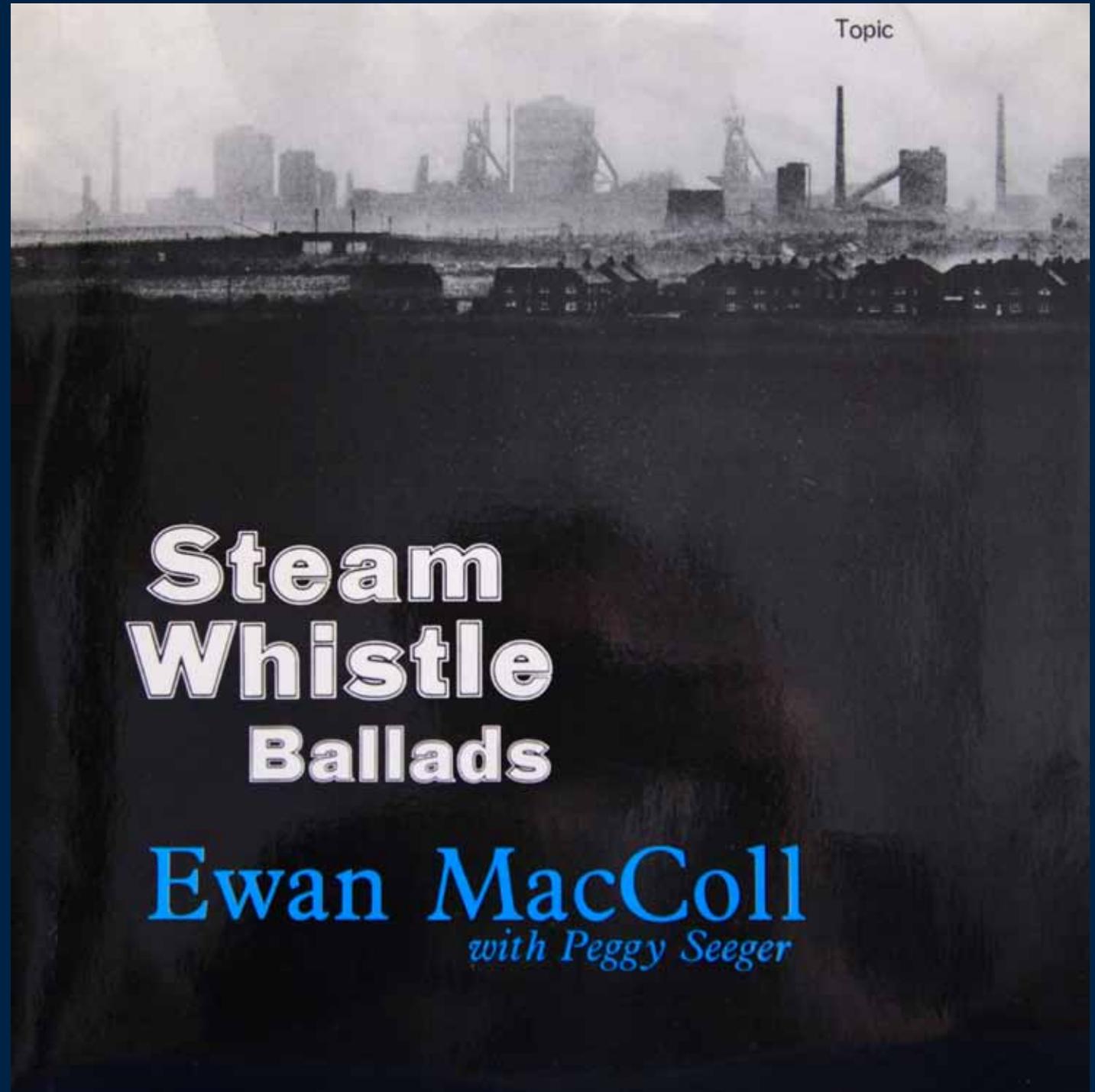


TSDL104

**Steam Whistle Ballads
Industrial Songs Old and
New
EWAN MacCOLL with
PEGGY SEEGER
Banjo and Guitar**



Steam Whistle Ballads

Ewan MacColl
with Peggy Seeger

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- 1 The Wark of the Weavers
- 2 Droylsden Wakes
- 3 The Four Loom Weaver
- 4 The Calton Weaver
- 5 Oh, Dear Me
- 6 The Coal-Owner and the Pitman's
Wife
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Recording by Bill Leader
Photograph for sleeve front, Brian Shuel

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EWAN MACCOLL, surely the best-known singer of folk songs in Britain, was born in Auchterarder, Perthshire. From both his parents he inherited a good store of Scots folk songs, and over the years he has vastly enlarged his repertory with songs learnt from print or from other (mostly traditional) singers. Now he probably has more folk songs in his head, in singable shape, than anyone else in the British Isles. He has worked as labourer, street-busker, playwright and actor, as well as singing professionally on stage, radio, television and in films. His BBC documentary 'radio ballads' such as *John Axon, Singing the Fishing, The Big Hewer*, etc., prepared in collaboration with Peggy Seeger and Charles Parker, have attracted keen attention not only in Britain but also on the Continent. MacColl is one of the main originators of the present folk song revival, which made its first wide-audience impact with his series of *Ballads and Blues* radio programmes, performed by a team of folk-style musicians assisted by Humphrey Lyttleton's band, in 1952. He is not only an impressive singer but also a most successful maker of songs, and several of his compositions have become widely current through the (now extensive) world of the folk song clubs. Other TOPIC recordings of this outstanding artist include:
Streets of Song 12T41 (with Dominic Behan), Still I Love Him 10T50 (with Isla Cameron), Blow the Man Down TOP98, A Hundred Years Ago TOP99, The Coast

of Peru TOP100 (three records of sea shanties with A. L. Lloyd and Harry H. Corbett), English and Scottish Folk Ballads 12T103, (with A. L. Lloyd), Chorus from the Gallows 12T16 (with Peggy Seeger), The Jacobite Rebellions 12T79 (with Peggy Seeger), Barrack Room Ballads 10T26, Bold Sportsmen All 10T36 (with A. L. Lloyd), Gamblers and Sporting Blades TOP71 (with A. L. Lloyd).

The songs on this record are from Shuttle and Cage 10T13 and Second Shift 10T25.

The British Labour Movement has a rich heritage of songs – songs that convey a sense of history, as well as imagery and emotion for present day industrial workers and their friends.

Hitherto, the best known Labour songs have been those made for directly political ends, with texts generally modelled on the rhetorical language of book poetry, expressing the more or less universal aspirations of working men; songs mainly used for special occasions, such as *The Red Flag* or *The Internationale*.

Of late, however, since folk song research has extended beyond the lore of the countryside into the home made culture of the mines and mills, a powerful body of songs has come to light, made by

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working men and dealing direct with their daily lives, cast in realistic non-rhetorical language, with tunes based on the tradition of folk melody not art song, and intended for informal performance at any odd moment.

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The force and tang of these songs proves irresistible to modern tastes, and many talented song-makers outside of industry as well as within it have been fired to imitate this kind of do-it-yourself workers' song. Among the best of these is Ewan MacColl, who presents here a number of songs created by industrial workers, interspersed with songs on industrial themes made by himself.

THE WARK OF THE WEAVERS

The handloom weaver, while carrying his finished products to the nearest centre of commerce, often covered considerable distances and the only relief from the rigors of the road was to be found in the weavers' howffs (poor inns). Here over a glass of 'tupenny', a man could exchange gossip, talk politics, boast of his conquests and roar out his defiance of a world seemingly bent on starving him. This song belongs to the period of nearly 200 years ago, when weaving was changing from a handicraft to an industry. Originally from Kincardineshire, it is widely sung throughout the Southern and Eastern regions of

Scotland.

DROYLSDEN WAKES

Of this song A. L. Lloyd writes, it "belonged originally to a Wakes custom, in which two spinners, one dressed as a woman, sat in a cart, going through the motions of spinning, singing the song (originally in dialogue form), and collecting from the onlookers. It is usually presumed that the 'Threedywell' meant 'thread the wheel' or 'tread the wheel', but it may be mere onomatopoeia".

THE FOUR LOOM WEAVER

One of the most dramatic of British industrial songs, this ballad was first sung shortly after the Battle of Waterloo, when handloom weavers' wages fell to a new low. That it was a great favourite for many years is evidenced by the great number of broadsheet prints issued under this and other titles. It is sometimes attributed to John o'Greenfield Junior, himself the character in a popular 19th century comic ballad. The version sung here was collected by Ewan MacColl from Becket Whitehead of Delph, near Oldham, Lancashire.

THE CALTON WEAVER

The village of Calton no longer exists, having been swallowed up by the City of Glasgow more than half

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a century ago. Of its once thriving weaving trade, nothing remains but this wry little song. Ewan MacColl learned this version from Hughie Martin of Shettleston, Glasgow, who insisted that MacColl's father had written the tune 'because he didna tak' to the ither yin'.

OH, DEAR ME

The text of this tender little song is the work of Mary Brookbank, an old jute mill worker, of Dundee. Mrs Brookbank, the author of several fine songs, has also collected a considerable number of jute mill songs and ballads. The air is by Ewan MacColl.

THE COAL-OWNER AND THE PITMAN'S WIFE

This ballad is believed to date from the Durham strike of 1844 and to have been written by William Hornsby, a collier of Shotton Moor, Durham. The ballad was discovered among a collection of papers relating to the strike by a studious Lancashire miner, J.S. Bell. The tune was supplied by J. Dennison, of Walker and, together with the text, can be found in A. L. Lloyd's 'Come all ye Bold Miners'.

FOURPENCE A DAY

Still current in North-East Yorkshire, this song is attributed to Thomas Raine, lead-miner and bard of Teesdale. The washing rakes, where the lead bearing

rocks were separated from the clay and gravel, were usually operated by young boys or old disabled miners. The mine owners are said to have become so incensed by the song that they closed the pits and imported lead miners from Germany. The song was collected by Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl from John Gowland, retired lead miner of Middleton-in-Teesdale, in 1948.

THE GRESFORD DISASTER

The mining disaster described in this ballad occurred on September 22nd, 1934. The ballad properly bitter in its editorialised narrative, slightly underestimates the casualties – 265 miners were killed, including three rescue men. Ewan MacColl learned the song from a young miner named Ford in the Sheffield Miners' Training Centre.

WILL CAIRD

There are few iron-moulders in Britain who have not heard of Alex Russell of Dundee, the author of this song, for Russell is the undisputed bard of the iron-founding industry. An admirer and follower of Robert Burns, Russell exercises his considerable gifts by recording, in verse, the day-to-day struggles of his fellow workers. The tune is an adaptation of The Mucking of Geordie's Byre.

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THE IRON HORSE

According to A. L. Lloyd, this song was written by Charles Balfour, Stationmaster at Glencarse, Scotland, and was first performed at a railwaymen's festival in 1848. It remained popular in the neighbourhood of Perth and Dundee for many years and was a favourite in the ploughmen's bothies (communal living huts) of Aberdeenshire. There are few folk who remember it now. The tune is an adaptation of The Piper of Dundee.

POOR PADDY WORKS ON THE RAILWAY

This song, long popular in the United States, was the product of Irish immigrant labourers, who moved west with the great railway expansions in the middle of the 19th century. A questionnaire (1952) circulated in a number of loco sheds in Northern England, produced five versions of this song. In the past few years, British folksingers have tended to fuse two versions into a single song. Ewan MacColl sings a collation of a slow version from Liverpool and a fast version from Hellefield in Yorkshire.

CANNILY, CANNILY

Written by Ewan MacColl in 1953 for Isla Cameron, the song is frequently sung in radio programmes of folk music, where it is usually described as a traditional song.

THE SONG OF THE IRON ROAD

Written by Ewan MacColl and arranged by Peggy Seeger, this song forms part of the narration of The Ballad of John Axon, a radio documentary first broadcast by the BBC Home Service in April, 1958. The material for both the song and the programme was collected at the Edgeley Loco Shed, Stockport, Cheshire.

THE BLANTYRE EXPLOSION

The disaster described in this ballad occurred at Messrs. Dixon's colliery, High Blantyre, near Glasgow on October 22nd, 1877, with the resulting death of over 200 miners. Unlike many pit disaster ballads which take the form of the Irish 'come all ye' songs, 'The Blantyre Explosion' is in the tradition of the South-West Scottish Elegy. The version sung here was collected in 1951 and first appeared in A. L. Lloyd's 'Come all ye Bold Miners'.

THE COLLIER LADDIE

One of the oldest and the most beautiful of Britain's industrial ballads, this song dates back to at least the 17th Century. Robert Burns noted it and sent it to James Johnson, Editor of The Scots Musical Museum, with the comment, 'I do not know a blyther old song than this'. The song, still fairly widely known, is most commonly found among farm workers, who

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sometimes substitute 'ploughboy laddie' for 'collier laddie'. Ewan MacColl's version was learned from his grandmother, Isabell Henry of Auchterarder, Perthshire.

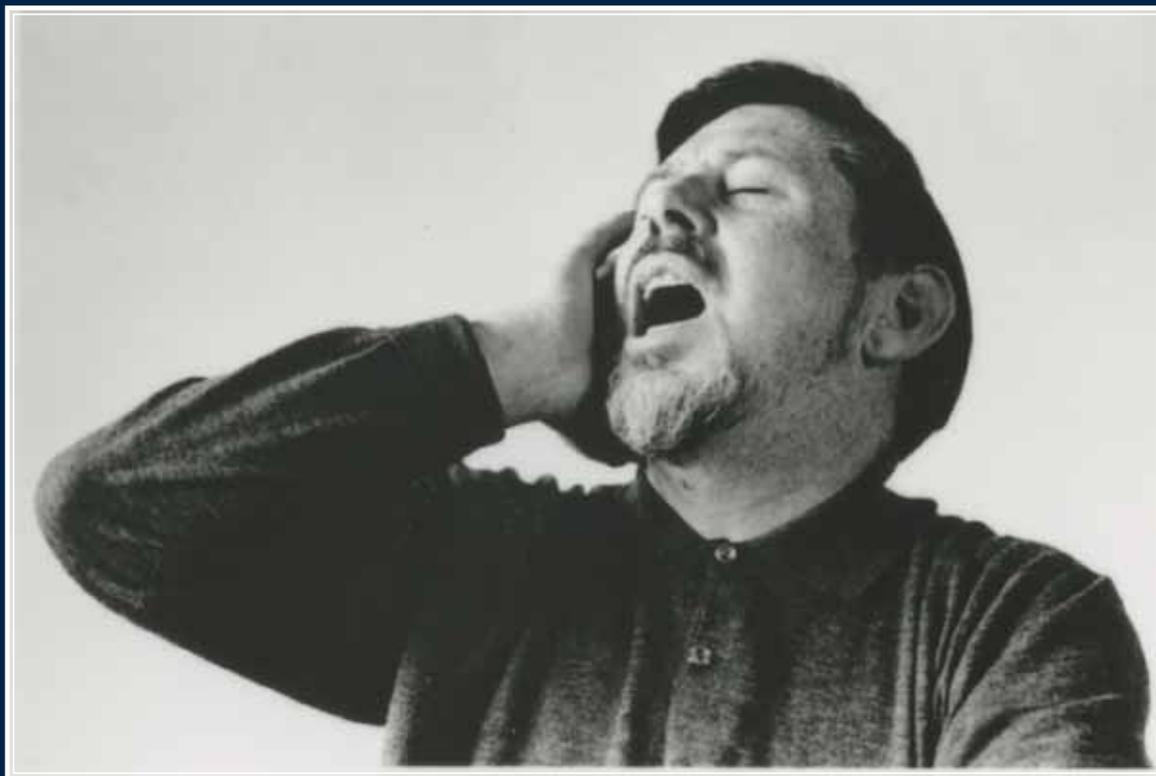
MOSES OF THE MAIL

'Moses' was the nickname of Henry Poyser, an engine driver who served on the Manchester-Warrington run in the 1880s. Despite the 'local' feeling of the text and the trivial nature of the events described, the song still lives as part of the oral tradition of the Lancashire railwaymen. The version sung here is collated from three texts collected in Newton-Heath Loco shed in 1952.

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