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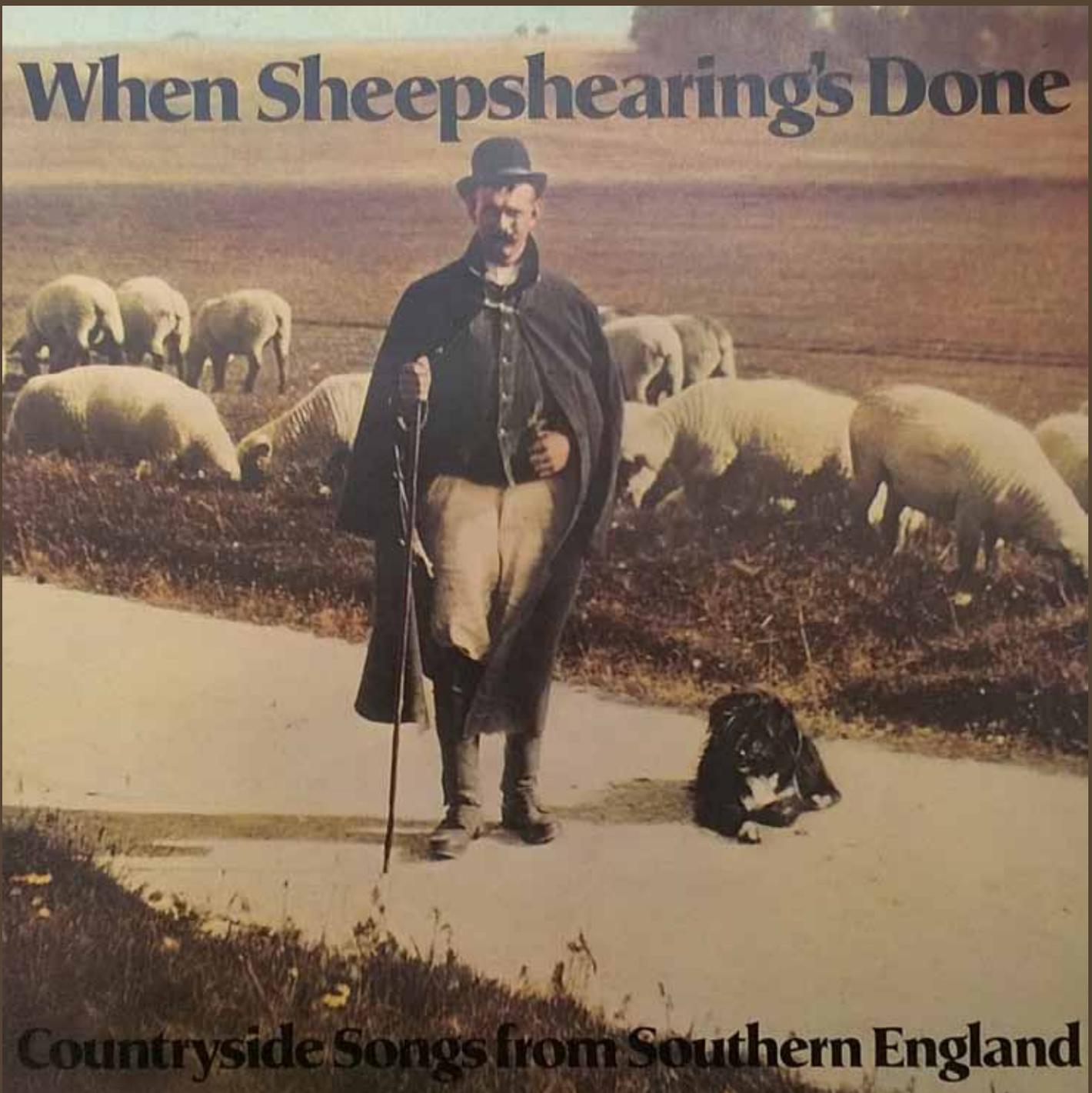
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**WHEN SHEEPSHEARING'S  
DONE  
COUNTRYSIDE SONGS  
FROM SOUTHERN  
ENGLAND**

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**Freda Palmer  
George 'Tom' Newman  
Bill Whiting  
Wisdom Smith  
Bob Blake  
Harry Holman  
George Spicer  
Bill Dore**

# When Sheepshearing's Done

A vintage photograph of a shepherd in a dark coat and bowler hat standing on a path with sheep and a dog. The shepherd is holding a long staff. The sheep are grazing in the background, and a dog is lying on the path in the foreground. The scene is set in a rural, hilly landscape.

**Countryside Songs from Southern England**

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'... and there would be calls for old David's 'Outlandish Knight'; not because they wanted particularly to hear it – indeed, they had heard it so often they all knew it by heart – but because, as they said, 'Poor old feller be eighty-three. Let 'un sing while he can''

Flora Thompson perfectly described a village singsong of the 1880s when she wrote of her childhood in the book *Lark Rise* (1939). The village stood among wheatfields in a north east corner of Oxfordshire and Miss Thompson felt that she was describing a way of life that had passed for ever. She continued, 'Songs and singers all have gone, and in their places the wireless blares.'

No one can deny that changes have occurred within the social structure, nor that patterns of culture, in themselves hundreds of years old, have vanished under the ever growing path of progress. But certain values have remained, as the singers on this record attest, and in their own way these singers are the direct descendants and carriers of 'old David's' past.

The late **Tom Newman** was in his 90th year when these recordings were made at his home in Clanfield, near Bampton in Oxfordshire. The collector John Baldwin, writing in the 1969 issue of *Folk Music Journal*, described Tom thus: 'He is an old man now and tends to become very excited when singing;

sitting in a chair and pumping the floor with his feet alternately, and similarly his knees with clenched fists.' **Freda Palmer** was born in the Oxfordshire village of Leaffield, home of the traditional Field Town morris dancers, and all but one of her songs on this record were taught to her by an aunt with whom she worked. The pair would sit in the aunt's cottage making gloves, singing to one another to pass the time.

Like 'old David', **Bill Whiting** learnt most of his songs in the Berkshire pubs of his youth. His song *I'm Going to the Woods* appeared in *Folk Music Journal* vol 1 no 5 (1969) as did other songs by Tom Newman and Mrs Palmer. **Bill Dore**, who still lives in Leaffield, was also mentioned in the *Journal*. At one time Bill was in great demand as a pianist, although recently ill health has sadly restricted his playing and singing. **Wisdom Smith** is an elderly gypsy whom I met one evening in Cheltenham. He travels about the Vale of Evesham in search of work with his son Wiggy – who can be heard singing on the record *Songs of the Open Road* (Topic 12T253).

The song collector Ken Stubbs once told me that **George Spicer** was never 'discovered' by collectors. George, he maintained, was so well known as a singer in Sussex that whoever ventured into the district looking for songs could not help but find him. Many

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of George's other songs can be heard on his solo record *Blackberry Fold* (Topic 12T235). He often sings in company with **Harry Holman** of Copthorne. Harry, who was 85 years old when I recorded him, was a friend of the late George 'Pop' Maynard, but unlike Pop, his repertoire is now rather small. The final singer on this record is **Bob Blake** who lives near Horsham. A one-time farmer, Bob now breeds bees and like George Spicer and Harry Holman often sings in local pubs and folk clubs.

### **The Fox and the Grey Goose**

*The Fox and the Grey Goose* is a universally known song – at least in the version popularised by Burl Ives – although, surprisingly, Mrs Palmer had never heard of the latter version until I mentioned it to her. A verse of the song appeared in *Gammer Gurton's Garland* (1810) and it is one of the songs that Sir Walter Scott listed as being a favourite of his childhood. The song was issued on broadsides by Disley of London and Harkness of Preston, and collectors have found versions of it in most of the English counties.

### **The Wandering Girl**

This song of unrequited love has only occasionally been noted by song collectors. George Gardiner found it in Hampshire in 1907, while Cecil Sharp collected a full set from the fine Somerset singer Mrs

Overd. Sharp also found the song in Virginia during his collecting trip of 1918. The song's structure – a collection of *floating* and loosely related verses – together with its infrequent appearance, suggests it to be the work of some late, and unknown, broadside printer.

### **All for the Grog**

Until recently it was a custom in southern English pubs to perform *All for the Grog* as an 'action' song; the singer removing his clothes as the song progressed! The collector Alfred Williams did not appear to have witnessed such a performance when, in 1923, he wrote, 'An old song, though not a particularly inspiring one. Nevertheless, in spite of the poet's poverty, he could be optimistic, though I fear such optimism was rather feigned than real.'

### **The Broken Down Gentleman**

*The Broken Down Gentleman* is well known throughout southern England. Alice Gillington found it in Hampshire, Alfred Williams in Berkshire, Cecil Sharp in Somerset and Gloucestershire and Bob Copper in Sussex. Bill Whiting remembers seeing Alfred Williams collecting songs from the Jordans and Jefferies in Longcot sometime before the Great War. Bill had forgotten the song until he borrowed a copy of Williams' book *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* from the local library and he now sings it again with

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'his own tune', which is, as the collector John Baldwin has noted, but a variant of the one used for the song *Three Jolly Hunters*.

### **I'm Going to the Woods**

The custom of 'hunting the wren' is one of the oldest extant traditions that we have in Britain. Scholars, as is usual in such matters, are divided as to its origin. With *Golden Bough* in mind, some relate the song's events to the ritual killing of an animal representing a god. Others see the wren as a symbolic representation of the Old Year being pursued, originally, by the robin, the spirit of the New Year, who sets out with his birch-rod to kill his predecessor. Others see the custom in terms of the peasants' revolt. Bill Whiting cares little for such debate. To him the song was but a piece of nonsense, to be sung in the village pubs at Christmas. No more, no less.

### **Sing Ovy and Sing Ivy**

*Sing Ovy and Sing Ivy* is an offshoot of the song *Can You Make Me a Cambric Shirt?* which in turn is related to the old ballad of *The Elfin Knight* (Child 2). In 1794 Joseph Ritson described it as 'a little English song sung by children and maids' and, interestingly, Tom Newman always referred to it as being a children's song. The earliest known set of words was printed c.1670 as *The Wind hath blown my Plaid away*, or,

*A Discourse betwixt a young Woman and the Elphin Knight* although the song's basic theme had previously been included in the 14th century collection of folk tales called *Gesta Romanorum*.

### **The Warwickshire R.H.A.**

In the 1870s John J. Brockley wrote a patriotic military song *The Scarlet and the Blue* which was later to become the basis for the Irish republican song *Off to Dublin in the Green*. During the Great War the song was adopted by the Royal Horse Artillery, the result being our present song. Mrs Palmer learnt it from an older cousin who had served in the R.H.A.

### **Oxford City**

Although *Oxford City* appeared on broadsides by Catnach and Such of London, Jackson of Birmingham and Harkness of Preston, it has not survived well in tradition; most singers nowadays preferring to sing the related – and later? – version, titled *Down the Green Groves* or *Young Maria*. The song may be based on fact, and Mrs Palmer is adamant that this is the case, though little, if any, evidence has been forthcoming to substantiate such a belief. In the early part of the century Ralph Vaughan Williams found another singer using Mrs Palmer's tune for the song *A Bold Young Farmer* and he later incorporated this tune into his ballet for orchestra *Old King Cole*.

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### **The Galloway Man**

In the late 1920s Albert Richardson of Burwash in Sussex recorded his now famous song *The Old Sow*, complete with grunts and whistles, for the Zonophone record company. Past singers had included animal noises in songs such as *Here's Luck to all my Cocks and Hens* but it was Albert's version that soon took hold of the popular imagination; and it would seem likely that Wisdom's spirited performance has been somewhat influenced by the latter's recording.

### **When Sheepshearing's Done**

*When Sheepshearing's Done* was included in the 1893 edition of Lucy Broadwood's *English Country Songs*. According to Miss Broadwood it had been sung at Frocester, Gloucestershire in the 1840s. Bob Blake had the song from his father, who originally came from Gloucestershire, and who would appear to have learned the song, directly or indirectly, from Miss Broadwood's published set.

### **As I Was A-Walking**

To my knowledge this is only the second time that *As I Was A-Walking* has been collected. The version noted in Southampton by George Gardiner in 1907 was printed in Frank Purslow's book *Marrowbones*, under the title *An S-O-N-G*, and Purslow adds, "The

humour of this song is not immediately apparent until one realises that each line of the first two verses is 'lifted' from other folk songs, and that there is a liberal sprinkling of quotes and allusions in the remaining verses.'

### **Up In the North**

*Up In the North*, or *No Sign of a Marriage* as it is called in the Southern Uplands of the United States, appeared on several early 19th century broadsides and chapbooks, although it has seldom been encountered by collectors. The Hammond brothers noted a fine Dorset version *Down in the West Country* in 1907, while Alfred Williams found it sometime before 1914 at Brize Norton, only a few miles from where Mrs Palmer now lives.

### **The Life of a Man**

It was Homer who wrote, 'As leaves on trees, such is the life of man', and his sentiment has re-echoed throughout the corridors of history ever since. 17th century broadsides exist on this theme while our present song appeared frequently on Victorian sheets. Although the song has appeared only infrequently in printed collections it is widespread, and often encountered today. In 1970 Ken Stubbs included Harry's fine version in his book *The Life of a Man*.

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Harry remembers that he won first prize for singing this song in an army contest in Aldershot in 1914. In common with many Sussex singers Harry ends the song with a toast, one of the many that he knows.

### **The Thrashing Machine**

*The Thrashing Machine* is a well known, if not often reported, song. The poet James Reeves has suggested that it dates from the early part of the 19th century when mechanical threshing machines first became available and, in fact, it was printed in the 1830s by William Walker of Durham. Although the song exists in many manuscript collections, it has often been prudishly overlooked by collectors who felt that they could not include such a song in their printed collections. Another version of *The Thrashing Machine* may be heard on the record *Songs of Seduction* (Topic 12T158) where it is sung by Anne O'Neill, an Irish tinker.

### **The Lily White Hand**

*The Lily White Hand* is a song with a long, and at times, complicated lineage. 'He took her by the lily white hand, and he laid her upon a bed' are lines in Chapman's *May Day* of 1602, and part of the song's theme appears in the early blackletter broadside of *The Western Knight*. The song is well known in Ireland under the title *Blackwater Side*. In the

version called *Abroad As I Was Walking*, which George Gardiner collected in Hampshire in 1907, the girl is aged fourteen and it is she who is responsible for the young man's seduction. No doubt Victorian morality was outraged by such a sentiment and it would seem that our present song was rewritten in the 19th century in an effort to conform to what was then current taste.

### **The Grey Hawk**

*The Grey Hawk* stems from a long 17th century blackletter broadside, *Cupid's Trepan*, and is quite rare in tradition today. Bob Blake learnt the song in the 1930s while on a cycling holiday in the West Country and his version is very similar to the one which the Hammond brothers collected in 1905 from Robert Barrett of Puddletown in Dorset.

### **The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington**

*The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington* is, I find, the most popular of all the *classic* ballads which are sung in the Thames Valley today. Professor Child found strong European parallels in Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece and it seems probable that the ballad came to Britain sometime in the 17th century. *True Love Requited*, or *The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington* was printed by one P. Brooksby at the Golden Ball in Pye Corner, London c.1680 and versions appear in the Roxburghs, Douce

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and Pepys collections of blackletter broadsides. Doubtless, part of the ballad's persistent familiarity is due to the fact that, after its appearance in Chappell's *Popular Music of the Olden Time* (1959), it entered the Victorian school song books, along with *Barbara Allen* and other favourites.

### William and Mary

The story of the sailor returning home in disguise to test the fidelity of his sweetheart is as old as Homer's *Odyssey*. The ballad of *Hind Horn* (Child 17) tells fundamentally the same story, as do several stall ballads. According to the Victorian song collector William Alexander Barrett, who included a good set of *William and Mary* in his book *English Folk Song* (1891), the song appeared on a broadside issued by J. Evans of Long Lane, Smithfield in 1794, and Mrs Palmer's version no doubt originally comes from this source.

### Maria Marten

Broadside printers always welcomed a popular theme to increase their sales and, as one Victorian pedlar put it, 'There's nothing beats a stunning good murder'. Maria Marten's death, in 1827, was a boon to the printers. Maria had left Polstead in Suffolk with William Corder, whom she intended to marry in order to avoid a bastardy charge. She was never seen

again, and following a series of prophetic dreams by her mother, her body was found, buried in The Red Barn, Polstead. Corder was arrested, found guilty of Maria's murder, and hanged outside Bury St Edmunds jail on August 11th, 1828. Maria Marten, the 'innocent nymph of her native village', became something of a cult figure on broadsides and in melodramas such as *Murder in the Red Barn*, so much so that her three illegitimate children – to different fathers – and her possible criminal activities with Corder became overshadowed by the myth that grew up around her death. Indeed, research now suggests that her mother's 'supernatural dreams' were motivated not so much by psychic phenomena as by her own criminal knowledge and probable association with Corder. *Maria Marten* was published as a 'dying speech' by the printer James Catnach of 7 Dials. Mrs Palmer's tune is a version of that usually found with the ballad *Dives and Lazarus*.

### Jolly Jarge

John Baldwin collected *Jolly Jarge* from Bill Dore in 1966. Bill, who is well known in the district as a pianist, told the collector that it was the only song he knew which he had never seen in print. Indeed, subsequent research has also failed to trace the origin of this song which, as John Baldwin noted in the 1969

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issue of the Folk Music Journal may be 'a large 19th century 'urban-rustic' offering or – equally possible – a local composition.'

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George Spicer



Freda Palmer

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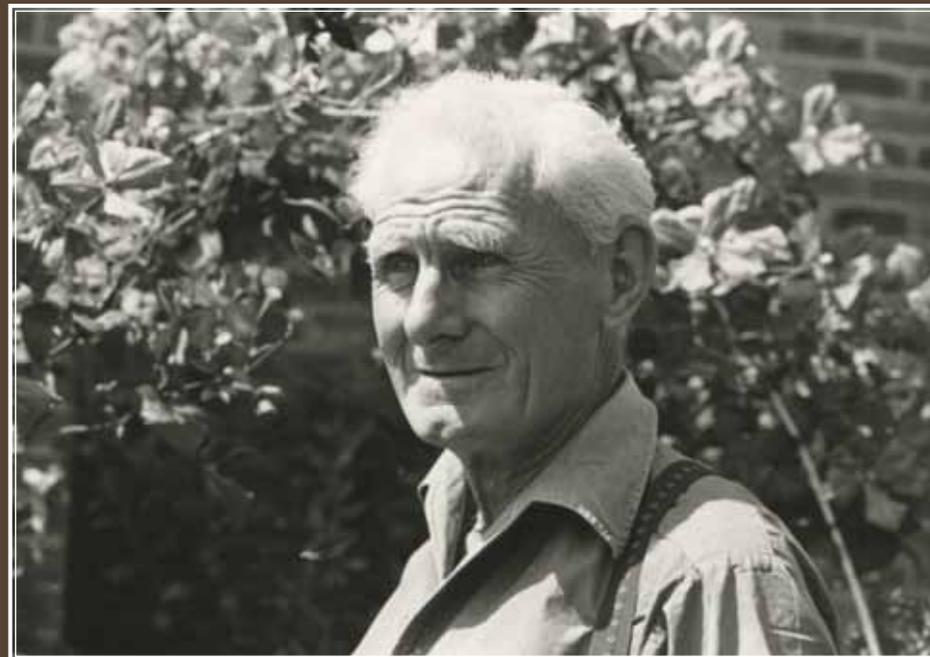
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Bill Dore



Bob Blake

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