

# Sing, Say and Play

TSDL375

## SING, SAY AND PLAY TRADITIONAL SONGS & MUSIC FROM SUFFOLK

### THE SINGERS

Jumbo Brightwell  
Jimmy Knights  
Dick Woolnough  
Alien Stollery  
Billy Bolton

### THE MUSICIANS

Fred Pearce – melodeon  
Albert Smith – mouth organ  
Eely Whent – fiddle



## Traditional Songs & Music from Suffolk

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Traditional  
Songs & Music  
from Sussex.

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1. **The Blacksmith's Daughter** Jumbo Brightwell
2. **Ratcliff Highway** Jimmy Knights
3. **The Barn Dance**  
(Woodland Flowers) Fred Pearce
4. **Cock of the North** Fred Pearce
5. **The London Prentice Boy** Dick Woolnough
6. **The Next Tune Tonight –**  
**Turkey in the Straw** Eely Whent
7. **The Banks of the Nile** Jumbo Brightwell
8. **Out with My Gun in**  
**The Morning** Jimmy Knights
9. **Old Country Waltz** Eely Whent
10. **Pigeon on the Gate** Fred Pearce
11. **Strolling Down to Hastings** Alien Stollery
12. **The Fellow Who Played**  
**The Trombone** Jimmy Knights
13. **Sailor's Hornpipe Medley** Eely Whent
14. **The Oak and the Ash** Jumbo Brightwell
15. **The Jolly Tinker** Billy Bolton
16. **Two Step** Eely Whent
17. **Yarmouth Hornpipe** Fred Pearce
18. **The Parson's Creed** Jumbo Brightwell
19. **Marrowbones** Jimmy Knights
20. **Golden Slippers** Fred Pearce
21. **The Chinaman's Song** Alien Stollery

22. **Old Brown in the Rose** Albert Smith  
**and Crown**  
**Red River Valley**  
**Pigeon on the Gate**
23. **Polka Medley: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5** Eely Whent  
**The Bells of Love**  
**Jingle Bells**

Front sleeve photograph from left to right:  
Fred Pearce, Cyril Poacher, Wicketts Richardson, Lew  
Poacher

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Few areas in England have produced such a wealth of traditional folk music over the last thirty years as the district around Woodbridge in East Suffolk. Since the first classic recordings from the 'Eel's Foot Inn' at Eastbridge and Blaxhall 'Ship' just after the Second World War, collectors have repeatedly returned to the area and we are now fortunate to have recordings from such excellent singers and musicians as Bob Roberts, Bob Hart, Cyril Poacher, Phoebe Smith, Percy Webb and Oscar Woods amongst others.

Until fairly recent times, the music of this area was not kept alive merely in the memories of old people but formed an important part of the social life of the area, as a live entertainment. Musical evenings in the local pubs were often well-organised affairs – singers had their own particular songs which would not be sung by others and there were sufficient good musicians travelling around the pubs to ensure that only the best held down the regular spots, playing for singing and step-dancing which often took on a very competitive air.

Such pub sessions were often kept in order by chairmen such as Alf 'Wicketts' Richardson at Blaxhall and Phillip Lumkin at the 'Eel's Foot' who in addition to giving their own particular ditties would maintain order and introduce the various singers. For instance 'Wicketts' would often end the first part

of the evening's proceedings before the cigarettes and sandwiches had been handed round with 'We shall now just take a break and in the second half Mister Pearce will entertain you with Irish jigs and reels and I hope you will all be entertained.'

Fred Pearce did not move to Blaxhall from Rendlesham until 1938 when he was 26. He had not been playing melodeon very long but did not take long to establish himself as the regular Saturday-night musician. Blaxhall had always been a great centre for local step-dancers such as Bensy Hewitt, Dick Woolnough and the large Smith Family and therefore it was hornpipes and polkas that Fred soon picked up. In addition to playing at 'The Ship', he travelled around many other pubs, about forty in all, from Oulton Broad to Illford in Essex where on Coronation Day 1937 he played for twelve hours non-stop. Fred continued to play at 'The Ship' until the early '60s when he retired, to be followed by Fred List and Oscar Woods, but he could often be talked into giving a tune until his sudden death in 1975.

Ten years older than Fred Pearce was Fred Whent – better known as 'Eely'. Eely Whent was also a pub musician and in the late twenties frequently visited 'The Ship' with his mate Spanker Austin, biking over from Woodbridge with their fiddles. He soon fell in with the Smiths, particularly Fred and 'Lightnin'

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Jack' who would take him round in a pony-and-cart and put him up in their caravan. 'When those Smiths danced they'd go one against the other for forty or forty-five minutes and if you went wrong, blast, you'd get swore at.'

As time went on Eely formed a number of small string bands to play in the pubs and chapels and dance bands for more formal dancing in Wickham Market and Woodbridge. A chance to turn professional was offered to him by Henry Hall but his strict step-father forbade it. 'I'm glad in a way,' he says. 'I think I prefer to be a busker.'

Of the many fine step-dancers in the area, one of the best was Dick Woolnough. Coming from a large family of singers and dancers, Dick was a champion dancer, often performing in clogs. Dick moved to nearby Snape later in life and it was there that I recorded him in his front garden, singing a song locally associated with the great Bob Scarce.

Just to the north of Woodbridge is a cluster of small villages – Hasketon, Debach, Grundisburgh and Charsfield, and it is from this area that Jimmy Knights originates. Now well into his 90s, 'Holy Jim' was a contemporary of the fine local singers Jim Baldry and Herbert Last. At an early age Jim would visit the local pubs and it was mainly from Jim Baldry's uncle Charlie – 'Old Didles' – that he got most of the songs

on this record. Jim was a stallion leader and his work took him all around the country – to Scotland and Yorkshire in particular, where he picked up a wealth of new and unusual songs. He still visits his local every Saturday night and, with liquid persuasion, will entertain the crowd and probably steal your girl!

Jumbo Brightwell appeared on the first radio broadcast in 1939 of Suffolk music from the 'Eel's Foot Inn' and has since had a record made of this fine singing (Topic 12TS261). In his youth he would bike with his father Velvet to the pub on a Saturday night and it was here that he picked up many of his songs from older men such as Diddy and Crutter Cook, Edgar Button and Percy Smith. In addition, Jumbo was an excellent steel quoits player and very often matches at surrounding villages would be followed by a sing-song in the local. On this record Jumbo sings the first song he ever learnt, **The Blacksmith's Daughter**, which he picked up as a boy standing outside 'Glemham Lion' while minding the ponies for local farmworkers. In addition he performs **The Parson's Creed**. These short recitations were normally reserved by a singer when called upon to 'sing, say or pay' (normally for a gallon of beer) if he was not really feeling much like singing, or as a means of frustrating the audience into demanding a 'big song.'

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Albert Smith, a forestry worker from Chillesford, also has a stock of such pieces and is in addition a fine mouth-organ player. About 30 years ago his local Butley 'Oyster' was another noted pub for singing and often Albert would have a crack, though the evenings were normally dominated by those fine singers Cis Ellis, Crump Snowdon and Percy Webb. As the evenings wore on Albert would often take out his mouth-organ or jew's-harp to play for Webby to step-dance to.

With the advent of television and easy travel, such musical evenings diminished – a great shame, if rather inevitable. I should really like to have made these recordings in a pub atmosphere but this proved pretty impossible.

KEITH SUMMERS

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Eely Whent



Jimmy Knights



Fred Pearce

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