

In Sheffield Park

Frank Hinchliffe

Traditional Songs from South Yorkshire

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First published by Topic 1977

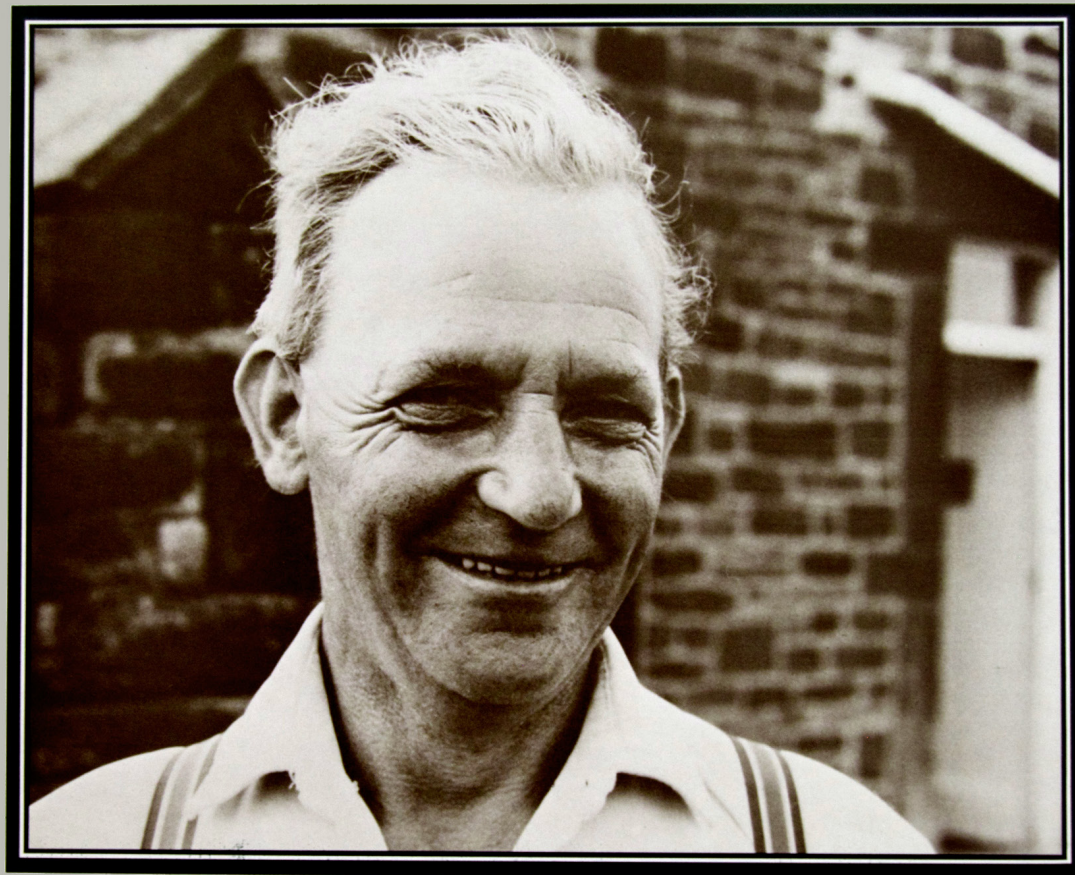
Recorded by Mike Yates and Ruairidh & Alvina Greig at Frank Hinchliffe's home in July 1976

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Frank Hinchliffe has lived in the Sheffield area all his life. His family farmed the land in the same locality for many generations and it was from them, and in particular from his parents, that he learned most of his interesting repertoire of songs. Singing was very much a part of everyday life, especially at milking time. Frank was milking twice a day when he was thirteen and it was at this time that he picked up many of his father's songs. The cows, he says, would not give milk without being sung to. It is probably fortunate for us that such was the case. This family tradition of singing was not unique in the area and to a certain extent the singing still survives. The pubs, however, are being altered one by one, and unprofitable tap-rooms are being turned into large carpet and chromium-fitted lounges, and pub games and Saturday night sing-songs are no longer welcome. In part it was this threat that led us to make this record, so that people should be aware of a fine tradition that is in danger of disappearing. Our main reason, however, will be obvious to anyone who listens to Frank's songs. The quality of his singing is a more than sufficient reason in itself. We also felt that too many people are inclined to believe that songs like these are only to be heard from the lips of octogenarians in the southern half of the country. Frank Hinchliffe, apart from being a particularly fine example of a traditional singer, comes from Yorkshire and is still in his early fifties.

Not only does this record include a remarkably high proportion of unusual songs with complete texts and good tunes, it also contains some very fine performances. Perhaps it is because Frank has been singing some of these songs in public until recently, that he has such a strong and distinctive style with a quiet dignified tone and a fine sense of rhythm and phrasing. It may also be because Frank has such a strong interest in singing; he certainly attaches great importance to the accuracy and meaning of the words he sings. We made these recordings in one of the hottest parts of a hot summer, when Mike Yates could find time to make the journey north. Frank sang for us after helping with his neighbour's hay harvest. Conditions were not exactly ideal and so we are especially grateful to him for his co-operation. We must also thank him, and in particular his wife Dorothy, for the generous hospitality shown us on our frequent visits. It should be mentioned that these are not the first recordings made of Frank's singing. He was first recorded in 1970 by Ian Russell on behalf of the Survey of Language and Folklore at Sheffield University.

The Pear Tree

This amusing song, about one of the more unexpected hazards of courtship, has an interesting history. We first saw a fragment of it that Bob Thomson had recorded in a Fenland pub, about eight years ago. Since then we have recorded two complete versions in the Sheffield area, another has been reported in Scotland, one in Cheshire, and Mike Yates has found yet another in Kent. It was, as far as we can discover, previously un-recorded. We first heard Frank sing it in his 'local' in the summer of 1970, in an attempt to cheer up a man who had just produced an enormous pocket handkerchief to wipe his eyes after a touching rendering of *The Blind Boy*.

The Golden Glove

The Squire of Tamworth or *Dog and Gun*, as it is sometimes called, has been popular with traditional singers for at least 200 years. Timothy Connor, a prisoner of war in England during the American Revolutionary War, included this song in a song-book he compiled during his imprisonment from 1777 until 1779. His version and Frank's are quite similar. Since Connor's day the song has been printed by many broadside printers, and has been widely collected in both England and America. It is a deservedly popular song with a fine romantic story. Robert Bell in *Songs of the Peasantry* writes that 'it is traditionally reported to be founded on an incident which occurred in the reign of Elizabeth'. We commented on the length of the song to Frank, who said that he found it one of the easier ones to remember because it was like telling a story, you knew what should happen next.

The Spotted Cow

Few songs so successfully conjure up such an idyllic picture of rural life. It was printed in *The Vocal Library* in 1822, and is listed in Pearson's catalogue of ballads. The song is today comparatively well known through recordings of the Copper Family and Harry Cox. Joseph Taylor of Saxby-All-Saints in Lincolnshire recorded a fine version of it for Percy Grainger. Frank's version has been handed down through several generations of the Hinchliffe family, and his performance of it is an excellent example of the truly expressive quality of his singing, in both tone and phrasing.

Mary Across the Wild Moor

Perhaps because of its open sentimentality, this song has rarely been published in collections in this country. It was printed by many broadside printers, including Ford of Chesterfield, Barr of Leeds and Bebbington of Manchester, and it is listed in Catnach's 1832 catalogue. It is known in Australia, is not uncommon in America, and has been collected in this country by Frank Kidson in Yorkshire, George Gardiner in Hampshire, Alfred Williams in Gloucestershire and both W. A. Barrett and Mike Yates in Sussex. Sentimental songs like this appear to have always enjoyed considerable popularity with country singers and it seems strange and regrettable that so few of them have been noted down.

The Nobleman and Thrasher

Robert Burns contributed a version of this song to *The Scots Musical Museum*, and it was an old song then in 1792, earlier broadside versions being in the Roxburgh and Ewing collections. It has been noted in many parts of the country and has been quite frequently published. Frank's tune is a particularly good one; he told us that it was a local favourite, once known to most of the older people in the area.

Wilkins and Dinah

Most people have heard the old stage song *Villikins and His Dinah*, and nearly everyone must have sung its tune to other words of one sort or another. The song which it parodies is called William and Dinah, a ballad often printed on broadsides, and in existence at least since 1832 when it was included in James Catnach's trade catalogue. Curiously, this once widely popular song has only rarely been reported from tradition. Frank's hero is not called William, but his song is a version of the original, and his tune is not the one made popular by Robson, the Victorian actor and comedian, creator of 'Villikins'.

The Green Mossy Banks of the Lea

Certain of Frank's songs, including this one, have an irregular verse pattern and it is interesting to hear how he adapts the tune to accommodate these irregularities. Commonly printed on broadsides, the song tells of a remarkably modern young girl, Matilda, who, with her parents, manages to arrange a marriage with a wealthy American who has recently arrived in the country. There seems to be a difference of opinion among scholars as to whether the song is Irish or English in origin, whether the river is the Lee or the Lea. It has certainly been sung in both countries; Lucy Broadwood described it as 'astonishingly popular among country singers'.

Wild and Wicked Youths

Also known as *Young Henry the Poacher*, this song was published by a number of ballad printers, including Ford of Chesterfield, Pearson of Manchester and Catnach of London. Roy Palmer, in *Folk Music Journal* Vol. 3 no. 2 (1976), puts forward an interesting theory, relating the song to events that took place in Warwickshire in 1829, which resulted in the transportation of eleven poachers, originally sentenced to death for shooting at the gamekeepers on Mr Dugdale's estate. He supports his theory with sufficient evidence to suggest that these events were the inspiration for the composition of the song.

Sheffield Park

The Park district of Sheffield lies just to the east of the City centre and it is to this area that Frank has always understood the song to refer, although there is a place called Sheffield Park in Sussex. Frank says the song was well known in the area. Ford of Chesterfield printed it on a broadside together with *The White Cockade* which Frank also knows. It dates from before 1832, when it too was listed in the catalogue of ballads printed by the Catnach Press. It was also printed as *The Unfortunate Maid of Sheffield* in *Holroyd's Collection of Yorkshire Ballads*, ed. C. Forshaw (1892).

Hear the Nightingales Sing

Versions of this song have frequently been noted in England and in North America, although some early collectors considered it rather unsuitable for publication. Frank does not remember it being much sung in his area. There is a close similarity between his version and the ones sung by singers we have recorded in North Lincolnshire. It is a good example of the use of symbolism in folksong to describe amatory encounters.

The Poor Old Weaver's Daughter

Most of the early collectors appear to have either overlooked or ignored this song. It was printed on broadsides by Pearson of Manchester, Fordyce of Newcastle and Harkness of Preston and is listed in the Catnach 1832 catalogue. Alfred Williams published a version in *Folk-Songs of the Upper Thames*. Its theme is an unusual one. Rarely does it happen in folksong that a young girl refuses a young man for the sake of her old father. George Maynard of Copthorne also knew the song and it is included on the Topic LP *Ye Subjects of England*.

It Hails, It Rains

The local popularity of this song, which is also known as *Forty Miles*, has been comparatively well documented. S. O. Addy, the local folklorist and antiquarian, printed it in his *Household Tales and Traditional Remains* (1895) and R. A. Gatty, who collected in the area both on his own and with R. Vaughan-Williams, noted it from the singing of Mrs Duckinfield of Treeton. F. Kidson also found several versions in Yorkshire. Frank's version includes the interesting rhythmic pattern in the last line of each verse which seems to be a consistent characteristic of the song in nearly all its variants.

Nothing Else to Do

This is another song which has rarely been recorded. Alfred Williams is the almost inevitable exception amongst the earlier collectors. He obtained his version from Alfred Spiers of Southrop and he considered it 'a charming old song with real poetry, gentle wit and pure sentiment'. Such issued a broadside version entitled *A Courting I Went; I had Naught Else to Do*. Frank likes this one because it is good for others to join in with. The offhand manner in which the hero of the song approaches life is certainly rather appealing.

Edward

Few ballads have such an interesting history as this one. Versions of it have turned up all over northern Europe, and already before the end of the 18th century Herder described it as 'one of the noblest of ballads'. A few versions had been collected in Scotland and the USA, but until recent years it had been recorded in England only once, as an accompanying song to a Souling Play in Cheshire. However, in the last 30 years a number of versions have been collected in various parts of the British Isles, including several in England. It was first collected in the Sheffield area by John Widdowson and Paul Smith, about 10 years ago. Frank quite understandably is not at all happy with the story in his version as it stands; it is hard to see the killing of three birds as a sufficient motive for fratricide. However, the tune is a fine one, and particularly well sung. Frank's wife, Dorothy, could not remember hearing him sing this one before he was recorded, which is surprising since, she says, he even sings in his sleep.

We've Been a While a-Wassailing

The Christmas season in South Yorkshire is celebrated with particular enthusiasm. Carols, some of them locally composed, are still widely sung in local pubs in the weeks up to Christmas, and this wassailing song is sometimes included. The song was also associated with house-visiting customs in which young girls went from door to door at Christmas, with a doll in a decorated boot-box, or with a decorated branch known as a 'Wassail Bough', begging for coppers and singing their local version. This custom survived until recent years in some parts of the area. Frank knows more than one version; this is the one popular in his locality.

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