

Northumberland For Ever

Dance and Song from the North-East

The High Level Ranters

- 1 **Shew's the way to Wallington / The Peacock Followed the Hen** *Band*
- 2 **The Sandgate Girl's Lament / Elsie Marley** *Johnny Handle acc Band*
- 3 **Bellingham Boat / Lambskinnet** *Band*
- 4 **Adam Buckham** *Johnny Handle acc Band*
- 5 **Meggy's Foot** *Concertina Guitar Jews Harp*
- 6 **The Lads of North Tyne / The Redesdale Hornpipe** *Band*
- 7 **The Hexhamshire Lass** *Tom Gilfellow acc Band*
- 8 **The Breakdown / Blanchland Races** *Band*
- 9 **The Lads of Alnwick / Lamshaw's Fancy** *Band*
- 10 **Byker Hill** *Tom Gilfellow acc Band*
- 11 **Whinham's Reel / Nancy** *Band*
- 12 **Because he was a Bonny Lad / Salmon Tails up the Water / Sweet Hesleyside** *Small-pipe Duet*
- 13 **Dance to Your Daddy** *Band featuring fiddle duet*
- 14 **Billy Boy** *Tom Gilfellow acc Band*
- 15 **Nae Guid Luck About the Hoose** *Concertina solo*
- 16 **Mi' Laddie sits ower late up** *Johnny Handle acc Jews Harp*
- 17 **The Keel Row / Kafoozalum / The Washing Day** *Band*

First Issued by Topic 1968
Recorded in Newcastle by Bill Leader 1968
Notes by Tom Gilfellow and A. L. Lloyd
Photograph John Harrison



Acknowledgement is made to the Northumbrian Pipers' Society for their co-operation in the production of this record, which where appropriate is recorded with their permission.

The High Level Ranters are a group of Northeastern musicians whose regular meeting-place is the Bridge Inn under the shadow of Newcastle-upon-Tyne's High Level Bridge (hence their, conceivably punning, title). They comprise Johnny Handle (accordion and sundry other sonorous engines), Colin Ross and Foster Charlton (both fiddlers doubling on small-pipes), Alistair Anderson (concertina), Tom Gilfellon (guitar); and at times John Doonan (piccolo) who doesn't feature on this record. Besides a grand array of 'ordinary' English, Scots and Irish tunes, their repertory is peculiarly enriched by their distinctive local North-eastern musical tradition, whose flavour is unlike any other in the world. Here then is a group that makes its folk music without fretting about it, producing a sound that's at once traditional and new, vastly sociable and, at times, capable of suddenly astonishing. In all these islands, on the folk scene there's no livelier band than The High Level Ranters.

Shew's the way to Wallington/ The Peacock Followed the Hen

In his foreword to Bruce and Stokoe's *Northumbrian Minstrelsy*, A. L. Lloyd points out that Northumbria possesses a style of tunes quite distinct from the melody-styles found elsewhere in Britain. We begin with a piece that shows this - a dance-tune distinctive not so much on account of its characteristic 9/8 time (common also to Irish slip-jigs) as for its engaging angularity arising from a remarkable profusion of augmented fourths. It seems pretty certain that the oddities of the typical Northumbrian airs rise mainly from the peculiarities of the local bagpipe or 'smallpipes'. *Shew's the Way* is a favourite small-pipes tune often connected with a miller named Anderson, who, on rent paying day, would take his pipes instead of money 'to the fair, where he would entertain his landlord so well that it's said he never returned without a receipt marked paid in full in his pocket.

The Peacock Followed the Hen is again a reasonably old tune, a version having appeared in the 1698 edition of Playford's *Dancing Master* under the title *Mad Moll* while a slightly different set was known by the names of *Yellow Stockings* and *The Virgin Queen*. About the turn of the nineteenth century it turns up as a very popular tune in Scotland under the title of *Brose and Butter*. Our set is from the *Northumbrian Minstrelsy*.

Johnny Handle
Accordion Guitar Piano
Colin Ross
Fiddle Whistle Northumbrian Pipes Jews Harp
Foster Charlton
Fiddle Northumbrian Pipes
Tom Gilfellon
Guitar
Alistair Anderson
English Concertina

The Sandgate Girl's Lament/Elsie Marley

We thought these two song airs would make excellent dance tunes. Both are vigorous melodies about robust females. *The Sandgate Girl* seems to have survived the depredations of her rough keelman husband to give forth with this damning ditty. Though keelmen were reckoned to be a 'good catch', as they were their own masters and could demand their own price for services when ferrying coal 'along the shallows of the Tyne out to the deep-water vessels, they had a general reputation for wildness and riotous living.

Elsie Marley was the landlady of the Swan Inn, near Chester-le-Street, in the middle years of the eighteenth century (delirious with fever, she fell into a disused coal-pit and was drowned in 1768). Elsie had the reputation of being accommodating, which is more than can be said for her tune, with its awkward but intriguing intervals. To the Northumbrian musician W. G. Whittaker, a German scholar remarked "If your peasants can sing such songs they must be the most musical race in the world". Whittaker's answer was: "Who told you they weren't?".

The Bellingham Boat/Lambskinnet

The pages of a music book are rather like a tomb and we like to think that we 'resurrected' this grand jig from the *Pipers' Society Tune Book*. Its composition is attributed to a formerly well known local musician called Whinham whose name is also perpetuated by a reel on the other side of this record. *Lambskinnet* is a lively piece, often used by pipers and is practically a 'standard' in the repertoires of all the local country dance bands.

Adam Buckham

Newcastle was once a busy, close knit community centred round the Quayside and Sandgate, and from all accounts most Hogarthian in character. One likes to imagine Adam Buckham, the local professional gossip flitting from pub to pub, from shop door to close, hotly pursued by his victims. The piece was first noted c.1820 by the great pioneer collector of North-eastern folk song, John Bell, whose discoveries include *The Hexhamshire Lass* and other items on this record.

Meggy's Foot

This graphically descriptive piece about the uncertain progress of a lame mare is again from the *Northumbrian Minstrelsy*. Like several other Northumbrian pieces, it reminds us that the Balkan countries aren't the sole European guardians of piquant rhythm.

The Redesdale Hornpipe

Although the hornpipe is not danced a great deal nowadays it is still a favourite with musicians because of its swing. *The Lads of North Tyne* is, in fact, *The Boys of Blue Hill*, an Irish tune first collected by Police Superintendent Francis O'Neill in the Stockyards district of Chicago some seventy years ago. The late, famed Northumbrian piper 'Anty' Charlton liked the tune and re-named it, and the new title seems to have stuck in the North-east.

The Redesdale was collected by the compilers of the *Charlton Memorial Tune Book* and as far as we know, had never been printed before. Colin Ross has, in his possession, a manuscript copy of the tune given him by Billy Pigg where it is entitled 'The Underhand' and attributed to the great Gateshead tunesmith James Hill.

The Hexhamshire Lass

A song we took to immediately when we heard Bob Davenport sing it. This is nearer the printed source in the *Northumbrian Minstrelsy* than Bob's fine version but we think none the less attractive for it! It's a typical North-eastern tune with its downward jumps of octave and diminished sixth, sweet and gritty.

The Breakdown/Blanchland Races

The Breakdown has many regional claimants - so we make no such demands. It's still one of the most popular tunes in the area with all the local musicians.

Blanchland Races we have heard claimed by Celts from various localities, usually under the title 'Timur the Tartar', which was a popular and widespread Victorian melodrama. Our version was collected locally by the Society of Antiquaries when putting together the *Northumbrian Minstrelsy* a century or so ago. By the by, it is a real 'fingerbuster'. You would do well to see Johnny Handle's face during a performance!

The Lads of Alnwick/Lamshaw's Fancy

The editors of *Northumbrian Minstrelsy* notated *The Lads of Alnwick* in 3/4 time. And so it is, in a way. Ordinarily we think of 3/4 as being "waltz time", yet here is no waltz but, instead, a stirring march. The typical small-pipes variations at the end of the piece seem to add to the martial excitement. *Lamshaw's Fancy* is associated with - and perhaps composed by - William Lamshaw, a soldier of fortune and one of the small-pipes players attached to a Northumberland regiment during the Napoleonic Wars.

Byker Hill

This song appeared in A. L. Lloyd's *Come all ye Bold Miners* some fifteen years ago, and since then quite a few 'cobbled' versions have been recorded, stemming no doubt from Lloyd's own version when he married the words to an unusual setting of *Mi' Laddie sits ower late up*. About the same time, a quite different tune also became attached to the *Byker Hill* words, and it is this tune that we use here. It is a variant of the old camp-meeting hymn *Where are the Hebrew Children?* attributed to an early nineteenth century itinerant preacher, Peter Cartwright, a native of Virginia.

Whinham's Reel/Nancy

The 'High Level' group often use these rant tunes as they admirably fit the bouncy one-two-three-hop step. Whinham was a famed musician living on a farm near Morpeth. His extensive manuscript collection of original compositions was inadvertently burnt by the wife of another musician - to whom they had been lent, but a few of his pieces survive (such as *The Bellingham Boat*). The present tune appears in the *Pipers' Society Tune Book*. Nancy is the work of that prince of pipers, Tom Clough, a colliery engine-man who lived nearly all his life in Newsham, near Blyth. Tom, a brilliant and self-educated man, was probably the first Northumbrian piper to record for a commercial gramophone company.

Because he was a Bonny Lad/ Salmon tails up the Water/Sweet Hesleyside

Tunes very popular among this generation of pipers. *Because he was a Bonny Lad* is attributed to an eighteenth century Redesdale piper, Cole Richardson, and was first published in John Peacock's Favourite *Collection of Tunes ... for the Northumbrian Small-Pipes*, published at the beginning of the nineteenth century. *Salmon Tails up the Water* has long been traditional among Northumbrian pipers, and is another of the tunes whose collection and publication we owe to the Pipers' Society. Both its two parts exist in countless variants in the dance-tune repertory of Scotland and Ireland, and among the familiar burlesques are *Stop your Ticklin'*, *Jock* and *Little Brown Jug*. *Sweet Hesleyside* is claimed by the piper Anty Charlton as his own composition, and is registered as such, though in later years Anty confessed to Foster Charlton that he received some help from Thomas Elliott, a local piano-tuner, a fine fiddler and all-round musician (who tuned the family piano in Foster's boyhood). So Anty's 'exclusive rights' to this polished piece remain conjectural.

Dance to Your Daddy

We took this fisherman's dandling song and gave it a 'semi-Hardanger' arrangement. It seems to have responded quite well to the treatment!

Billy Boy

This little song, which some see as a comic version of *Lord Randal*, is rather typical of the 'Geordie's' sometimes burlesque approach to courtship. Maybe inspection of the goods on a system of approval is not always a bad policy! Richard Runciman Terry recorded this version from a sailor in South Shields, though the words here are slightly altered and added to.

Nae Guid luck about the hoose.

A much admired and sought-after talent among pipers is the ability to improvise and play variations on a tune. Billy Pigg is, no doubt, the most exciting piper we have today and here, Alistair Anderson, a great admirer of Billy plays his variations on this Scottish tune. Ironically they are played on the concertina, an instrument which, because of its popularity in the nineteenth century, threatened to make the pipes extinct.

Mi' Laddie sits ower Late Up

"How true, how true!" we all mutter whenever Johnny sings this song of complaint by a wife whose husband is out drinking late at the pub. The accompaniment is by Colin on the gew-gaw or jews harp. (The cost of living seems to have risen somewhat since the advent of this song, which first appeared in *Peacock's Favourite Collection* at the outset of the nineteenth century, though it was by no means new even then.)

The Keel Row/Kafoozalum/The Washing Day

This is a selection of schottishes played by the band at a slightly 'tweaked' tempo to test the virility of the dancers. The pace invariably increases as the dance wears on and a quarter hour of it usually ensures a quiet night afterwards! The tunes need very little introduction, the *Keel Row* being a standard for Northumbrians while *Kafoozalum* will be recognised by the rawest student of bawdry. *The Washing Day* is our old friend 'Nae guid luck', which was re-vamped some time ago as a Tyneside music hall song dealing with the rigours of that most awful day of the week.

A Note from the High Level Ranters

We hope this record will be used for dancing at some time or other. We have tried to make our selection of tunes representative of quite a few which we use when playing for dances at home on Tyneside. It would be a great shame if it was never used for anything else than tapping a foot to while contemplating life from an easy chair! On the other hand we did give much thought to the 'listenability' of the tunes when we made our choice and we hope that you will derive many an hour's pleasure from the record, we have certainly done that much from playing them.

Digital remaster ©2009 Topic Records Ltd.
©2012 Topic Records Ltd.

The copyright in this sound recording and digital artwork is owned by Topic Records Ltd. All rights reserved.



TOPIC TSDL186
www.topicrecords.co.uk