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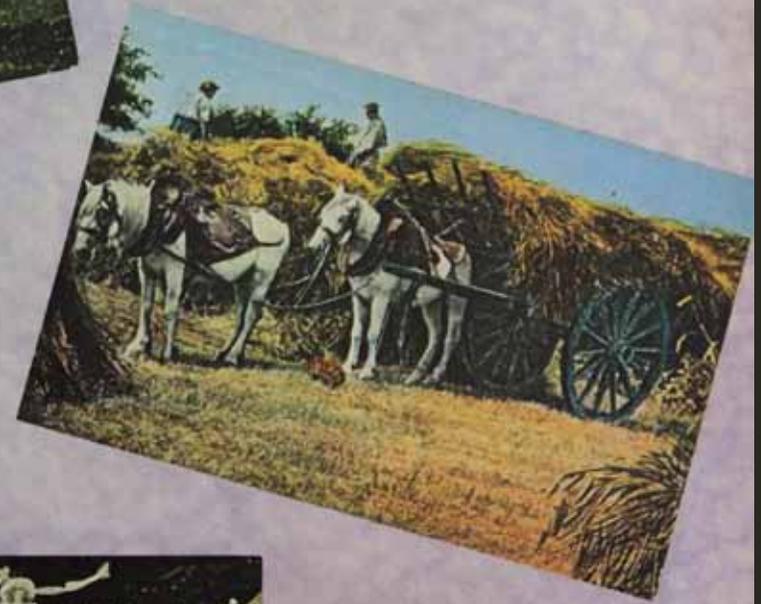
**SUSSEX HARVEST
A COLLECTION OF
TRADITIONAL SONGS
FROM SUSSEX**

Ernest 'Rabbidy' Baxter
Bob Blake
Mrs Mary Ann Haynes
Harry Upton



Sussex Harvest

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TOPIC

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Sussex has long been a county associated with folksong. In 1843 the Reverend John Broadwood published his *Old English Songs* with tunes, 'set to Music exactly as they are now sung, to rescue them from oblivion', and words, 'in their original Rough State, with an occasional slight alteration to render the sense intelligible'. Broadwood, a Sussex country vicar, had played the tunes on the recorder to his organist, so that the latter might write them down, but was surprised to be told that he had 'got them all wrong'. It was only when the organist heard the singers for himself that he realised, to his amazement, that supposedly illiterate peasants were singing perfect melodies outside the common major and minor scales.

In later years John Broadwood's niece, Lucy Broadwood, was to return to Sussex along with other members of the newly formed Folk Song Society and, between them, they were to discover a vast body of extant folk music. 'Who ever would have thought my old songs could have been any good! When I lived down at Lodsworth I knew lots and lots of them, but I have forgotten a great many of them now', said Henry Hills to W Percy Merrick who published about seventy of Henry's songs in the first volume of the Society's Journal, and Henry Burstow, a phenomenal singer, told Lucy Broadwood, 'I once sang all my songs, by request, to a gentleman. It took a month to

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do it!' Ralph Vaughan Williams published songs from Sussex in the 1906 issue of the Journal, as did George Butterworth and Frederick Keel in 1913 and 1918.

In 1899 Miss Kate Lee published songs that she had collected from James and Thomas Copper of Rottingdean. During the early 1950s James' grandson, Bob Copper, acted both as informant and collector for the BBC, and many of his family songs as well as those which he collected appear in his two books *A Song for Every Season* (1971) and *Songs and Southern Breezes* (1973).

During the time of the BBC recording scheme (1950-5) many fine Sussex singers were discovered and recorded, though none was as important as George Maynard – 'Pop' as he was universally known – a retired poacher and marbles player who lived in Copthorne. It was through meeting Pop that Ken Stubbs, a teacher then living in Lingfield, began to collect songs in Sussex during the 50s and 60s. Ken's book *The Life of a Man* (1970) contains many splendid songs, including *Will the Weaver*, *The Wreck of 'The Northfleet'* and *Canadee-i-o*, whilst his monograph *The Life and Songs of George Maynard* (1963) – which, incidentally, is still in print – should be read by all who profess an interest in Sussex folkways. It was because of Ken that I first began to look for songs in Sussex. Not only did Ken introduce

me to Harry Upton, who sings on this record, but also to George Spicer of West Hoathly and the late Harry Holman of Copthorne, whose songs can now be heard on *Blackberry Fold* (Topic 12T235) and *When Sheepshearing's Done* (Topic 12T254).

Back in 1843 it was John Broadwood's belief that he was rescuing folksong from oblivion. To Broadwood, as to almost every subsequent collector, the folksongs were to be collected because it was believed they would be gone from us within a generation. This record attests that this was not to be so, that songs and singers were to remain active, if not exactly common.

The Singers

Ernest 'Rabbidy' Baxter was a gardener who lived in Chelwood Gate. In the late 1950s Ken Stubbs began to record the concertina player Scan Tester and, in the process, met Rabbidy who accompanied Scan on tambourine. Ken arranged for Topic to record Scan and Rabbidy in 1962 and during one such session, at The Half Moon, Balcombe, Rabbidy burst into song. Sadly some of the regulars chose to continue talking but the sheer vitality of Rabbidy's singing necessitated the eventual issue of this recording. Rabbidy died two years later, but he is remembered locally by the fact that the road where his cottage stands is known today as 'Baxter's Lane'.

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Harry Upton who was born in 1900, is a part-time cowman who now lives in Balcombe. As a boy he learnt songs from his father, a Downsland shepherd, and from his father's colleagues including members of the Copper family. *The Wreck of the Northfleet* and *Canadee-i-o* come from his father, while *Poison in a Glass of Wine* and *The Freckless Young Girl* were his mother's songs. Like the Copper family, Harry has many of his songs in manuscript form, usually in his father's handwriting, and until recently owned many broadsides – mainly printed by Henry Parker Such of south London in the 1880s or later – which he inherited from his parents. Ken Stubbs introduced me to Harry about three years ago and during the time I have known him I have found him to be thoroughly professional in his approach to singing. He is a craftsman who constantly rehearses his songs and who will not record anything until he is certain that he cannot improve his performance.

Mary Ann Haynes is a gypsy who has now settled on the Sussex coast. Mrs Haynes was born in 1903 and spent most of her early life travelling to country fairs with her father who was a horse dealer. She knows more songs than any other singer that I have so far recorded and can be heard singing *Little Dun Dee*, *The Young Officer* (Child 4), *All Through Mi Rakli*, *At the Atchin Tan* and *Erin's Lovely Home* on the album *Songs of the Open Road* (Topic 12T253).

Bob Blake is one of the most charming and interesting singers that I have recorded. He is a bee keeper who now lives near Horsham. Previously he lived in Shipley, a village famed for its white windmill. Bob's interests range from pottery to wild life and, unlike the other singers on this record, he often appears in local folk clubs. Other songs of his were previously issued on the album *When Sheepshearing's Done*.

Canadee-i-o

According to the eminent song-collector Frank Kidson, *Canadee-i-o* is a song which first appeared during the 18th century. In form, it is related to the Scots song *Caledonia* – for which see Gavin Greig's *Folk Song in the North East*, article LXXVII – although exactly which song came first is one of those 'chicken and egg' questions which so frequently beset folk music studies. Harry Upton recalls singing this song in a Balcombe pub in 1940, and, to this day, remains puzzled as to how a visiting Canadian soldier could join in a song which he believed to be known only to himself and his father.

The Female Drummer

In the early 1740s Hannah Snell, the daughter of a Worcester draper, joined the British Army to search for her husband, a Dutch seaman, who she felt may

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have been pressed into the service of the King. As Private Snell, Hannah fought against the French in the Battle of Pondicherry and, following her retirement from the army, gained fame as the landlady of 'The Female Warrior' in Wapping, and, incidentally, became the recipient of a £30 annual government grant following a petition to the King by the then Duke of Cumberland. Whether or not Hannah Snell was the origin of so many 'female warrior' songs which stem from the late 18th century is hard to say, although one is tempted to think that this may be the case. *The Female Drummer* was printed in the early 1800s by Pitts and Evans of London, and later in a somewhat altered form by Henry Parker Such. The song is frequently found in Sussex today and one version, similar to that sung by Mrs Haynes, is printed in *The Life of a Man*.

Poor Leonard

Most of the singers in southern England who have *Poor Leonard* in their repertoire have it in the form which Henry Parker Such printed the song in the 1850s. In its original Irish form the song tells of a young man who is seduced to his death by a mermaid who has fallen in love with him, although the broadside press soon rationalised this supernatural element out of the story. Under its original title of *The Lake of Coolfin*, the song was first noted with its tune by the Irish collector P W Joyce, who took it

down from the singing of a 13 year old Limerick girl in 1854.

The Freckless Young Girl

Versions of *Taking an Evening Walk*, as most collectors have named this song, have previously been found in Sussex by Clive Carey, in the Thames Valley by Alfred Williams and in Surrey by Frederick Keel. The latter version was printed in Volume VI of the *Journal of the Folk Song Society* (1918) with the note that 'both song and air appear to be Irish in origin'.

The Basket of Eggs

When Bob Blake recently moved to live near Horsham he became interested in the repertoire of Henry Burstow – the legendary Horsham singer who is reputed to have known some 400 songs. *The Basket of Eggs* is one of Burstow's songs – it was reprinted in the *Penguin Book of English Folk Songs* (1959) – and, as Ken Stubbs has recently shown in *The Life of Man*, it is still popular in south east England.

The Old Miser

Many ballads tell of lovers who are parted by jealous or over-protective parents. It was a much used broadside theme and no doubt one that carried a certain degree of plausibility in the days of the press gang. *The Old Miser* was printed in the early 1800s

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by James Catnach of Seven Dials and it became especially popular with gypsies in southern England. Cecil Sharp found it in Gloucestershire in 1908 and a version sung by the gypsy Tom Willett is included on an anthology of gypsy songs, *The Roving Journeymen* (Topic 12T84).

Riding Down to Portsmouth

Although *Riding Down to Portsmouth* has all the characteristics of the stock broadside ballad, none of the early 20th century collectors who found the song, including Cecil Sharp and Ralph Vaughan Williams, was able to trace it to any known broadside. Recently, however, such a sheet has been discovered, without printer's imprint, in the Harris Library, Preston. Like *The Old Miser* it is frequently sung by gypsies and a version with somewhat different words is included on *The Roving Journeymen*.

Will the Weaver

Will the Weaver has been knocking on other men's doors since 1790 at least, when our song was printed in *A New Garland* by E Sergeant, a Preston printer. Further sets appeared in Scottish chapbooks and the song was later reprinted by James Catnach and Henry Parker Such of London, and William Armstrong of Liverpool. The song is well known in North America and Doc Watson's version, *Every Day Dirt*, comes from a commercial recording made in 1930 by the

Piedmont singer Dave McCarn who had originally learnt it from a friend's wife in North Carolina.

The Wreck of the Northfleet

During the night of January 22nd 1873 the sailing ship *Northfleet* was anchored in the English Channel ready to sail to Australia. On board were some 379 persons, mostly railway workers, en route to build the Tasmanian railway. The vessel was also carrying a cargo of railway iron. At 10.30pm the Spanish steamship *Murillo* struck the *Northfleet* amid ships at water level and within fifteen minutes 320 of the *Northfleet's* passengers were dead, including Captain Knowles who, revolver in hand, had tried to prevent his crew from panicking. Although it was a calm clear night the *Murillo* did not stop, and it was not until September 22nd that the ship was arrested by the Admiralty who subsequently confiscated the vessel. Harry Upton learnt the song in 1914 when he acted as tarboy for his father, a shepherd who worked on the South Downs overlooking the Channel. The song does not appear to have been collected elsewhere although other songs relating to the event have been traced to late Victorian broadsides.

Long a-growing

Scholars have long argued over the origin of this mysterious and, in some respects rather disturbing ballad. Some believe that it is based on certain

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historical facts which follow the death of John Urquhart of Craigstoun in Scotland c.1631. Urquhart's eleven year old son was taken under the wing of Robert, Laird of Innes who promptly married the boy to his eldest daughter, Elizabeth Innes, thus gaining control of the Craigstoun estate. Within three years the boy was dead, although not before having fathered a son. Other scholars notably the Reverend Baring-Gould, have suggested an English origin, basing their assumption on the apparent similarity to a snatch of words in Fletcher's play *Two Noble Kinsmen* which was published in 1634. The song is widespread today. One version, from Devon and published in the *Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*, has this comment from A L Lloyd, 'Child marriages for the consolidation of family fortunes were not unusual in the Middle Ages and in some parts the custom persisted far into the seventeenth century. The presenting and wearing of coloured ribbons, once common in Britain, still plays a prominent part in betrothal and marriage in Central and Eastern Europe'.

The Bonny Labouring Boy

The Bonny Labouring Boy belongs to that large class of broadside balladry which concerns true love's triumph over family opposition. Indeed it is difficult to imagine a more typical example of a broadside ballad – in this case one which was printed by

numerous 19th century printers including Catnach, Ryle, Fortey and Such, all of London, and Cadman of Manchester. Bob Blake learnt the song in the 1930s while on holiday in the West of England.

Poison in a Glass of Wine

Although attempts have been made to trace this tragic tale of murder to an actual historical event, scholars have, so far, failed in their efforts. Harry Upton's version of this common ballad is very similar to the one which Bob Copper recorded from old George Atrill of Fittleworth and which is printed in Bob's book *Songs and Southern Breezes*. For other recordings that I have made of this ballad see *Oxford City*, sung by Mrs Palmer of Witney in Oxfordshire (Topic 12T254) and *Down the Green Groves*, sung by Fred Jordan of Wenlock Edge in Shropshire (Topic 12T150).

The Ball of Yarn

The Ball of Yarn is popular with singers in southern England, if not with collectors who, in the past, have tended to ignore the song because of its subject matter. It is related to a Scottish song *The Yellow, Yellow Yorlin'* – yellowhammer in English – which Robert Burns collected and which was printed in *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* (c.1800). Stan Hugill reports that the song was once used as a shanty and,

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in 1937, it was recorded commercially by the Southern Melody Boys, an American String Band from the Virginia and Kentucky area.

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(Rabiddy Baxter recorded by Bill Leader 1962)

Produced by Mike Yates and Tony Engle

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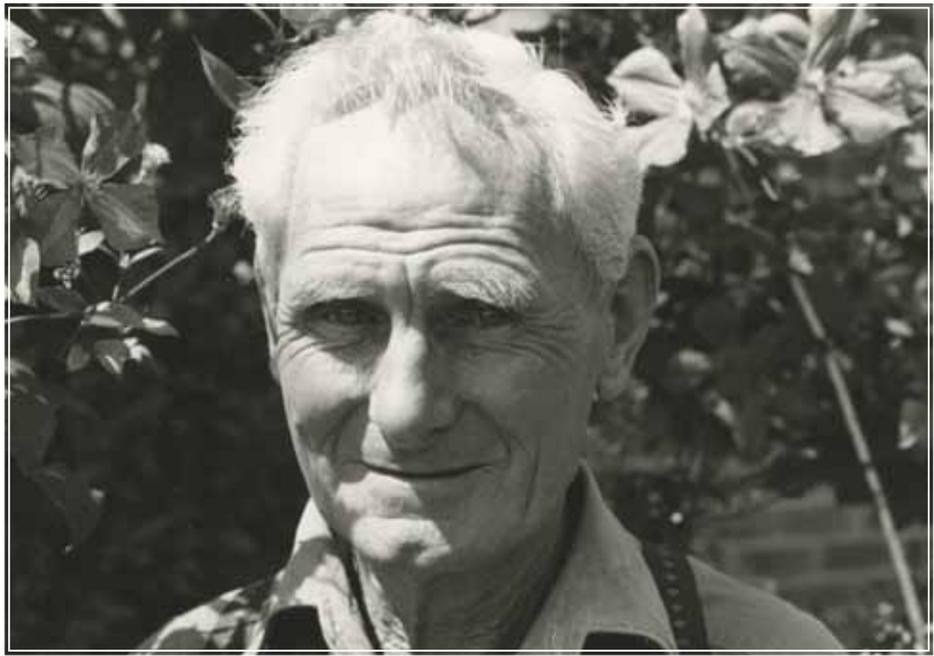
Sleeve design by Tony Engle

Postcards used on front sleeve from the collection of Peta Webb and Tony Engle.

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Bob Blake



Mary Anne Haynes

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Harry Upton

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