him that he would join her in death within 10 days. He did so, dying at Cornbury Park on 4 September 1588. Amy's ghost is said to have appeared at Cornbury since, warning again of sudden death.

Woodstock itself was the ancient site of a royal hunting lodge. The town is known today for one of the greatest of England's stately homes, Blenheim Palace, built 1705–25.

Early One Morning (1784)

Ear - ly one mor - ning, just as the sun was ri - sing, I heard a maid

6 sing-ing in the val - ley be - low: 'Oh! don't de - ceive me, Oh! ne - ver

12 leave_ me, how_ could you use_ a_ poor_ mai - den so?

2. Oh! gay is the garland, and fresh are the roses
I've culled from the garden to bind on thy brow;
Oh, don't deceive me! Oh, do not leave me!
How could you use a poor maiden so?

3. Remember the vows that you made to your Mary,
Remember the bow'r where you vow'd to be true;
Oh, don't deceive me! Oh, do not leave me!
How could you use a poor maiden so?'

4. Thus sung the poor maiden, her sorrows bewailing,
Thus sung the poor maid in the valley below;
'Oh, don't deceive me! Oh, do not leave me!
How could you use a poor maiden so?'

No-one can say where this famous English folk song originated, but the tune was first noted down in the 18th century by a man called John Baptist Malchair, who heard it being sung in the streets of Oxford. Malchair was a violinist and composer who led the band at the city's smart new concert hall, the Holywell Music Room. But although he was a very gifted musician, he also loved the music of ordinary people and used to ramble about the city, noting down any tunes he heard being played by street



musicians. In his diary, he wrote that he got *Early One Morning* 'from the singing of a Poor Woman and two female children, Oxford, May 18, 1784.' As far as is known, this was the first time anyone wrote the tune down.

The song later became incredibly popular, and it seems that serving maids had a special fondness for it. The Victorian song collector William Chappell wrote in the 1850s that he had heard it sung by them 'from Leeds, from Hereford, and from Devonshire, and by others from parts nearer to London.' The song often cropped up in miscellanies, and Chappell wrote that he had found *Early One Morning* in 'Sleepy Davy's Garland', 'The Songster's Magazine' and others. The words vary somewhat in different versions, but the theme is always the same – a heart-broken maiden complains of being left by her boyfriend. Perhaps a lot of serving maids had had similar experiences, and that was why it meant so much to them?

Oxford Scholar (1813–29)

When first the world I did begin,
Through every rank and station,
To Oxford school straight I came
To view every part of the nation;
Of all the rakish tricks I played
I'll tell you in such a manner,
How I would spend my night and days
When I was an Oxford scholar.

A servant maid I always kept
To sweep out my study and chamber,
I could kiss her when I liked
Because I could command her;
But sure such havoc I did make
Withal to dress my honour,
I was a most wild and extravagant rake,
When I was an Oxford scholar.

I beat my butler and my cook
When they denied what I wanted,
My parents' hearts I almost broke
When money and things grew scanty;
But sure such havoc I did make
Withal to cross my honour,
I was a most wild and extravagant
youth,
When I was an Oxford scholar.

The Sabbath day I always kept,
When chapel bells did call me,
Drunk or sober to prayers I went
For fear the devil should maul me;
When kneeled down for to receive
Good liquor it did follow,
I was forced to puke in my surplice
sleeve



When I was an Oxford scholar.
I spent my money and sold my books,
I lived upon my learning,
Many an oath I turned into gold,
And spent it in the bargain.
I'll teach your children, I'll teach them
well,
I'll teach them all good manners;
All you that have sons and would have
them spoiled,
You must make them all Oxford
scholars.

A varsity trick, smuggling in

The disgraceful behaviour of Oxford students is satirised in this ballad. The Bodleian Library in Oxford has several copies, so it must have been fairly popular. They were first published between 1813 and 1829, a time when the university was notorious for its lax standards. We hear of our scholar kissing his serving maid, beating his butler, breaking his parents' hearts through his spendthrift ways, and going drunk to prayers in chapel.

Only men were admitted to the university at this time (though women were often smuggled in for partying in at night). Students were generally rich and under no pressure to learn, while the dons were just as comfortable, being under no pressure to teach. Both dons and students spoke Latin and kept up their ceremonious manners. They wore academic gowns in the street; frock coats when they dined in hall; and surplices when they went to chapel. But the university won a reputation for being conservative and self-satisfied; completely out of touch with the modern world. The radical politician John Bright called Oxford 'the home of dead languages and undying prejudices.'

Drinking and eating too much were the main vices. One Professor of Geology, the eccentric Dr Buckland, was famous for wanting to taste every dish in the world. He kept jackals, monkeys and bears in his house in Christ Church, and served his guests the likes of crocodile and mice baked in batter. He once said that a mole was the worst thing he had ever eaten, but later decided that bluebottles were even nastier.

Later in the century there were strong moves to improve standards. Progressive dons started to encourage students from less wealthy families to come and study, and in 1878 the first women's college was founded. The ballad sheet does not say what tune should be used for the song. You can fit it to anything you like – or make up a melody for yourself.

Oxford and 'Hampton Railway (1852)

If you will lis - ten to my song I'll not de - tain you ve - ry long, on the
have a ride, oh what a treat, fa - ther, mo - ther, son and daugh - ter, a -

4 1. 2.
First of May the folks did throng, to view the Ox - ford rail - way. And to wa - ter.
long the line like one o' - clock by fire and steam and

9
Ri - fum, ti - fum, mirth and fun, don't you won - der how it's done,

13
car - ria - ges with - out hor - ses run on the Hamp - ton and Ox - ford rail - way.

2. From villages and from the towns,
The gents and ladies flocked around
And music through the air did sound
Along the Oxford railway.

There was bakers, butchers, nailers
too,
Lots of gentlemen in blue,
And all did strive to get a view,
Along the Oxford railway.

Chorus: Rifum, tifum, mirth and fun...

3. An old woman peeping at the line,
Said I wouldn't care a farthing,
But they destroyed my cottage fine,
And cut away my garden,
Where I so many years did dwell,
Growing lots of cabbages and
potatoes,

But worse than that, my daughter Nell,
Went off with the navigators.

Chorus

4. When the line is finished at both
ends,
You may send your cocks and hens,
And go to visit all your friends,
Your ducks and turkeys, pigs and
geese,
To any part wherever you please.
You may also send your butter and
eggs,
And they can ride who've got no legs,
By the Hampton and Oxford railway.

Chorus

Railway lines started to sprawl across Britain in the 1830s, built by the 'navigators' mentioned in the song. Also known as 'navvies', these tough, hard-drinking workmen built the rail tracks, tunnels, cuttings and embankments. The new railways – and the navvies too – formed popular subjects for ballads and folk songs everywhere.

The railways came later to Oxford than to other important cities, because the colleges were afraid that students would be corrupted by a big influx of outsiders – or take trips to places beyond the university's control. In 1844, when the Great Western Railway at last gained permission to reach Oxford, university officers were given the right to police the railway station. They could stop students from travelling – even if they had paid their fare. One of the places they were worried about them visiting was Ascot, famous for its horseracing.

The Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton railway was begun in 1845. The famed engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel was in charge until 1852, when the first major section of the line, running from Stourbridge to Evesham, opened on Saturday 1 May. The day was treated as a public holiday in all the towns and villages along the line; there were cheering crowds, church bells and cannon fire. The cheery ballad dates from the year of the opening. Note that it does not really say anything very specific about what happened that day. It may well have been printed ahead of the event – to sell to the crowds who assembled.

Oxford's line to Wolverhampton was finally completed in 1854. There were mishaps, though. In 1858, a particularly bad accident occurred when carriages became derailed during a Sunday excursion, resulting in the death and serious injury of 70 people. So many problems in fact occurred that the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton railway was nicknamed 'The Old Worse and Worse'.

Dr Darwin (c.1860)

Oh, Doc tor Dar-win he's the boy, to tell the truth with - out al-loy, re - gard-less whom he
 6 may an - noy, sing oh__ for Doc - tor Dar - win. Now Peers to He - rald's col - lege throng, to
 11 learn to whom they all be - long, for all their quar - te - rings are wrong, ac - cor - ding to Doc - tor
 16 Dar - win. Ho - key, po - key, mon - key fum, won - ders ne - ver will be done Hux
 21 ley and Lub - bock and ev' - ry - one__ sup - por - ting Doc - tor Dar - win.

2. Some trace their pedigree so far,
 With Garter, Coronet and Star,
 But no-one knows how old they are

According to Doctor Darwin.

The Howards and Gowers, and all
 that lot,

Were born to be, I know not what,
 But whence they came at last we've got

According to Doctor Darwin.

Chorus: Hokey, pokey, monkey fum,

3. Some monkeys they are vastly kind,
 And some apes have no tails behind,
 And that's where they're so like mankind

According to Doctor Darwin.

The fish in shore and out at sea,
 Related are to you and me,

Think of that when you've shrimps
 for tea,

According to Doctor Darwin.

Chorus: Hokey, pokey, monkey fum,





A Victorian ballad from Oxford's Bodleian Library pokes fun at Charles Darwin. The famous naturalist had put forward the theory that all species of life have evolved over millions of years, from common ancestors. The idea that even the noblest families such as the Howards and Gowers might be descended from apes struck people as very funny. The first verse suggests that they will all be rushing to the college of heraldry where their family crests are recorded – to find the apes that should be on them.


Darwin's book *On the Origin of Species* was published in 1859. It prompted furious criticism from some churchmen because its ideas seemed to contradict the Bible's version of how humanity came into being. A great debate was held at the Oxford University Museum the next year. Darwin's opponents were led by a powerful speaker called Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, and it is reported that more than a thousand people crowded in to listen. Darwin himself was too ill to attend, but his cause was championed by Thomas Huxley, a notable scientist who earned the nickname of 'Darwin's Bulldog' for his strong support of the naturalist. After the debate both sides claimed victory, but most people agree that it was a key moment when scientists generally began to accept the idea of human evolution.

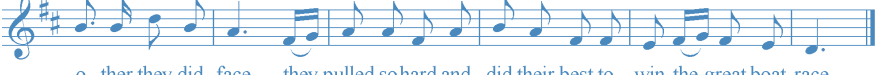
The verses are edited from the longer version on the ballad. The term 'Hokey pokey' originally came from *hocus pocus*, a traditional cry of street magicians; it later came to refer to any cheap trick or swindle. Biologist Sir John Lubbock was another distinguished supporter of Darwin; he and Huxley were members of the 'X Club' to promote the naturalist's theories. The song borrows the tune from a popular ballad of 1858 called *The King of the Cannibal Islands* whose nonsensical chorus began 'Hokey pokey wonkee fum'. The tune was a favourite of William Kimber, a great concertina player and morris dancer from Headington in Oxford, who from 1899 played a key role in reviving morris dancing in England.

Oxford & Cambridge Boat Race (1877)

Soprano  Now if you'll lis-ten un-to me, *Doo-dah Doo-dah*, I'll tell you of a jol-ly spree,

7
S.  *Doo-dah Doo-dal Day* It's a-bout the boat race you must know *Doo-dah Doo-dah* It

13
S.  is such sport to see them row, *Doo-dah Doo-dal Day*. The crews they nobly tried, each

19
S.  o-ther they did face, they pulled so hard and did their best to win the great boat race.

2. Oh! won't it be a glorious sight,
Doodah Doodah
 They'll pull away with all their might,
Doodah Doodal Day
 Finer crews could ne'er be,
Doodah Doodah
 Their whopping muscles you can see.
Doodah Doodal Day

Chorus: The crews they nobly tried...

3. Such pushing and squeezing oh
 goodness me,
Doodah Doodah
 Between the chaps and girls you can
 see,
Doodah Doodal Day
 To see the race they all are bent,
Doodah Doodah
 Oh! won't there be some money spent.
Doodah Doodal Day

Chorus

4. Before the boys began to row,
Doodah Doodah
 They take a stroke with the oars you
 know.
Doodah Doodal Day
 In their pretty dresses of coloured
 cotton,
Doodah Doodah
 Don't they fit tight from top to bottom.
Doodah Doodal Day

Chorus

5. There's Polly and Jane as they row
past,
Doodah Doodah
Looking through their opera glass.
Doodah Doodal Day
Says Jane to Polly 'Oh! goodness me,
Doodah Doodah
One's burst his breeches and I can see.
Doodah Doodal Day

Chorus

6. When the race it is done,
Doodah Doodah
Oh won't there be some jolly fun.
Doodah Doodal Day
As home the chaps and girls they go
Doodah Doodah
They wind it up with a game or so.
Doodah Doodal Day

Chorus



A saucy Victorian song celebrates the famous university race. The ballad sheet is from Oxford's Bodleian Library and someone has scrawled on it 'Hampstead Heath, Good Friday, 30.3.77'. So, it is likely that whoever bought it got it from a ballad seller at Hampstead Heath in north London, where Bank Holiday fairs were regularly held. The ballad was probably first produced for sale to the crowds in London watching the boat race itself. It was already a major national event by 1877, a year which produced a sensational result. The race was declared a dead heat – the only one that has ever been.

The sheet does not specify a tune, but was obviously intended to be sung to the popular 'Camptown Races'. Like many cheap street ballads it was obviously written quickly and with no great care – it is hard work getting some of the lines to fit the melody. Songs like this rarely entered the folk singing tradition; there was not enough in them for people to want to learn them by heart. The ballad sellers relied on their audience being attracted by the title, or wanting to take away a souvenir – whether from a boat race, a railway opening, a prize fight, or execution.

The idea for a rowing race between the universities of Oxford and Cambridge came from two young men who had been schoolfriends at Harrow. Charles Merivale went to Cambridge, and Charles Wordsworth to Oxford. On 12 March 1829, Merivale got Cambridge to send a challenge to Oxford, and so the tradition was born. The first race was rowed on the river at Henley in Oxfordshire in 1829. Oxford, wearing Dark Blue, beat their rivals in Light Blue and the day ended with a grand display of fireworks. Since then, the loser of the previous race always challenges the opposition to a re-match. The present route, covering more than 4 miles from Putney to Mortlake in London, was used from 1845. Today 250,000 spectators crowd the banks of the Thames on Race Day, and the event draws millions more television viewers around the world.

THE

OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE BOAT RACE.

New if you'll listen unto me,
Doodah Doodah.
I'll tell you of a jolly spree,
Doodah Doodah Day.
It's about the boatrace you must know,
Doodah Doodah.
It is such sport to see them row,
Doodah Doodah Day.

CHORUS:—

The crews they nobly tried,
Each other they did face,
They pulled so hard and did their best
To win the great boat-race.

Oh! won't it be a glorious sight,
They'll pull away with all their might,
Finer crews could ne'er be,
Their whopping muscles you can see.

Such pushing and squeezing, oh! goodness
me,
Between the chaps and girls you can see,
To see the race they all are bent,
Oh! won't there be some money spent.

Before the boys began to row.
They take a stroke with their oars you
know.

In their pretty dresses of coloured cotton,
Don't they fit tight from top to bottom.

There's Polly and Jane as they row past
Looking through their opera glass
Says Jane to Polly oh! goodness me,
One's burst his branches and I can see

Bob Snooks on the river he did go
To see the race and have a blow
He lost his scull, least, so he said,
And had to use his stick instead.

Says old Mrs. Brown, oh! what a sin,
If some young scamp ain't stuck a pin,
I wish I'd never come I'm sure,
For I shall never be able to sit down any
more.

There was big Bill Smith, that aly young
fellow
He was poking the girls with his umbrella
But they only laughed I do declare
And said be quick or you'll rattle my
hair

When the race it is done.
Oh! won't there be some jolly fun.
As home the chaps and girls they go,
They wind it up with a game or so

We Shepherds are the Best of Men (1893)

We shep-herds are_ the best of men, that e'er trod Eng-lish ground; when we come to an
6 ale- house we va-lue not a crown. We spend our mo-ney free- ly,___ we pay be- fore we
12 go;_____ there's no ale on___ the wolds where the stor- my winds do blow. We
17 spend our mo - ney free - ly,___ we pay be - fore___ we go;_____

2. A man that is a shepherd
Does need a valiant heart,
He must not be faint-hearted,
But boldly do his part.
He must not be faint-hearted,
Be it rain, or frost, or snow,
With no ale on the wolds
Where the stormy winds do blow.

Chorus: He must not...

3. When I kept sheep on Blockley Hills
It made my heart to ache
To see the ewes hang out their tongues
And hear the lambs to bleat;
Then I plucked up my courage
And o'er the hills did go,
And penned them in the fold
While the stormy winds did blow.

Chorus: Then I plucked up...

4. As soon as I had folded them
I turned me back in haste
Unto a jovial company
Good liquor for to taste;
For drink and jovial company
They are my hearts' delight,
Whilst my sheep lie asleep
All the fore-part of the night.

Chorus: For drink and jovial company...

A hugely popular song among shepherds, and very well known in the Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire Cotswolds. It was sung for Radio Oxford by traditional singer Mervyn J. Penny as late as the 1960s. The Cotswolds were sheep hills and their many handsome churches and manors were built on wealth from the wool trade. The market town of Witney was famed from the Middle Ages for its blanket-making industry. Water for cleansing the cloth was drawn from the River Windrush, which was believed to give them a special purity. A 17th century visitor noted that 'no place yields Blanketing so notoriously white as is made in Witney'.

Shepherds would sing songs like this at their sheep-shearing feasts, when the shearing was over. They were highly regarded by farmers in Oxfordshire, and received special perks. When the first lamb of the season was born, the farmer gave them lamb pancakes; when the lambs' tails were docked they were given the tails to make lambs' tail pie. The song itself reveals the pride shepherds took in their demanding work, and their own sense that among farm labourers, they were a breed apart. This version of the song was first published in 1893. However, it closely resembles a much older sailors' song of the 17th century. This tells of the hardships of the mariner's life, 'When the stormy winds do blow'. There are no rules in folk music. At some time, shepherds must have heard the song and adapted it for themselves...



As I was Going to Banbury (1909)



2. And when the codlings began to fall
Ri-fol la-ti-tee O
And when the codlings began to fall
I found five hundred men in all.
With a ri-fol la-ti-tee O.

3. And one of the men I saw was dead,
Ri-fol la-ti-tee O
And one of the men I saw was dead
So I sent for a hatchet to open his head.
With a ri-fol la-ti-tee O.

4. And in his head I found a spring,
Ri-fol la-ti-tee O
And in his head I found a spring
And seven young salmon a-learning
to sing
With a ri-fol la-ti-tee O.

5. And one of the salmon as big as I,
Ri-fol la-ti-tee O
And one of the salmon as big as I
Now do you not think I am telling a lie?
With a ri-fol la-ti-tee O.

6. And one of the salmon as big as an elf,
Ri-fol la-ti-tee O
And one of the salmon as big as an elf –
If you want any more you must sing it
yourself
With a ri-fol la-ti-tee O.



A nonsense song collected by Cecil Sharp in 1909 from a 71-year-old nun called Sister Emma, of Clewer in Berkshire. Sharp was one of the most important collectors of folk songs and traditional dances in the early 20th century. In Victorian times people started to notice how country people were singing their own songs less and less, partly because of the spread of village schools where children were taught what to sing from books. So, 'collectors' went round country districts to find the people who remembered and still sang the old songs, and make a note of these national treasures before they died out completely.

The singers came from many walks of life, including ploughmen, shepherds, fishermen, housewives – and even nuns. Sister Emma recalled many different songs. In general, folk songs dealt with the main concerns of ordinary people: love and courting, marriage, drink, work, war and so on.

Nonsensical lyrics crop up from time to time, as they do in nursery rhymes. This particular song is similar to another nonsense song called 'A Leg of Mutton went over to France' which a collector heard being sung in Newfoundland in 1918. (In it, a man dies, and a doctor looks in his head and finds a spring in which 39 salmon are learning to sing).

Tunes sometimes had a longer life even than song words. The melody of 'As I Was Going to Banbury' is very much like that of a song called 'Tom Tell Truth' which was being sung in the reign of Elizabeth I.

May Day Carol (1921)



This carol was sung by the children of Swalecliffe, near Banbury, as they carried their garlands on May Day in 1921. It is one of many songs from the notebooks of a woman called Janet Heatley Blunt who lived at the village of Adderbury and played a great part in the revival of English folk music and dance. She died in 1950 at the age of 91 – still collecting songs, music and dances to the end.

Today carols are thought of only as Christmas songs but in times past they existed for many seasons of the year. In ancient times, May Day marked the end of the winter half of the year. Long before Christianity came to Britain, the Celts and Anglo-Saxons used to celebrate the coming of summer with lively festivities. Even in Christian times, ancient customs continued on May Day, with dancing around a maypole, the crowning of a May Queen and the bringing in of may (hawthorn) garlands to decorate houses. Instead of banning the celebrations, churchmen tried where possible to adapt the old songs and traditions to Christian teaching.

Oxford University is famous for its annual May Morning event. At 6 am on 1 May, the Magdalen College Choir sings a hymn from the top of Magdalen Tower. Huge crowds gather under the tower to hear it, with general partying in the High Street. Music and morris dancing go on for a couple of hours. As several colleges hold all-night balls the night before, many students can be seen in formal dress, wearing black tie attire or ball gowns.

Eynsham Poaching Song (1923)

Three Eyn-sham chaps went out one day, to Lord A-bing-don's ma-nor they made their way; they

5 took some dogs_ to catch some game, and soon to Wy - tham woods they came.

9 Lad dy i - o, lad-dy i - o, fol di rol, lol di rol, lad-dy i - o. lad-dy i - o.

2. We had not long been beating there,
Before our spaniel put up a hare;
Up she jumped and away she ran,
At the very same time a pheasant
sprang.

Chorus: Laddy i-o, laddy i-o...

3. We had not beat the woods all through
Before Barrett, the keeper, came into
view;
When we saw the old beggar look
We made our way to Cassington Brook

Chorus

4. When we got there 'twas full to the
brim,
And you'd have laughed to see us swim;
Ten feet of water, if not more;
When we got out our dogs came o'er.

Chorus

5. Over hedges, ditches, gates and rails,
Our dogs followed after, behind our
heels;
If he'd have caught us, say what you
will,
He'd have sent us all to Abingdon jail.

Chorus



Three Eynsham men go out with their dogs, poaching in the woods of Lord Abingdon's Manor. Poaching was very widespread all around Oxfordshire in times past. The poorer families got little meat to eat, and the big country estates were full of pheasants, hares and deer. But taking game from the lords' lands was against the law, gamekeepers patrolled the woods and fierce punishments were meted out to offenders. In the Middle Ages poachers could even be hanged; later they were generally sent to jail – if they were caught.

Among local people the poachers were often seen as heroes, and their daring adventures were celebrated in song. The 'Eynsham Poaching Song' was collected by a man called Alfred Williams, and is one of many he published in his *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* (1923). He wrote of Eynsham as a village which still had a strong singing tradition, and noted that the poaching song was sung to him by a local man called Henry Leech.

Williams was chiefly interested in the words of songs, and did not note down the melodies. It was some years before the lyrics were joined to the tune used today. Around 1961, folk singer Dave Arthur and his wife Toni visited the villages and places named in the lyrics - Eynsham, Cassington Brook, Wytham Woods and so on. For an album they were making they took several songs from Williams's book and fitted tunes to them from other sources. They put 'Eynsham Poachers' to a tune they had learned from a Buckingham poaching song which had the chorus Laddie-i-o.

Mixing and matching words and tunes in this way is part of folk practice. People are happy to use tradition creatively; Dave Williams even decided to put a morris dance together to the tune. Out of this came a 'poachers' stick dance, in which at one point the sticks are brought up to the shoulders and 'fired' into the air. It is still danced by the Eynsham Morris.

We are the Boys (1939–45)



*Chorus: Oh, we are the boys, we are the lads in khakhi,
We are the boys that are always gay and hearty,
Oh we don't give a shrew when we hear the bugle blow,
The good old call that suits us all is 'Come to the cookhouse door!'*

Now when I was on the firing range and fired my first five,
The folks all living on Bletchington Hill, they're lucky they are alive,
For the first shot that I fired, it nearly killed a cow,
The second made the skin fly off old Georgie Bailey's sow,
The third one hit the sergeant on his tarara-boom-di-ay
It made him sing 'God Save the King' and 'Yipp-iady-iay!'

Chorus

Now the first time I was in a campaign I was under heavy fire,
The captain gave the order for his company to retire,
All the lads they doubled back except me and I stood,
And with the fright I got that night I was standing like a block of wood.
Now when the captain saw it he came running up to me,
He said, 'Young man, you'll get a new suit just for your bravery'.
By God, I were frightened and I didn't know what to do,
I said, 'If you please sir, could you oblige me with the trousers now?'

Chorus

A comical serviceman's song of World War II. Soldiers, sailors and airmen all made up their own songs to keep their spirits up during the long periods of training and waiting for combat. They sang in the canteen, on the march, in the backs of trucks, below deck on ships and wherever else they could. These were not songs to be broadcast on the radio and they were rarely heroic – more often funny and rude. Favourites everywhere included 'Why are We Waiting?' and 'When This Bloody War is Over'.

Musician Dave Townsend heard 'We are the Boys' being sung after the war by melodeon player and folk singer, Ron East of Weston-on-the-Green in Oxfordshire. The first verse describes World War Two training sessions near the village of Bletchington. As in other servicemen's songs, the lyrics evoke the general chaos of army life, poking more fun at the troops' own Sergeant Major than at the enemy. In the punchline at the end of the second verse, the singer admits to being so frightened himself that he soiled his pants.

In Oxfordshire during World War II, ordinary families built air raid shelters, received gas masks and covered their windows with blackout material so that the enemy should not see town lights twinkling at night. At Uffington, the ancient chalk-cut White Horse was even covered with turf to hide the prominent landmark from enemy planes. In June 1940, bombs started falling on Oxfordshire, and though the county did not suffer as badly as other areas of Britain there were some serious incidents. The worst was at Banbury on 3 October 1940, when a Dornier bomber caused the deaths of six people and several more injuries. There were many raids on local airfields too. Weston-on-the-Green, near RAF Bicester, was attacked on 11 separate occasions between June 1940 and May 1941.

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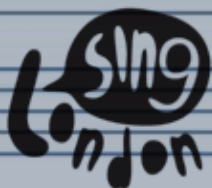
We are the Boys collected by Dave Townsend from the singing of Ron East of Weston-on-the-Green in Oxfordshire

Near Woodstock Town, *The Oxford Scholar*, *The Oxford & Cambridge Boat Race* and *Dr Darwin* are all from ballad sheets in Oxford University's Bodleian Library Broadside Ballad collection. The originals are among some 30,000 ballad sheets which can viewed online at www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/ballads/ballads.htm All other images are from the 'Oxfordshire County Council Photographic Archive' at Oxfordshire Studies

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