

The Fox jumps over the Parson's Gate

Peter Bellamy

- 1 The Spotted Cow, *acc. concertina*
- 2 Two Pretty Boys (The Two Brothers)
- 3 The Female Drummer
- 4 Here's Adieu, Sweet Lovely Nancy, *vocal duet with Chris Birch*
- 5 The Ghost Song (The Cruel Ship's Carpenter)
- 6 The Carnal and the Crane
- 7 The Little Black Horse (The Penny Wager), *acc. fiddle*
- 8 The Barley and the Rye, *acc. fiddle*
- 9 The Turkish Lady
- 10 Warlike Seamen (The Irish Captain), *vocal duet with Chris Birch*
- 11 The Blackberry Fold
- 12 Saint Stephen
- 13 The Rigs of London Town
- 14 The Fox Jumps Over the Parson's Gate, *acc. concertina*

Recorded at City of London Studios, 1969

First Published by Topic 1970

Notes by A. L. Lloyd

Production A. L. Lloyd

Cover Drawing: Randolph Caldecott



Peter Bellamy became well-known to folk music revival enthusiasts in England and the United States when he was the luminary of the *Young Tradition*. Since the break-up of that group, he has been singing solo and has established himself as one of the most forthright and impressive of younger singers of English folk song - indeed, there are good judges who reckon he's the best.

He was born in 1944, the son of a farm foreman, and was brought up on farms in the neighbourhood of Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk, just near the estates where in the latter years of the eighteenth century Thomas Coke (along with 'Turnip' Townshend) established the new crops and new methods that inaugurated the great Agricultural Revolution whose effects were only a little less powerful than the Industrial Revolution that was occurring about the same time. So there was Bellamy in classic farming country, but oblivious of the grand tradition of rural folk song, threshing away at a homemade guitar, at the age of twelve or so, under the influence of Burl Ives and the Weavers.

He was an art school student when he first became 'exposed' - as the Americans say, making the experience seem dire - to the folk song revival, and from then on his interest in English traditional song grew. He developed as a performer in folk song clubs in Norwich and Rochester, and in 1965 he decided that he would probably be a better singer than painter, so he came to London. Here, 'after singing and starving round the clubs for a while', he met Royston and Heather Wood and the *Young Tradition* was formed, a group that, like *The Watersons*, is no longer with us but is looked back on with nostalgia and respect.

With the *Young Tradition*, Peter Bellamy gained great experience in clubs, at concerts and festivals, on radio and television, both in England and America (the group visited USA four times, appearing two years running at the gigantic Newport Folk Festival).

Since October 1969, he has been performing as a solo singer, concentrating mainly on deeply traditional song sung in a deeply traditional-sounding manner that owes much to his admired Norfolk models, Harry Cox and Sam Larner. These grand old-timers, it seems, still have as much to say to us all, even those who are very much the young men of our time, like Peter Bellamy.

The Spotted Cow

The innocent idyllic tone and the bits of literary phrase - 'cot', 'swain' and such - suggest that this song wasn't made by a country labourer but by an educated amateur writing 'in the folk manner'. And so on examination it proves to be. It was written for the London pleasure gardens, appearing on a Vauxhall Gardens song-sheet in the 1740s and again at Ranelagh Gardens in the 1760s (with the locale fashionably moved to Scotland so that it concerns a swain named Jamie on the banks of the Tweed). It reappeared as a Regency parlour ballad in Fairburne's *Everlasting Songster*. It dropped out of fashionable use by the mid-nineteenth century, but country-folk retained their affection for it right up to the present, and it has turned up in Devon and Somerset, in Oxfordshire and Yorkshire, and of course in Norfolk, where Peter Bellamy found it in the repertory of Harry Cox.

Two Pretty Boys (The Two Brothers)

Francis James Child called this ballad *The Twa Brothers*, and it's No. 49 in his great compilation. As is often the case, there is more to this ballad than meets the ear. The song has its relatives not only in Britain but on the Continent too, and tracing its sundry versions we find that it concerns not merely a violent bit of schoolboy horseplay but a murderous quarrel over a patch of land, and beyond that, in the oldest versions of all, we find that the root of the dispute is in incestuous jealousy, with both brothers enamoured of their sister. Peter Bellamy learnt the song from a recording by Lucy Stewart of Fetterangus, Aberdeenshire (see: *Folk Songs of Britain*, Vol. 4)

The Female Drummer

Girls who dress as men and enlist in the army or the navy aren't simply a longing fantasy of soldiers and sailors starved of female company. Notably in the eighteenth century there were several examples of this in real life, and some of the many songs on the theme are based on actuality. Whether that's so or not with the present saucy piece, we do not know, but it has been a favourite for some two hundred years. Gavin Greig reported it as 'well-known' in Aberdeenshire, Percy Grainger recorded a good set of it in Barton, Lincs. (see the record *The Watersons, Yorkshire Garland*). The present version is from Norfolk, from redoubtable Harry Cox.

Here's Adieu, Sweet Lovely Nancy

Oldtime sailors are popularly imagined as hairy-chested bawlers, but many of their songs belie this stereotype, for they are often remarkable for tender lyricism. As with this example. It has an amiable history, for it's one of the first pieces ever noted from the Copper family of Rottingdean, being noted in 1898 by Mrs. Kate Lee from James and Thomas Copper, the grandfathers of well-known Bob and Ron of our own day. It was published in the very first issue of the *Journal of the Folk Song Society*. Some country singers call it *The Poor Jolly Sailor Lads*, and it comes to us from the eighteenth century.

The Ghost Song (The Cruel Ship's Carpenter)

For the best part of three hundred years the common folk have been unable to shake this melodrama out of their imagination, and ever since it appeared in print in the 1680s it has influenced, and not infrequently formed the pattern for, a number of ballads about murdered ladies. Well-known all the way from Somerset to Aberdeen, it was printed over and again by nineteenth century broadside firms. At the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was a favourite with stage comedians and in 1805, Laurie and Whittle of London published a sheet-music version '*The Sailor and the Ghote, a whimsical ballad. As sung by Mr Moody, Mr Suett and Mr R Palmer*'. A comic parody in the Sam Vellerish Cockney dialect of the time, called *Molly the Betrayed* or *Fog-Bound Vessel*, appeared in the 1840s. In America the song has - as often - lost its supernatural element and survives as the banal crime narrative called *Pretty Polly*. Alongside the burlesque versions, the folk have kept the song in its original sober form, as expressed in this version, learnt from the singing of Sam Lerner of Winterton, Norfolk.

The Carnal and the Crane

It's possible that several of our well-known folk carols - such as *Herod and the Cock*, *King Pharaoh* (about the flight into Egypt), and *The Miraculous Harvest* - were once parts of a single long religious epic, that ultimately broke up into a number of short ballads. Or were they all separate pieces that at some stage got grouped together in the form of a dialogue between a crane and a knowing crow (carnal = crow, as in French: *corneille*)? In Child's collection, the version has thirty verses and it comprises a whole chain or garland of international apocryphal Gospel legends. The present version, complete in itself but comprising only the opening part of the full set, comes mainly from Mr. Hirons of Dilwyn, Herefordshire, and was noted by R. Vaughan Williams in 1909. Probably the song is old, but we've no trace of any version before the nineteenth century. The tune, in a score of transformations, has served as a vehicle for folk carols for many centuries in various parts of Europe.

The Little Black Horse (The Penny Wager)

This much-loved trickster ballad was published by John Pitts, Seven Dials, London, in the opening years of the nineteenth century, and some forty years later, Kendrew of York had a big success with it. Doubtless on the strength of its broadside, the song survived well in Yorkshire, but the version published by Pitts was powerful in the West Country and both Baring-Gould and Sharp found it there. Peter Bellamy has his set of it from the singing of Bob Arnold in Oxfordshire. Arnold's ending is happy enough, but most southern versions, including the one noted by George Gardiner in Portsmouth Workhouse, are even happier, for when the gambler comes to pay his bill at the inn, all the landlady wants from him is a kiss.

The Barley and the Rye

Curious how rare some good songs are. This excellent little genre scene, sketched vividly in a few lines, of a silly old cuckold, a rampaging wife, and a young rake, has been recovered from only one singer and it had to be Harry Cox. E. J. Moeran collected it from him more than forty years ago. The tune is a handsome member of the vast *Dives and Lazarus* family; the well-known sailor song *Rounding the Horn* or *The Gallant Frigate 'Amphitrite'* is its cousin.

The Turkish Lady

Around the middle of the seventeenth century pirates of the Barbary coast were much in the news and bristling encounters between British and Arab ships were not uncommon. Many English seamen were captured and lay in chains in the prisons of North Africa, and their plight inspired a number of songs, tragic, adventurous, romantic. The song-makers didn't distinguish between Moors and Turks, so in the ballads the Ottomans often get blamed for the misdeeds of Arabs, as in *Lord Bateman*, a close relative of the present piece. *The Turkish Lady* first printed in a garland dated 1782, and fifty years later it appeared, copied verbatim, on a broadside by Catnach. The present version, from Harry Cox, is slightly condensed but in the main follows the broadside word for word, a remarkable evidence of the constancy of some folk song texts and the regulating effect of print upon them. The tune will be recognised as a close variant of the old wedding ceremonial song *Come write me down, ye powers above*.

Warlike Seamen (The Irish Captain)

The song began its life in the seventeenth century and concerned the little merchant ship *Marigold*, 70 tons, owned by a Mr. Ellis of Bristol, which fought a brisk and successful skirmish with 'Turkish' pirates off the coast of Algiers. At the end of the eighteenth century the song was re-jigged to suit the times, and now it dealt with an encounter with the French, fought by a ship variously called the *Nottingham* and the *London* (the *London* was one of the ships involved in the Spithead mutiny, and it poked its bowsprit into several songs of the time, through being in the news). For some reason the ballad has been particularly well-liked in East Anglia (Harry Cox has a version called *Liverpool Play*; Sam Larner called his set *The 'Dolphin'*). This duet setting comes from Bob and Ron Copper, the Sussex cousins.

The Blackberry Fold

Well into the twentieth century this broadside song issued by Henry Such of Southwark was still being hawked in the countryside. Eva Ashton heard the song in Sussex and E.J. Moeran found it in Suffolk. Like these two sets, Harry Cox's version of the words follows the Such broadside closely, though the three tunes are different, reminding us that Cox like many another folk singer before him, sometimes made up his own melody to fit a set of words that came before him without a tune.

Saint Stephen

Davies Gilbert, politician and scientist (who, incidentally, chose Brunel's design for the Clifton Suspension Bridge) heard this stern ballad sung in the streets of Bodmin, and he included it in his *Collection of Christmas Carols* (1822), the pioneer modern carol compilation. Some ten years later the solicitor William Sandys published another version, with tune, in his *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern*. In Peter Bellamy's version, the words are mostly Gilbert's, the tune is Sandys', the whole comes from the *Oxford Book of Carols*.

The Rigs of London Town

Country singers have special relish for that large family of songs concerning the seemingly simple fellow - usually a sailor - who turns the tables on the tricksters of the big city. This nineteenth century broadside song has been more favoured by singers than collectors, for it has been often heard but seldom printed. It was one of the masterpieces of the late Charlie Wills of Bridport, and his version may be heard on *Folk Songs of Britain*, Vol. 2. E. J. Moeran noted the version from Harry Cox in 1924.

The Fox Jumps Over the Parson's Gate

Straight from the Bellamy family repertoire. The words from a Randolph Caldecott picture book. 'The tune,' says Peter Bellamy, 'from me mum'. P.B. was fascinated by the song as a nipper and continues to be so. With justification.

The Fox
jumps over
the Parson's Gate

06



Photograph by John Harrison

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 TSDL200
www.topicrecords.co.uk