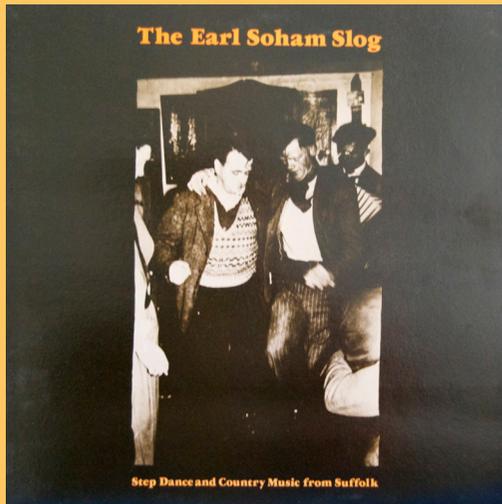


The Earl Soham Slog



Step Dance and Country Music from Suffolk



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Step Dance and Country Music from Suffolk

Harkie Nesling
Reg Reeder
Font Whatling
Fred Whiting

Fiddle
Dulcimer
Melodeon
Fiddle

- | | | |
|----|--|----------------|
| 1 | Polkas (Harkie's Polkas) | Fred Whiting |
| 2 | Cat Among the Tails/Rakes of Mallow | Reg Reeder |
| 3 | The Earl Soham Slog/Flowers of Edinburgh | Fred Whiting |
| 4 | Mick's Tune/Pigeon on the Gate | Font Whatling |
| 5 | The Sultan's Polka/Untitled Polka | Harkie Nesling |
| 6 | Waltz Medley: Oscar Woods'/Charlie Philpotts' | Reg Reeder |
| 7 | Jigs: The Maid at the Well /The Old Kerry Fiddler/The Priest and His Boots | Fred Whiting |
| 8 | Come and Be My Little Teddy Bear | Harkie Nesling |
| 9 | Polkas | Font Whatling |
| 10 | Hornpipes: The Weaver's/The Bristol Sailorman/Ballinalig in the Morning | Fred Whiting |
| 11 | Impudence Schottische/Rakes of Mallow | Harkie Nesling |
| 12 | Polka Medley : 1, 2, 3, 4, 5/Jenny Lind/Joe, the Boat is Going Over | Reg Reeder |
| 13 | The Hurling Boys ('Old Country Dance')/Jack Tar Hornpipe | Fred Whiting |
| 14 | Untitled Tunes | Font Whatling |
| 15 | The Barn Dance | Harkie Nesling |
| 16 | Off to California /Will the Waggoner(Gypsy Hornpipe) | Fred Whiting |
| 17 | Pigeon on the Gate | Font Whatling |

Font Whatling is accompanied by Wattie Wright step-dancing on track 4 and by his own step-dancing on track 17.

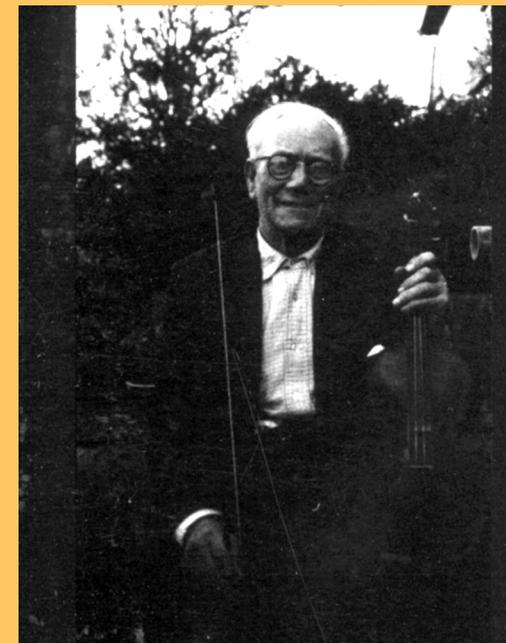
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Production by Keith Summers and Tony Engle
Notes by Keith Summers
Design by Tony Engle
Front sleeve photograph is Font Whatling and Wattie Wright step-dancing
Back sleeve photographs - except Ernie Seamen - by Mike Yates.

The traditional folk music of East Suffolk has probably been the best documented regional style in England over the past thirty years. Whereas much of the music and singing recorded in this period would appear to be indigenous to a general 'East Anglian style'. It is possible, even within such a relatively small area, to detect various distinctive traditions often revolving around either a particular pub, village or influential musician. Basically during this period, there were four such quite separate local groupings in this area, with of course some interaction between them (primarily in the case of the travelling pub musician). The best known of these was undoubtedly that centred around the singing pubs along the Aldeburgh coastal district, such as Blaxhall 'Ship' and the 'Eel Foot Inn' at Eastbridge. Here the music and singing was highly organised, generally as a Saturday night's entertainment with chairmen introducing the singers and maintaining order. Secondly the nearby towns of Woodbridge and Wickham Market boasted a fair number of dance and string bands led by men such as Walter Clow, Fred Whent, Billy Hall and Lennie Pearce. A third tradition was active around the pubs in Halesworth and Yoxford area, revolving around the charismatic Seaman Family from Darsham. Finally the small villages between Framlingham and Debenham sported a great musical tradition dominated by melodeon players Walter Read and Alf Peachey and fiddlers Walter Gyford and Harkie Nesling. It is from the last two traditions and through four generations that this recording is drawn.

Harkie Nesling is the elder statesman of current musicians in the Debenham area. Born in Bedfield in 1891, Harkie first started his musical career at the age of five on a concertina given to him by a neighbour and it was another concertina player, Billy Smith, a travelling packman, who gave him his first violin lessons when he was fourteen. The purchase of his own violin from an old gipsy Billy Harris of Charsfield, assisted his progress before he moved to London as a young man to work

as a wheelwright. In the evenings he moonlighted as a musician in a hand, playing for silent movies in the Holloway Empire. On returning to Bedfield he formed a small band with another fiddler, Walter Gyford, an old school chum, and Walter Read, a superb blind melodeon player from Harkie's village. For many years they regularly played together at fairs, weddings, pubs and for carol singing in Earl Soham and Framlingham. Eventually the band split up, to be replaced by a more modern ensemble led by Walter Gyford's nephew Sam Gyford. The gradual effects of a bad accident in London left Harkie more isolated in his cottage but thanks to regular visits from his great friend Fred Whiting, Harkie never lost interest in his music and he still has four violins and a fund of stories, tunes, and songs.

Fred 'Pip' Whiting comes from the village of Kenton, two miles from Bedfield and plays a normally strung fiddle left-handed 'I guess I'm just a fiddling freak.' The Whiting family a large one locally was very musical and 'Pip' would often be sung to sleep by his father John. 'When I went to bed he'd sing "The ship that never returned" or "Dark eyed sailor" and I'd join in. When I'd stopped he knew I was asleep.' Even in a tiny village like Kenton there were many good musicians and in his early teens Fred took to the mouth-organ but found that with constant use they were soon blown out 'and at 3/6d each I was soon financially paralysed.' So he bought his first fiddle for 30/- when sixteen and picked up some tunes from 'Honeyman's Violin Tutor' and some from old gramophone records, such as his favourite hornpipe Flowers of Edinburgh from the Scottish melodeon player John McCluskey. To escape the grim '20s in rural Suffolk, Fred left for Australia to work as a bricklayer on the railway and it was in the navy camps that he developed a liking for Irish and Scottish music. On his return in 1932, he began playing regularly in the pubs around Debenham and Earl Soham with older men such as Alf Peachey, Bob Keble and Harkie. With a good stock of hornpipes, jigs and polkas he was often in demand by step-dancers like Stumpy Webber



Harkie Nesling



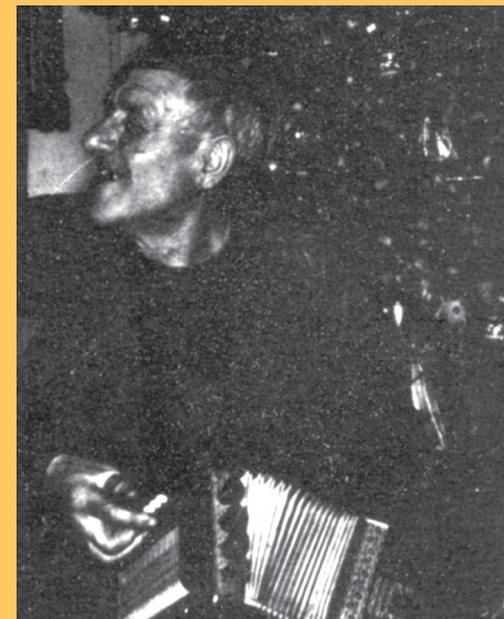
Fred Whiting

and the younger members of Billy Harris's family. His music-making days seemed at an end, however, about 1955 after a bad eye infection had damaged his sight. Happily this was cured some years later but by then the four-ale beerhouse and village dances had been replaced by the 'scampi and horsebrass' pub and the discotheque. However regular visits to a few old mates like Harkie has thankfully kept active a very fine traditional musician.

Walter 'Font' Whatling is a generation removed from 'Pip' and is a contemporary of notable local melodeon players Oscar Woods and Fred List. Like Fred List, 'Font' was an early prodigy of Walter Read of Redfield, the most influential of all the local melodeon players. Having one of the few cars in the area, 'Font' would often pick the older blind man up and a crowd of others and travel miles to isolated pubs and play all night. An early interest in the drums gave Font a good sense of rhythm and it was not long before he had become adept at step-dancing (for which Walter Read was a master musician). 'I once stepped for Walter for twenty-five minutes in Bedford Crown. He said, "I thought you'd never stop, boy." "Blast." I said, "I was waiting for you."' 'Font' won many prizes locally for step-dancing, normally held on the back of a cart. He also teamed up with Wattie Wright, an excellent dancer, stepping together in unison, and he even developed a style of stepping while playing his accordeon - quite a sight! In the '50s he formed his own band. 'The Three W's', with Wattie on drums and Eddie Woolnough of Saxstead on second accordeon, playing for weddings and dancing and in the pubs, often crossing paths with other notable accordeonists, Alf Peachey and Ernie Seaman. He still plays regularly around his native Worlingworth area.

On the surface, **Reg Reeder** is not distinguishable from most men of his generation. In his early 40s, he lives in a modern comfortable house in Leiston with his charming wife and three lively young daughters. However, Reg is one of the few survivors (Oscar Woods is another) of a tradition of country musicians operating until twenty years ago around the Yoxford and Halesworth area dominated by the Seaman family, notably Ernie and Charlie Seaman of Darsham. Indeed the hammer dulcimer Reg plays won the unofficial World Dulcimer Championship for its maker, a Mr Howard, in a circus tent in Halesworth over a hundred years ago. Reg's great-grandfather acquired it for another dulcimer and a pair of boots and it has been in the family ever since. It was Reg's grandfather Charlie Phillipott who taught Reg, when about twelve, to play it and many of his tunes. Charlie was a celebrated local musician who played frequently with the Seamans - themselves line melodeon and dulcimer players. In his mid teens Reg would play piano in the pubs in Yoxford - 'Ruby Starr songs were my favourite' alternating sets with Charlie Kerridge, a fine step-dance player on melodeon and a close friend of Ernie Seaman. In his early 20s Reg moved away to Cambridge and the dulcimer remained in the attic until one of his daughters, a keen folk dancer at school, told her teacher, who invited Reg to bring it to Leiston Folk Club. While there he met a friend, Graham Bloomfield, a neighbour of Fred Whiting and Harkie Nesling, who supplied a tape of their old tunes, jogging Reg's memory. 'Now we have the dulcimer out every night'.

Keith Summers



Ernie Seamen



Font Whiting

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