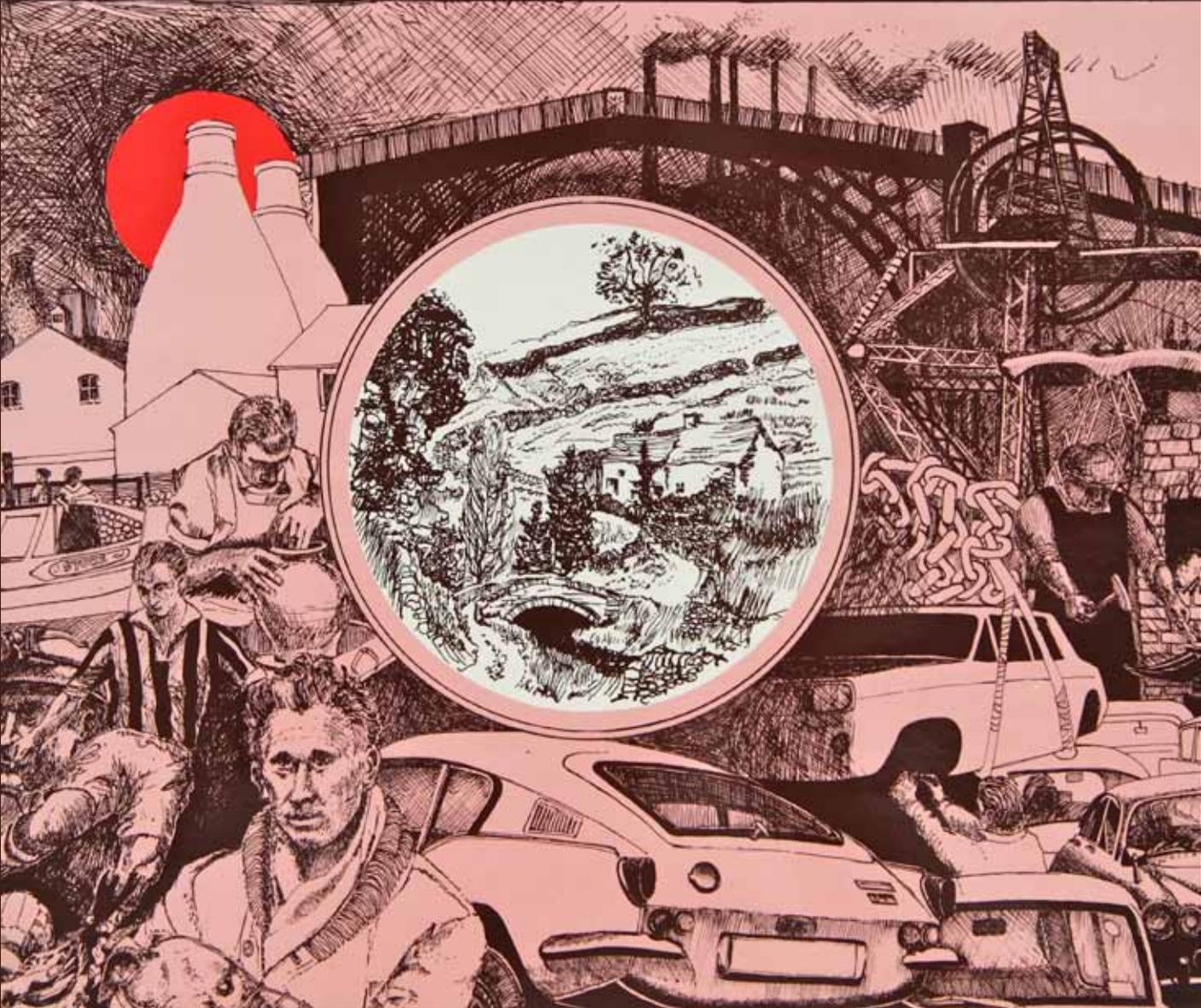


THE WIDE MIDLANDS

TSDL210

THE WIDE MIDLANDS
SONGS, STORIES AND
TUNES FROM THE
CENTRAL COUNTIES



TSDL210

1. The Dudley Boys

Sung by Peter Coe, Chris Richards, Mick Bramwich and Les Ivall, acc. Adrian Morris (whistle), Jim Haywood (tabor) & Helena Ivall (tenor drum)

2. When shall we get married, John?

sung by Julie West & Roy Palmer, acc. Martyn Briggs (banjo) & Mick Nash (guitar)

3. The slap-bum tailor

sung by Roy Palmer and chorus

4. Swaggering Boney/The black joke

played by John Rose (fiddle) & Paul Hooke (guitar)

5. Stop that clock/Early in the morning/ When you get up in the morning

sung by Graham Langley, Doreen Davis, Pam Bishop & Steve Lynn

6. Jolly Joe the collier's son

sung by The Singing Tradition (Julie West, Martyn Briggs, Bob Lapworth & Mick Nash)

7. Owd never could

told by Tom Langley

8. I can't find Brummagem

sung by Richard Hamilton, acc. Pam Bishop (guitar) & John Wrench (mouth organ)

9. The Birmingham Jack of all trades

Sung by Dave Rogers & chorus, acc. John Wrench (guitar) & Pam Bishop (concertina)

10. The nailmakers' strike

sung by Chris Rogers & Pam Bishop

11. The old miner

sung by The Singing Tradition

12. Birmingham Sally

sung by Chris Richards

13. Buffoon/Staffordshire Hornpipe

played by John Rose (fiddle) & Paul Hooke (guitar)

14. Aye for Saturday Night

sung by Joan Smith, acc. Pam Bishop (whistle)

15. The Aston Villa Supporter

told by Tom Langley

16. Motor Trade Workers

sung by Graham Langley and Bob Etheridge, acc. John Wrench (guitar)

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The pure oral tradition of classic folk song and ballad is perhaps something of a myth. The early collectors were selective in what they took down and the tradition was subject to the influence of broadsides, the music hall and popular song.

The ritual and rural songs, the carols and ballads of the Midlands are well known, but the ‘crab-apple’ balladry of the broadsides and the industrial songs has begun to find a wide audience only recently.

Birmingham, the Midland metropolis, was an important centre for the printing of broadsides and it is inevitable that this selection should lean towards the West Midlands. As well as broadsides, a number of industrial songs and fragments have been included, which have survived in oral tradition. The final song was written as lately as 1970.

The toughness, the resilience, the humour and pride of the urban Midlander, both in hard times and in easier days, are the qualities which emerge from these songs and stories. They are as much ‘in the idiom of the people’ as their cousins from the country.

The Dudley Boys

The Dudley Colliers were well known during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for their turbulence and, on the occasion described in the song, they rioted against high food prices. The refrain, ‘Oh the brave Dudley boys’ had become a rallying cry in the locality by 1790 and the Lord Dudley Ward mentioned was therefore probably John, who held the title from 1763 to 1788. The air used is known to have been *The Bold Benjamin*, but a suitable variant has not survived and Pam Bishop has written a new tune, based on a traditional melody. W. Byng Kenrick of Birmingham recited the text to Charles Parker in 1959.

When shall we get married, John?

This dialogue between a woman anxious to be wed and her reluctant suitor is still sung in the Midlands, usually as a children’s song recollected by adults.

The slap-bum tailor

The tailor seems to have suffered universal execration, perhaps because his craft was regarded as unmanly: ‘Nine tailors make a man’, said the proverb. He was even regarded as fair game for the press gang and in this broadside, printed by Theophilus Bloomer of Birmingham, he is gaily consigned to prison (Limbo) for correcting a woman who has insulted him.

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Swaggering Boney/The black joke

These Morris tunes were collected by Cecil Sharp at Bampton in Oxfordshire. The first is perhaps better known as *Gee ho dobbin*.

Stop that clock/Early in the morning/When you get up in the morning

Working class resentment at the tyranny imposed by long hours and exact time-keeping is a feature of the early days of the industrial revolution which is still alive.

These epigrammatic pieces have all been collected from oral tradition: the first two by Roy Palmer from Mrs. E. M. Turner of Wednesbury, Staffs, in 1966, and the third by Pam Bishop and Charles Parker from Mrs. Cecilia Costello of Birmingham in 1967.

Jolly Joe the collier's son

This song is widespread, both in print and tradition. The place names are usually fantastic: Holberry Town and Bilsom Hill in a Hampshire version; Belson Hill in a Pitts broadside, for example. Our version is a broadside printed by Wadsworth of Birmingham, in which the place names are perfectly clear: Oldbury and Bilston. I conclude that the song originated in the Midlands, the place names having been corrupted through oral transmission in versions from other parts of the country. The tune was collected in Somerset by Sharp.

Owd never could

Tom Langley is a retired policeman with a huge fund of anecdotes and stories about his native Black Country. Here, he talks of the encounter between a work-shy man, Owd never could, and a Hogarthian magistrate, Twicer, and concludes with a poem of his own composition.

I can't find Brummagem

For the past ten years and more, not only visitors, but inhabitants have been astonished and perplexed by continual changes in the topography of Birmingham caused by re-building carried out on a vast scale. The situation was apparently similar in 1828 when a music-hall entertainer, James Dobbs wrote this song, to the tune of *Duncan Grey*. It was popular for several years, being frequently reprinted on broadsides and sung, we are told, by passengers riding on the tops of stage coaches. There was also a Coventry version. The old church mentioned is St. Martin's; the moat around the residence of the ancient lords of Birmingham was filled up to form Smithfield Market Place; the Dungil or Dungeon was the town prison, originally in Peck Lane, and later moved to Moor Street; jack banils are sticklebacks.

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The Birmingham Jack of all trades

Songs which catalogue trades sometimes explore the sexual symbolism of different crafts, but this broadside, printed by Wright of Birmingham, which I found in the Madden Collection at Cambridge, is simply a skilful enumeration of the trades practised in various streets. I have never seen other versions featuring Liverpool and Dublin.

The nailmaker's strike

Nailing was one of the staple industries of the West Midlands and is still carried on here. The nailers were small craftsmen who depended on middle men, from whom they collected their materials and to whom they were obliged to sell their finished products. In 1862 the nailers were on strike against payment in truck, and, a well-wisher having presented them with a ton of coal, they dragged it the thirteen miles from Halesowen to Bromsgrove, where many nail dealers lived. The sale of the coal brought in money for the strike fund and the demonstration drew attention to the strikers' cause. The tune used here is by Pam Bishop.

The old miner

An old miner at Haunchwood Pit, Nuneaton, made up this song to a tune he had learned in his native Durham. John Moreton heard it in the early 1960s.

Birmingham Sally

The themes of misalliance, romantic love and local patriotism combine in this sprightly little song, which comes from an early nineteenth century garland, *Nelson's wreath*. The tune intended may have been *Sally in our alley*, which is related to *Cold and raw*, a variant of which is used here.

Buffoon/Staffordshire hornpipe

More Morris tunes collected by Sharp, the first from Sam Bennett of Ilmington, Warwickshire, and the second from a gypsy fiddler in Herefordshire.

Aye for Saturday night

Mrs. Cecilia Costello, now aged 87, is justly famed for her fine versions of ballads like *The grey cock* and *The cruel mother*, but she also knows a great many lighter pieces, and she still sings this one with rumbustious humour. It was collected in 1967 by Pam Bishop and Charles Parker. A. L. Lloyd reminds me that the tune is known in the north-east as *The Hexhamshire lass*.

The Aston Villa supporter

In the 1969-70 season, when Aston Villa were demoted to the third division, a wave of derogatory stories sprang up: "Why are they called Aston Vanilla?"

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Because they're always getting licked; in the absence of the reserves, the first team played a practice match against strategically placed dustbins, and lost 2-0". Tom Langley looks back to a bad patch in the 1930s. Through its long history, Aston Villa has had a bigger share than most, both of grandeurs and miseries.

Motor trade workers

In 1769, John Freeth, the balladeering publican, wrote a jaunty song to the tune of Dibdin's *Warwickshire lads*, about the opening of the first canal in Birmingham. His work, called *Birmingham lads* was revived for the bi-centenary and Don Perrygrove, another Brummie and a motor trade worker himself, used the tune and the metre for a new song, written in 1970.

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Recorded in Birmingham by Dick Swettenham, 1971

Sleeve Notes by Roy Palmer

Sleeve Design by Paul Hipkiss and David Hart

Produced by Roy Palmer

Acknowledgement is made to The Birmingham and Midland Folk Centre for access to its archives.

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SONG OF THE TIMES: "Motor Trade Workers" was written by Don Perrygrove, pictured here in the British Leyland plant at Loughbridge, Birmingham, in the days when he was a Midland car worker himself. Last year he left the production lines to study English literature with a view to going to university. "I think the boredom and monotony of it all comes over in the song," he says. "The men on the track become an extension of the machine. The work they do is governed totally by the track. It never stops." He admits that the song, which has gained wide acceptance in Midland folk circles, is a bitter commentary. "But I've tried to be objective," he says. "The words are based on the comments of the men." Before taking his studies further, he wants to return to his old trade for a year. "The comradeship of the men has to be experienced to be understood," he says.

Don Perrygrove

TOPIC

THE WIDE MIDLANDS

SONGS, STORIES & TUNES 12 TS210 12 inch stereo LP £2.10

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Songs of town life in Birmingham and the West Midlands—work, strikes, love and marriage in an industrial setting, urban trades—sung by local singers, with plenty of strong choruses and varied accompaniment. Stories by Tom Langley, the well-known Black Country writer and raconteur. Tunes by John Rose, fiddle.

PAM BISHOP, PETER COE & CHRISTINE RICHARDS, BOB ETHERIDGE, RICHARD HAMILTON, LES IVALL & MICK BRAMWICH, GRAHAM LANGLEY, TOM LANGLEY, ROY PALMER, CHRIS ROGERS, DAVE ROGERS, JOHN ROSE, THE SINGING TRADITION, JOAN SMITH.

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The Dudley Boys; When shall we get married, John?; The Slapbum Tailor; Swaggering Boney/The Black Joke; Stop that clock/Early in the morning / When you get up in the morning; Jolly Joe the collier's son; I can't find Brummagem; The Birmingham Jack of all trades; The nailmakers' strike; The old miner; Birmingham Sally; Buffoon / Staffordshire Hornpipe; Aye for Saturday night; Motor trade workers; Owd never could; The Aston Villa Supporter.

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FOLK ON LOCATION: A Midland group, The Singing Tradition, goes to derelict Haunchwood Pit, near Nuneaton, to capture the atmosphere of an old mining song. The song, "The Old Miner," has recently been recorded by the group on "The Wide Midlands," an L.P. of regional folk music. The Singing Tradition, comprising Bob Lapworth, 23, Julie West, 22, Mike Nash, 24, and Martyn Briggs, 26, have been together now for five years and are proving themselves one of the most popular traditional groups in the country. "For forty years I've loved the mine," sang the Old Miner at Haunchwood on his retirement, "for forty years I've worked down there." Of such devotion was much folk music created.

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INFORMATION

TOPIC RECORDS Ltd 27 Nassington Road London NW3 Hampstead 9983

THE WIDE MIDLANDS

The importance of music relevant to the times we live in for children is being increasingly recognised by progressive teachers. That the children's musical taste is often limited to 'Pop' shows their inherent musical interest and gives the teachers the opportunity of broadening their musical experience. The increasing use of Topic's folk music recordings in schools serves a part of this broadening process.

For the most part our industrial folk-song recordings have been of Northumberland, Durham and Lancashire, but now with the issue of The Wide Midlands (TSDL210) the 'Black Country' takes its rightful place in the Topic catalogue.

THE WIDE MIDLANDS was made with the co-operation of the Birmingham and Midland Folk Centre and produced by Mr. Roy Palmer, who, being a teacher himself, knew of the record's educational value.

Overleaf we give details of the record which we hope will be of interest to you.

From the Head of a large Birmingham Comprehensive School.

".... I have now got a copy of The Wide Midlands and I'm just writing to tell you how much I have enjoyed it. I have ordered it for my department at school. I particularly like Tom Langley's stories and, of the songs, "When shall we get married, John?", "The Blap Run Tailor", the early morning songs... actually the whole lot!"

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