

TSDL204

**'OWDHAM' EDGE
POPULAR SONG AND
VERSE FROM LANCASHIRE**

TOPIC

Owdham Edge Popular song & verse from Lancashire

Harry Boardman

The Oldham Tinkers

Harvey & Mary Kershaw

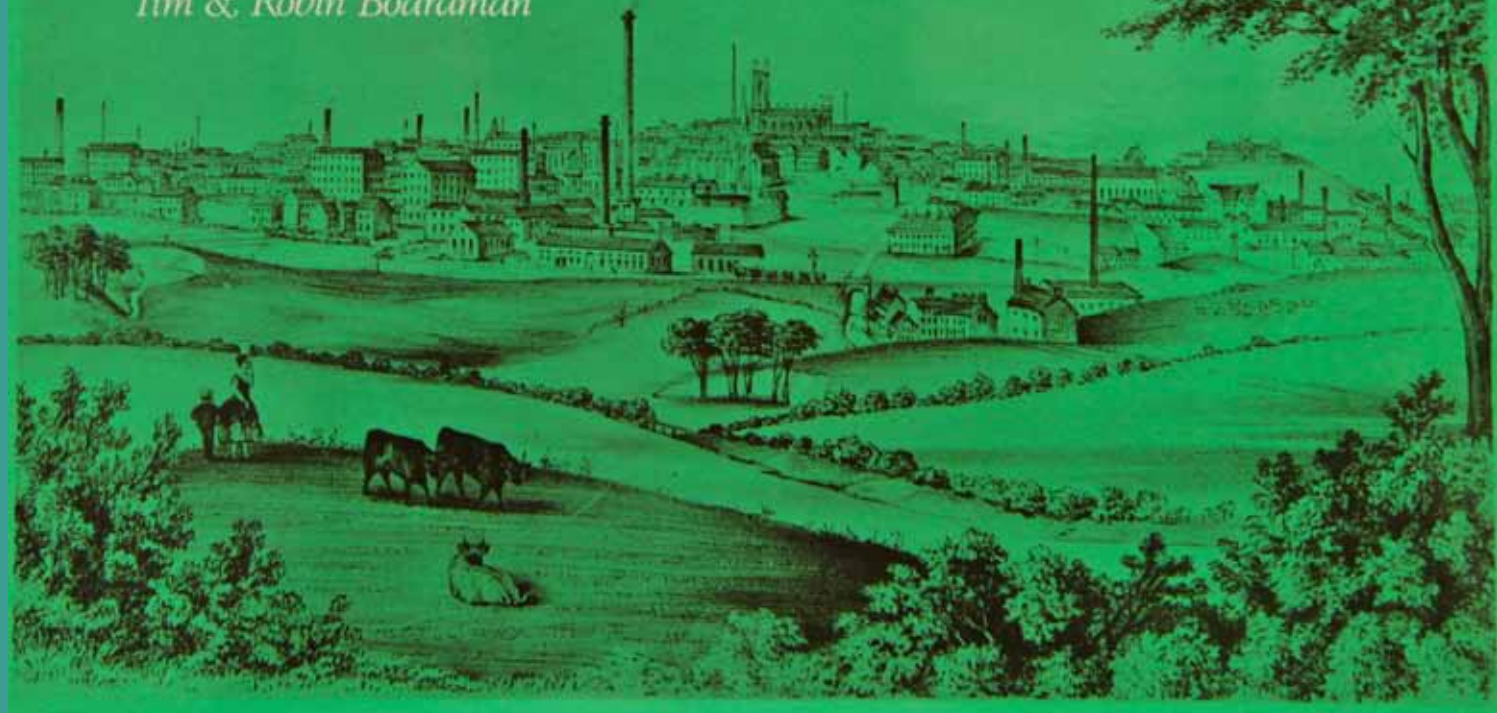
Mike Harding

Harry Ogden

Dave Brooks

Bernard Wrigley

Tim & Robin Boardman



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02

1. **Sam Shuttle and Betty Reedhook**
*Sung by Harry Boardman (banjo),
acc. Lesley Boardman (mandolin)
& Bob Diehl (fiddle)*
2. **Owdham Edge**
*sung by John Howarth
and The Oldham Tinkers (with banjo,
mandolin and guitar)*
3. **Our Sarah's Getten' A Chap**
*sung by John Howarth
and The Oldham Tinkers (with banjo
mandolin and guitar)*
4. **The Miners' Lock-Out**
*sung by Harry Boardman (banjo);
acc. Lesley Boardman (tenor banjo)
& Mike Harding (Jews Harp)*
5. **Street Scene**
recited by Harvey Kershaw
6. **Pounds, Shillings and Pence**
*sung by Tim and Robin Boardman,
leading into Down at our School sung by
The Oldham Tinkers (with banjo, mandolin
and guitar)*
7. **The Little Piecer**
sung by Dave Brooks (concertina)
8. **Sammy Shuttleworth**
*sung by Mike Harding (concertina),
acc. Bernard Wrigley (bass concertina)
& John Tenent (tenor horn)*
9. **Bowton's Yard**
*sung by Harry Boardman (banjo),
acc. Lesley Boardman (tenor banjo)
& Bob Diehl (fiddle)*
10. **Toddlin' Whoam**
sung by Larry Kearns (guitar)
11. **The Bard's Reformation**
*sung by Harry Boardman (banjo),
acc. Lesley Boardman (tenor banjo)
& Bob Diehl (fiddle)*
12. **Schoolyard Song**
*sung by Harry Ogden (guitar),
acc. Ian Hope (fiddle)*
13. **Nobbut a Cockstride Away**
*sung by Mary Kershaw
acc. Harvey Kershaw (piano)*
14. **Billy Suet's Song**
sung by Harry Boardman (concertina)
15. **Canute**
*sung by The Oldham Tinkers (with
banjo, tin whistle and guitar)*
16. **Our Bill**
sung by Bernard Wrigley (guitar)

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From the start of the post-war folk song revival, particular regions of England were at the forefront because of their abundance of material and the number of singers who were determined to revive and popularise their local songs and stories. Apart from folk songs by the strictest definition, urban and industrial song and localised music-hall songs, were all absorbed into the repertoires of the mainly young revival singers.

In England, one thinks immediately of the North-East, with its traditional and music-hall songs, mining ballads and, of course, distinctive pipe tunes. To a lesser degree, the West Country had established itself very early in the folk revival in terms of quality, if not in quantity. But in addition to English regions, the influence of singers and songs from Scotland and Ireland has been immeasurable and it therefore seems odd, that until the past few years, the industrial North-West seemed to be unrepresented. The omission seemed particularly strange in view of the fact that there is a strong tradition of dialect verse and song in Lancashire going back at least to the eighteenth century, and in more recent times, a multitude of fine music-hall entertainers.

Five years ago, however, Topic released *New Voices*, which apart from being the recording debut of The Waterson Family and Maureen Craik of Newcastle, included six Lancashire songs sung by Harry Boardman of Manchester. The effect of this LP in Lancashire was to encourage many younger singers to hunt for songs in libraries and perhaps more importantly, to seek out older dialect poets and singers; sometimes in dialect societies, sometimes in pubs. And here it must be stressed that in the 'Lancashire Revival' there has been the closest contact between young and old.

This period culminated in Topic's release of *Deep Lancashire*, late in 1968. This record, which was an immediate success, included some of the best singers from Lancashire and also the Rochdale poet, Harvey Kershaw. The wide appeal of this very regional LP has led to its 'follow-up', the present album. Like *Deep Lancashire*, 'Owdham' Edge presents a range of songs, expressing defiance, comradeship, sadness and uproarious humour. Lancashire does not have a monopoly of songs expressing these emotions; but perhaps it has more than its fair share.

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NOTES ON PERFORMERS

Most of the performers on this record appeared on *Deep Lancashire* (Topic 12T188) and need no further introduction.

Mary Kershaw is a native of Rochdale. A small lass with a big voice, she delights northern audiences with her renderings of many old favourites. Her repertoire also includes songs specially written for her by her husband Harvey and as in *Nobbut a Cockstride*, he accompanies her on the piano. Mary is also renowned for her ready wit and ability as an impromptu storyteller.

Bernard Wrigley is from Bolton and has for several years been associated with the Bolton Octagon Theatre, where his distinctive voice will long be remembered in such productions as *Crompton's Mule*, a documentary on the life on Samuel Crompton. More recently, he has been on tour with Ken Campbell's Road Show and written some of the songs for this group, whose unconventional productions have attracted considerable attention in northern towns.

Dave Brooks has also lived in Bolton all his life and sang in local folk clubs with Bernard Wrigley for several years. He began his working life as a buyer but gave this up in order to work in the theatrical productions with Bolton Octagon Theatre and the Liverpool Playhouse Theatre.

Harry Ogden was born in Rochdale and now lives in Whitworth, a small town on the edge of the moors which surround Rochdale. A television aerial erector by trade, Harry has for many years been writing songs about local places and events, but although he has written songs with a Lancashire setting, he is enthusiastic about many kinds of music.

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Sam Shuttle and Betty Reedhook

This sly ballad was taken from an undated broadsheet and supplied by Paul Graney of Manchester.

There are several equally interesting strands to the piece. Firstly, it paints a rapid picture of a situation in an early cotton mill, in which the all important characters of the overlooker and cutlooker (cloth examiner) vie for the attention of the young woman weaver. The dispute is to be settled by clog fighting (known variously as ‘purring’ or ‘up-and-down’ fighting), a bloody sport by all accounts and one for which burning in the hand and transportation were often meted out by the magistrates. A crude form of Queensberry rules applied, whereby apart from kicking on every part of the body, throttling to the verge of death was also allowed.

Not the least interesting feature of this ballad is that the names of the *actores fabulae* are taken from the weaving implements.

Owdham Edge

Oldham Edge is a well known vantage point from which can be seen, on the one hand, a great vista of industry and endless rows of terraced houses, and on the other, the wild moors of the Pennines.

If asked ‘Where are you going for your holidays?’, it is not uncommon to be told ‘Owdham Edge’, this is of course being another example of the Wigan Pier, Royton Sands idea of holidays at home. It is, need one say, a rather facetious reply. Speaking of facetiousness, it will be gathered from the song that on the other side of the Pennines from Oldham, lies the county of Yorkshire.

Our Sarah’s Getten’ a Chap

Close observation of the most minute details of family life and its comic aspect has long been a strong point with Lancashire poets, song writers and comedians. Sam Fitton, the author of this song, took a situation known to many, where the whole family is disrupted when big sister starts courting. It would have been bad enough if Sarah had been pursued by a local lad from down the street, but a slickly dressed young man who worked in an office and was therefore, by definition ‘posh’ was too much. Most members of the family could be expected to co-operate, but little brothers can take on an evil aspect in situations of this kind and have probably ruined many a beautiful relationship.

Sam Fitton, of Rochdale, described as a

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humourist, dialect writer, author, artist, playwright, reciter, singer and musician, was a cartoonist in *Cotton Factory Times* for a number of years and much of his work appeared in the *Manchester Weekly Times* and *Liverpool Weekly Post*. In 1912, he began publishing the *Crompton Chanticleer*, a monthly magazine of humorous prose and verse, which was re-named *Sam Fitton's Humorous Monthly*. Sam Fitton died at Rochdale in 1923.

The Miners' Lock-Out

Ballads of this type were popular in the Midlands and North for most of the nineteenth century. They usually served the dual purpose of winning moral support for the struggle in hand and as appeals for the raising of money. The ballad, being printed as a broadsheet, was often sold to raise funds for the family of the strikers or the unemployed.

The Miners' Lock-Out was written by the Wigan poet Burnett O'Brian and appeared on a broadsheet bearing an illustration of a pit shaft. We are indebted to Keith Roberts of Wigan for supplying a photographic copy of the original broadsheet.

The *Federation* was, of course, the Miners'

Federation, which was to play an historic role in the General Strike.

In June 1893, owners demanded a 25% wage reduction following a 35% fall in the price of coal.

Following the M.F.G.B. Conference in July the miners refused to accept the wage cut. The lock-out began in the last week of July affecting more than a quarter of a million workers in the area covered by the M.F.G.B.

In the course of disturbances two men were killed and sixteen wounded by troops at Featherstone, Yorks. The lock-out lasted sixteen weeks; settlement was signed on November 7th. The miners were victorious. Samuel Woods (1846-1915) of Wigan was first Vice-President of M.F.G.B., elected in 1889. A Baptist, total abstainer, 'a dapper gentle kind of man'

Street Scene

L.S. Lowry has long been a controversial figure, not only among art critics, but also among working folk in Lancashire. Some claim that he depicts a far too dreary picture of Lancashire cotton towns and that he has provided us with a poor image (in more senses than one), yet it is hard to exaggerate the total sense of dreariness

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which one feels when confronted with much of the North's industrial landscape. Here, written and recited by Harvey Kershaw, is a picture in words of a 'Lowry' street scene, where the figures become more realistic perhaps than one might expect from L.S. Lowry. The fact that we hear a description of a picture seems to emphasise that the picture itself was very much a representation of a reality which in many ways is still with us.

The Little Piecer

This song has infiltrated the record rather than been included in the sense that its author, Gordon Allen North, was in fact a Yorkshire man. However, in spite of the traditional antipathy between the red and white rose counties, they have, of course, much in common, especially in their history of working conditions and child labour, where the position was much the same on both sides of the Pennines.

Northerners have never forgotten, or forgiven, the fact of child labour and the tragedy was that women and children could be employed for lower rates of pay than the men and were often given work while their menfolk were forced into idleness. Children did, of course, work in their

homes before the invention of the power-looms, but they were at least watched over by their parents, whereas in the early cotton mills, hours were long and the treatment harsh.

The Little Piecer, like so many dialect songs and poems, is simple and straight to the point: it has pathos without being a mere 'tear-jerker'

Sammy Shuttleworth

The music-hall tended to produce caricature rather than character, but oddly enough, the stereotype, gormless buffoons conveyed by stage comedians, were almost invariably popular in the region concerned.

The song is of the same ilk as *Mick McGilligan's Ball* (where they had to tear the paper off the wall), a rip-roaring night out – and who cares if it's back to work in t'mornin'.

Sammy Shuttleworth is obviously a 'legitimate' music-hall song which has had an extended life in pubs on both sides of the Pennines. It is interesting that it has cropped up with various titles, such as *Sammy Butterworth*, etc. and with slightly varying lyrics. Obviously the oral transmission of songs applies to urban pubs as well as the rural fireside.

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Bowton's Yard

Bowton's Yard (Bolton's Yard) is a classic amongst dialect verse and song in Lancashire and has appeared many times in representative anthologies and also as a broadsheet.

Sam Laycock (1826-93) became renowned for his accounts in rhyme of the period of the cotton famine (sometimes called the cotton panic) and was dubbed the 'laureate of the cotton panic'.

The yard mentioned in the song was a square of houses which took its name from the owner, Bolton, who of course lives in t'best house in t'row. The people described formed what one might call a street community, with every member playing a fairly distinctive role.

Laycock managed to steer a careful course between humour and compassion for although the song is basically light-hearted, Laycock's awareness of the hardships which existed among the poor is ever present.

The version here is taken from a printed song sheet and is shorter than Laycock's original recitation.

Toddlin' Whoam

Toddlin' Whoam literally means walking home, but there is often far more implicit in a single dialect expression than appears at first sight.

Most Lancashire poets have reflected in their work the deep attachment to home and family, which seemed particularly strong in times of unemployment and poverty among working people in the nineteenth century.

Edwin Waugh was undoubtedly the greatest Lancashire poet of all time and although **Toddlin' Whoam** may not be one of his best pieces it seems to convey an easy-going simplicity which captures the sentiment, without sentimentality. *Birds in t'nest*, by the way, means children at home.

The Bard's Reformation

Sam Bamford was better known as a radical leader and chronicler of the early nineteenth century, than as a poet or song writer. He is particularly remembered for the part he played in the great meeting at St. Peter's Fields, Manchester, in 1819 (Peterloo) and for his account of this event. He was also deeply interested in local traditions such as pace-egg mumming, morris dancing etc. and conscious of the speed with which many of these customs were dying out.

Just how seriously Bamford expected us to take *Bard's Reformation* is open to conjecture,

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but there is no doubt that the notion of self-improvement by study and diligence was popular in Lancashire during the nineteenth century. In this song however, the characters sound too attractive to be completely forsaken

Schoolyard Song

Harry Ogden, author and singer of this song, is equally at home in the atmosphere of dialect verse or contemporary song. He is not easy to categorise as a song-writer because he seems to respond directly to a situation or mood without worrying too much about how he 'ought' to approach the subject in mind.

In *Schoolyard Song*, the nostalgic imagery will appeal directly to northerners who recognise the situation and, no doubt, to others, for this kind memory has many parallels.

Nobbut A Cockstride Away

Many a traveller in the North, when asking for directions to his destination, has been told that 'It's nobbut a cockstride away'. It was almost as common as 'You can't miss it'.

In this song, Harvey Kershaw takes a common expression and weaves a series of philosophical statements around it. At the end of a hard day's work, the beauty of the moors is close at hand,

and even the good Lord is nobbut a cockstride away.

For those of you unfortunate enough never to have visited Rochdale – Mary Kershaw's voice is the closest you've been yet.

Billy Suet's Song

In the days before power looms, there was an established custom whereby a young woman, on getting married, would take with her the loom which she had worked upon at home (often referred to as a pair of looms). This is said to be the origin of the term heirloom.

In the song, four sisters are being offered in marriage to any suitable young men and the girls' father lets it be known that they will, as tradition dictates, 'ha' their looms'. Four young men, bearing typical nicknames of the time, go to court them. Billy Suet, who relates the story, being how ever hopeful, winds up wi' t'foust (foulest – ugliest) lass, wi' t'worst pair o'looms.

The song was written by David Halstead, who was in many ways untypical of most dialect poets. He was well educated and was, for a time, a major in the army. He had, nevertheless, a deep interest in local history and the speech of ordinary folk. A Haslingden man, Halstead was

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elected Mayor in 1917, whereupon he presented his collection of books on local history and poets, etc. to the free library. The collection comprised over 600 volumes

Canute

'Translating' moralising stories from history or the bible, etc. into dialect, has long been a popular pastime in several regions of Britain, particularly in the North-East and in Lancashire and Yorkshire. These tales and verses create such images as Moses putting out his tab before talking to God, or Sam talking 'matey-like' to the Duke of Wellington.

Here we have an example, written by Harvey Kershaw, of dialect being used quite consciously to give a localised, homely effect to an 'official' story.

Our Bill

The oral tradition as related to folk song, is obviously on the wane. Songs handed down within a family for generations are growing dimmer in the memories of the old and finally dying with them. This is not the case however, with the spoken word. Stories and jokes told at bars, or in factories and offices, are still being transmitted by word of mouth and often

gaining in the process. Bernard Wrigley came to 'translate' one of these stories into song because of his association with the theatre group, Ken Campbell's Road Show, which is dramatising stories always claimed as true by the teller ('As I live and breathe'). These stories are acted out by the group in pubs, clubs and any place where people gather to drink, sing, or swop a joke.

First Issued by Topic 1970

Recorded by Sean Davies 1970

Notes by Harry and Lesley Boardman

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Harry Boardman

Folk feast on 'Oldham Edge'

ENTHUSIASTS of traditional Lancashire folk music and dialect poetry have a feast in store when a long-playing record called "Oldham Edge" comes out soon. On it will be the Failsworth-born folk-singer Harry Boardman, the Oldham Tinkers, the Rochdale dialect poet Harvey Kershaw and others.

"Owdham Edge" is one of the songs on the record, and the Chronicle picture library supplied a local landscape scene for the record cover. Owdham in the song has been changed to Oldham on the cover, because the disc is going on sale nationally.

Everything on the record will be Lancashire material. There are songs from the industrial revolution; memories of school days in

Rochdale; pub songs; songs about factories; a miner's lock-out song from Wigan; and traditional children's songs.

Harry Boardman and the Oldham Tinkers have five tracks each. Mike Harding, from Blackley; Harvey Kershaw and his wife Mary; Harry Ogden, of Rochdale; and Bernard Wrigley and Dave Brooks, both of Bolton, are also featured.

Harry (39), used to live in Marlborough Drive, Failsworth, but now lives at Gatley. His two children, Tim (13), and Robin (8) make their recording debut on the LP singing a children's song as an introduction to a medley of children's songs by the Tinkers. The material was recorded in Manchester.

Harry and the Tinkers collaborated on a record before, and Mike Harding was on that, too.

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