

SONGS & SOUTHERN BREEZES

Country Singers from Hampshire and Sussex

Recorded by Bob Copper



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*Noah Gillette, George Attrill, Jim Swain,
George Fosbury, Ben Butcher,
Mrs. Chapman, Frank Bond, Fred Hewett,
Gladys Stone, Leslie Johnson, Enos White,
Victor 'Turp' Brown*

- 1 **The Bonny Bunch of Roses**
Noah Gillette
- 2 **Epsom Races**
George Attrill
- 3 **The Banks of The Mossem**
Jim Swain
- 4 **False Lanky**
George Fosbury
- 5 **Cruel Lincoln**
Ben Butcher
- 6 **The Silver Pin**
Mrs Chapman
- 7 **The 'Chiner's Song**
Frank Bond
- 8 **God Bless the Master**
Frank Bond
- 9 **The Prickle-Holly Bush**
Fred Hewett
- 10 **Three Maidens a-Milking Did Go**
Fred Hewett
- 11 **Her Servant Man**
Gladys Stone
- 12 **Rolling in the Dew**
Leslie Johnson
- 13 **George Collins**
Enos White
- 14 **In Sheffield Park**
Ben Butcher
- 15 **The Streams of Lovely Nancy**
Victor 'Turp' Brown
- 16 **As Broad As I Was Walking**
Victor 'Turp' Brown
- 17 **Six Jolly Miners**
Victor 'Turp' Brown

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Produced for Topic by Tony Engle

Notes by Bob Copper

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The sleeve design is based upon the jacket illustration
of Bob Copper's 'Songs and Southern Breezes' (pub.
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In the summer of 1954, as a small part of a nationwide collecting scheme instigated by the late Brian George of the BBC to salvage what remained of the living folk-music and song tradition of the United Kingdom, I took a portable tape-recorder into the countryside of Sussex and Hampshire to see what could be found. At that time the scheme was considered by many to be an eleventh-hour action a good ten years late and only too often collectors met with the discouraging remark, "A-gh! You should 'a' bin 'ere about twenty years ago. We 'ad some wonderful fine ol' singers 'ere in they days before music was invented." (Or words to the same effect in some other dialect).

But now, twenty or so years later, it is realised that we got into the field just in time and, far from merely gleaning, gathered in a remarkably rich harvest of previously unrecorded traditional material which is now safely stored in the BBC Library Archives. This album is an introduction to a few of the singers I was lucky enough to meet.

Noah Gillette *Hastings, Sussex*

Noah remembered his grandmother singing *The Bonny Bunch of Roses*. Here is a direct link with the same song that the ballad-singers sang to the sound of cracked fiddles in the bitter winter of 1812, warming the hearts of their fellow-countrymen with the news of Napoleon's downfall.

George Attrill *Fittleworth, Sussex*

George and I sat down with the wine-jar squatting comfortably between us ... After he had topped up our glasses for the fourth time I suggested it was about time we had a song ... George stood up and let of a mighty, uninhibited belch, "Woops," he said, "paddle-sticks an' umbrella 'andles". Then launched headlong into *Epsom Races*.

Jim Swain *Angmering, Sussex*

Jim was sitting hatless just outside the open kitchen door. His head was inclined slightly backwards and his eyes directed steadily up into the blue sky overhead ... He heard the click of the gate and the unfamiliar footfalls on the brick path. "Goo mornin'," he said without moving his gaze. "Goo mornin'," I said. Jim was totally blind ... He learnt *The Banks of the Mossem* when he was a lad from an old shepherd at Felpham.

George Fosbury *Axford, Hampshire*

To sit talking to old George was to be wafted back to the turn of the century when he had been in his middle thirties. When I met him his voice was past its prime but I could tell from his self-assurance, his poise, and sense of timing that here was a good singer of the old school.

Ben Butcher *Popham, Hampshire*

Ben's mode of singing was exuberant, almost bouncy, and it was not unusual for him to break into an impromptu and somewhat ungainly dance right in the middle of a song, his long arms and breeched and be-stockinged legs flailing about in all directions. This tended to lend the whole proceeding an air of incongruity - particularly if the subject of the song was serious.

False Lanky and **Cruel Lincoln** are obviously variants of the same ballad, no version of which had been sound recorded until I found these two existing within three miles of each other. Only slightly at variance, they stemmed from entirely different and widely separated sources. George learnt *False Lanky* in Axford, Hampshire, and Ben got *Cruel Lincoln* from his father in Storrington, Sussex, although I recorded him at his home in Popham.

Mrs. Chapman *North Waltham, Hampshire*

Mrs. Chapman, when a little girl, used to sing *The Silver Pin* as a duet with her father, sitting on his knee. She sang it for me half a century later with confidence and without hesitation, with none of the memory-searching pauses so often met with in singers who have not sung a song for years.

Frank Bond *North Waltham, Hampshire*

Frank wrote the words of *The Chiner's Song* in about 1906 and it is based on a traditional tune. *God Bless the Master* used to be sung by way of introduction or, as Frank said, "to open out" when The Mummers went round to perform their play at the big houses at Christmas.

Fred Hewett *Mapledurwell, Hampshire*

Fred slipped his braces of his shoulders and left the support of his corduroy trousers, the waist-band of which reached up almost to his armpits, to a stout leather belt round his middle. He stood there in his socks, his forehead still damp from his day's work, and sang.

Gladys Stone and Leslie Johnson *Fittleworth, Sussex*

Gladys and Leslie are sister and brother and they sing their father's songs, the words of which he wrote down in a school exercise-book. Their father, John Johnson, a friend of George Attrill's and a celebrated singer of the old songs, had died before my arrival in Fittleworth but with the help of his book and the retentive memories of Gladys and Leslie I was able to add several of his songs to my collection.

Enos White *Axford, Hampshire*

... Enos's voice trailed away leaving a thoughtful silence ... and I wondered how this sensitive little man, who was so physically tough, had managed to retain such a tenderness of thought and feeling both of which were made apparent in his singing. His songs had lived on in his heart as a delicate fern-leaf pattern is preserved in a chunk of rough-hewn rock.

Victor 'Turp' Brown *Cheriton, Hampshire*

On Saturday nights in the H.H. Inn, Cheriton, Turp would really come into his own ... There in the centre, pitching right into the fun and frolic, he would flatter the girls, tease the men, lead the singing and perform his dance. His face flushed with pleasure and his grey eyes twinkling like stars under his bushy, white eyebrows and the peak of his tweed cap, which remained firmly in position at all times. (These notes are adapted from "Songs and Southern Breezes" - Heinemann).

Songs and Southern Breezes complements Bob Copper's book of the same title (Heinemann, 1973). Bob Copper's subject is, in his words, 'the living essence of old English country life'. To the words and photographs which so tellingly evoke that life in the book, TOPIC here adds the still more vivid testimonies of the singers themselves, in their songs of the Southern countryside.

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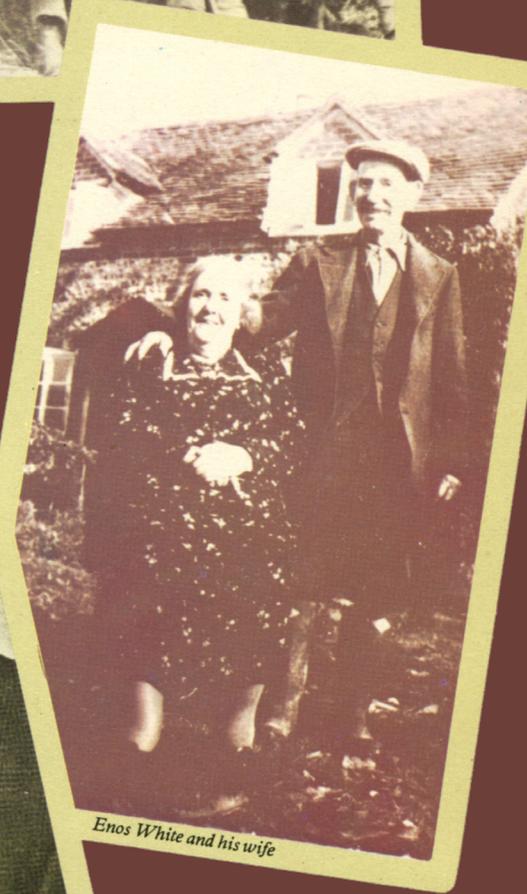




Frank Bond, second from right, c1920



'Turp' Brown



Enos White and his wife