

*“Ye subjects of England come listen
awhile, I will sing you a ditty that’ll
cause you to smile.”
William Taylor*

Ye Subjects of England

George Maynard

Traditional Songs from Sussex

- 1 Polly on the Shore**
- 2 The Sweet Nightingale (The Birds in the Spring)**
- 3 Locks and Bolts**
- 4 Down by the Seaside**
- 5 Jack the Jolly Tar-O**
- 6 The Seeds of Love**
- 7 Shooting Goshen’s Cocks Up**
- 8 William Taylor**
- 9 Rolling in the Dew**
- 10 A Sailor in the North Country**
- 11 The Banks of Claudy**
- 12 Three Sons of Rogues**
- 13 The Weaver’s Daughter**
- 14 A Wager, A Wager**
- 15 The Sun Being Set**

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Track 7 recorded by Paul Carter and Ken Stubbs at Copthorne, 1962

All other tracks recorded for the BBC by Peter Kennedy at Copthorne, 1956

Produced for Topic by Mike Yates and Tony Engle

Sleeve notes by Mike Yates and Ken Stubbs

Sleeve design by Tony Engle



George (Pop) Maynard was one of the first traditional singers whom I met. I thought him the greatest then, and, meeting dozens more since, I have not changed my mind. As Henry Burstow was the greatest to be discovered before the First World War, and Harry Cox between the two wars, so was George after the Second. Unfortunately, during his lifetime the gramophone record market was not ripe for an LP of his singing to be produced. The only commercial disc he has been heard on till now was 'Four Sussex Singers', which included his *Polly on the Shore*, issued on Collector Records in 1961. George Maynard was recorded by the BBC, and a sing-song with him and other singers in the 'Cherry Tree', Copthorne, was heard over the air in the 'As I Roved Out' series. Subsequently, Mervyn Plunkett, Frank Purslow and I made recordings. Before he was 'discovered' by the post World War Two Folksong Revival, 'Pop' was already a celebrity in Surrey and Sussex, on account of his singing and playing of games, including marbles, shove-ha'penny, quoits and darts. In 1948 George became known further afield, when his team won the marbles tournament at Tinsley Green. He was taken to a BBC studio and interviewed, and in several succeeding years he was seen on the television screen shooting his marble. The tournament has been held on Good Friday from time immemorial. Maybe it derives from the custom of rolling eggs at Eastertide.

George was born in Smallfield, near Copthorne, in 1872 and died in 1962. He lived most of his life in Copthorne. Singing was part of the life of the family, and his cousins were renowned singers. Many of his songs he learnt from his father, brothers and sisters. Although his formal education ended early, he learnt to read, which stood him in good stead, for it allowed him to acquire songs which he could not otherwise (through oral transmission) have learnt in their entirety. His repertoire was thus augmented, through the ballet-sheets which were hawked around the village, and handwritten texts. To those of our age, his memory was phenomenal, but it would not have been so outstanding before wireless entered the field of culture. All manner of agricultural labour was undertaken by George; harvesting (by hand), hedging and ditching, hop-picking, woodcutting and flaying mostly. Being reliable, skilful and hardworking, he was always able to make an honest living, although in hard times it had to be supplemented by poaching rabbits and pheasants. He was happily married and never remembered having quarrelled with his Polly. Often he took her and their children hop-picking. For about half his life he was a widower, and after his four sons and two daughters grew up and left home, he lived mostly on his own. It was only in the last couple of years of his life that he felt lonely, when his friends had died, and when, because of infirmity, he could not often go to the public houses in the village.

Known to everyone as Pop, George was popular among both old and young, and with male and female on account of his good humour, natural courtesy and kindness. He was recognized as a character, and was a familiar figure around his village, where for several years he was the oldest inhabitant. With his white beard, and walking with a stick, he had the dignity of a patriarch. It was only in his eighties that I came to know him, but his voice was still strong until his last couple of years. Unless he were feeling unwell, he would always 'oblige' with a song. Before I had the use of a tape-recorder, he patiently dictated the words of songs for me to take down in longhand. Sitting in his cottage he would also entertain me with anecdotes from his eventful life. I recorded sixty-five songs from him, some being but fragments. I wished later that I had taken down all his music-hall songs, but at the time I held them of little value compared with his ballads. His favourite songs were *Banks of Claudy*, *The Brave Irish Soldier* and *The Old Rustic Bridge*. Even in his declining years he continued to learn songs. He died, his daughter-in-law told me, with a song on his lips.

Ken Stubbs

George Maynard, like many of his generation, was largely dependent on the broadside press for his repertoire. Where he differed from his contemporaries was in his ability to select and memorise fine and interesting songs and to enhance them with a sweet and delicate performance. Although mention is made of *A Wager, A Wager* (Child 45) in *The Complaint of Scotland* (1549) Pop's text is closer to that which the Birmingham printers Jackson & Son issued in the early 19th century and *The Seeds of Love, Locks and Bolts, Down By the Seaside* and *Rolling in the Dew* were also stock Victorian broadside ballads, albeit ones with ancient histories even then. Many of these songs, once common, are now seldom encountered. Cecil Sharp, for instance, noted four versions of *Locks and Bolts* at the turn of the century as did George Gardiner also. However, to my knowledge, Pop is the only English singer to have been recorded singing it - a sad come-down for this splendid ballad which was first licensed to be printed on September 5th, 1631 under the title *A Constant Wife*. The same can be said for his version of *A Sailor in the North Country* - which Ralph Vaughan Williams collected in 1904 from Mrs Verrall of Monksgate, near Horsham, in Sussex, and which was also noted in 1908 by Cecil Sharp - which must once have enjoyed a widespread popularity, judging by its frequent appearance on song sheets.

Understandably many of Pop's songs were concerned with poaching, *William Taylor* is not the well-known song in which a young girl joins the army in search of her true-love, but a rather lesser known song which Cecil Sharp found once in Middlesex and which turns up occasionally today in the mouths of gypsies. Legend has it that *Shooting Goshen's Cocks Up* was written by Fred Holman of Tatsfield in Surrey to commemorate a local poaching incident. Many people recall that Fred would write out the words in exchange for a pint whilst those unable to read would listen to his frequent performance of the tale. The tune, known as *The Barking Barber* or *Bow Wow Wow*, comes from the reign of George II, although in the early 1920s Richard Terry gave the tune with the song *The Drummer and the Cook* in a collection of sea shanties which gained widespread popularity; a fact which may explain how Fred came by the tune.

Surprisingly *The Birds in the Spring* only appears to have been previously collected in Surrey, Sussex and Essex.

The repetitive nature of the tune suggests an 18th century stage origin and, like some of Pop's other songs, it is also in the repertoire of the Copper family of Rottingdean in Sussex. Similarly *Three Sons of Rogues*, often called King Arthur's Sons, is probably a stage remake of *The Freeman's Song* (Three Men's Song) which appeared in Ravenscroft's "Deuteromelia" of 1609.

Pop was obviously taken by songs which dealt with the sea and his version of *The Valiant Sailor* (Pop called it *Polly on the Shore*) became something of a masterpiece in his singing. His version differs somewhat from the broadside text that John Ashton included in his book "Real Sailor Songs" (1891) and from the set that Cecil Sharp collected in Cambridgeshire in 1911 .

Several of Pop's other songs belonged to the "rustic- idyll" class, and suggest an urban, rather than rural origin. *The Weaver's Daughter* was described as "once popular" by Alfred Williams who noted it once in the Thames Valley some time prior to the Great War. Other collectors appear to have ignored the piece. The same cannot be said, however, for *The Sun Being Set*, or *Ground for the Floor* to use its better known title, versions of which appear in most of the major collections.

Finally we include two fragments from Pop's repertoire, *Jack the Jolly Tar-O* which seems to be based on the classic ballad of *Glasgerion* (Child 67), and s, Pop's favourite song. A complete version of the latter is given in Ken Stubb's book "The Life of a Man" (1970) together with some of Pop's other songs. Mention must also be made of Ken's monograph "The Life and Songs of George Maynard" printed in the 1965 "Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society" (vol. IX no. 4) which also includes transcriptions of eleven of Pop's songs.

Mike Yates



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