



That Lancashire Band



The Oldham Tinkers

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Recorded by John Brierley
at Cargo Recording Studio, Rochdale, April 1979
Notes by Larry Kerns
Sleeve illustration by John Atkinson.
Produced by Tony Russell

1 Old May Song

Gerry Kearns *vocal, guitar*;
John Howarth *vocal, banjo*;
Larry Kearns *mandolin*

2 John Willie's Performing Newt

John *vocal*;
Gerry *vocal, guitar*;
Larry *vocal, mandolin*

3 Nowt About Owt

John *vocal*;
Larry *mandolin*;
Chris Holmes *piano*

4 Children's Chants & Songs (Captain's Medley)

John *vocal*;
Gerry *vocal, guitar*;
Larry *vocal, mandolin*

5 Eawr House - As Was

John *speech*;
Gerry *guitar*;
Larry *mandolin*

6 Oh! That Lancashire Jazz Band

John, Gerry, Larry *vocal trio*;
Chris Holmes *piano*;
Pete Taylor *bass*;
Pete Staples *drums*

7 The Lark

Gerry *vocal, guitar*;
John *whistle*;
Larry *whistle*

8 John Willie's Grand-Dad

John *vocal*;
Gerry *vocal, guitar*;
Larry *vocal*

9 Tribute to Owd Paddy

Gerry *vocal, guitar*;
John *vocal, banjo*;
Larry *mandolin*

10 Old King Coal

John *vocal*;
Gerry *vocal, guitar*;
Larry *vocal, whistle*

11 Steeple Jack

Gerry *vocal*

12 The Crime Lake Boggart

John *speech*;
Gerry *guitar*;
Larry *mandolin*

13 An Oldham Rugby Medley

Gerry *vocal, guitar*;
John *vocal, whistle, banjo*;
Larry *vocal, whistle*

14 McCarthy's Party

Larry *vocal*;
John *vocal, banjo, bones*;
Gerry *vocal, guitar, bass drum*

Old May Song

May songs and maypole songs were commonplace in Oldham during the first three days of May when John, Gerry and Larry were younger and in fact the lads have already recorded some of them on previous LPs. These however have tended to be rhythmic for dancing around the pole. Gerry had only the words to work on with this song from Swinton. The tune, which he wrote and added, makes it far more melodious than the May songs of the Oldham Tinkers' childhoods but for them not so evocative of fond memories.

Gerry encountered the song in BALLADS AND SONGS OF LANCASHIRE, 2nd edition, compiled and collected by John Harland, Published in London in 1875 by George Routledge and Sons and L C Gent. It is also in the first edition of 1865 (London, Whittaker and Co.)

John Willie's Performing Newt

Another addition to John Willie's menagerie is this amphibious clog dancer; a supremo and a charmer whose feats surely rival those of John Willie's Ferret and John & Willie's Horse. The words were written by Larry, the tune by Gerry, and the verses of the song are delivered by John, who keeps newts as a hobby.

Nowt About Owt

Paul Graney, a longstanding friend of the Oldham Tinkers, assures the lads that Nowt About Owt was first sung by an opera singer called Ernest Butcher. Ernest Butcher must certainly have had a sense of humour, a feeling for the working man and indeed an eye for a pretty girl. Nowt About Owt makes a pleasant change from the many 'kiss and tell' songs that one encounters.

Children's Chants & Songs (Captain's Medley)

The Oldham Tinkers have always cherished the habits and songs of their own childhood, especially since they were so intertwined, Gerry and Larry being brothers and John a friend from childhood. Also contained in this medley, however, are songs from a younger generation, that of their own children.

Eawr House – As Was

Everybody who was lucky enough to have a happy childhood; rich or poor, has precious memories of his home. The Oldham Tinker went back to the house where Gerry and Larry lived as children and nostalgia ruled the day as they stood on the demolished site. Cliff Gerrard has obviously not only had this experience but is able to put his sentiments into verse. After asking Cliff's permission to record the poem, John and Gerry suggested that The Old House be used as background music. By coincidence The Old House is Cliff Gerrard's favourite song.

Oh! That Lancashire Jazz Band

Copyrighted in 1919, and first sung by George Bass, this song smacks heavily of many other pieces of its era, not least George Formby Senior's John Willie's Ragtime Band - also recorded by the Oldham Tinkers, on BEST O' T' BUNCH (Topic 12TS237). Oh! That Lancashire Jazz Band is one of several songs that link an exaggerated tripe-and-cowheel image with that of the seemingly colourful American world of, syncopation. The inclusion, of a real jazz trio was John's idea and these talented musicians certainly give the track some 'umph'. The piece was written by Wynn Stanley and Andrew Allen.

The Lark

Not too long ago, a letter appeared in the Oldham Chronicle. Complaining that its writer had not seen a lark in the Oldham area for thirty years. The person who penned the letter blamed the dearth of larks on the chemicals lavished on the crops around Oldham. But in fact there is very little arable land about the town, and, besides, the neighbouring moorland harbours more larks than 'Soft Mick'. This song, whose words were written by Larry and tune by Gerry, is a tribute to the lark's natural ability to soar, view and sing and also Larry's protest about people who kill birds for nothing, as many do. The images portrayed in the song are all Oldham ones, particularly of Saddleworth. The men fighting 'the battle in shorts' are the players of Saddleworth Rugby League Club and their opponents.

John Willie's Grand-Dad

Just as Edgar Rice Burroughs wrote sequels to 'Tarzan of the Apes', so the John Willie saga continues with a song about the hero's grandfather's antics in the land of the Gauls. The song was jointly written by Gerry and Larry. It is John's ambition to make Nice and Wigan twin towns.

Tribute to Owd Paddy

This is Cliff Gerrard at his most sincere. Cliff tells the lads that Paddy, whose second name was Ward, was a 'real person', and in Lancashire that term means far more than just a living being. It is the supreme compliment. According to Cliff, Paddy had all the warmth, honesty, willingness and allure that the verses describe - and he really was born on Christmas day. Here again we see evidence of the Lancastrian-Gaelic liaison. 'Poor Paddy was an Irishman' (though he lived in Rainford, near Saint Helens), and so Gerry thought that his tune should have an Irish lilt.

Old King Coal

Obviously based on the nursery rhyme, Old King Coal is a tribute to the mineral without which Lancashire's industrial society, and indeed industrial feats of other areas, could never have been achieved. The Oldham Tinkers were introduced to this regal personification of coal by Charles Chilton - the author, historian and collector of historical songs - in 1968.

Steeple Jack

Perhaps this song is best understood in the light of this news item in THE OLDHAM OPERATIVE Friday, December 5, 1884:

'Last Friday Mr. Joseph Ball, of York Castle Oldham, took a load of 4-lb loaves to Moston, which he distributed among the drowned-out colliers. He also purchased new sets of tools for those who had lost their old tools in the mine.'

Following this in the paper is a poem, Steeple Jack, dedicated to Joseph Ball. The tune was added by Gerry.

The Crime Lake Boggart

The Oldham area is indeed the Domain of Boggarts. It harbours the Chamber Hall Boggart, whose mischievous antics are recalled in countless tales. Nearby Blackley boasts a piece of parkland infested with the impish sprites: 'Boggart Hole Clough'. The Crime Lake Boggart, or 'Peggy's Lantern' as it is sometimes known, lurks in the village of Woodhouses, a hamlet between Failsworth and Ashton.

The poem, like many other Lancashire dialect pieces, was written under a pseudonym, 'CFC'. In LANCASHIRE MISCELLANY, published in 1960, the editor says in his notes that the poem's author claims: 'The experience happened to an old friend at Woodhouses though a similar experience happened to the father of a friend of my mother some seventy years ago (1890). It was he who called it "Peggy's Lantern" Perhaps the author used the pseudonym to camouflage the tongue in his cheek. The background music is of course The Wraggle Taggle Gypsies.

An Oldham Rugby Medley

When folk think of rugby songs they often think of the lewd Crude relics of army and air force renderings. Oldham however has a tradition of real rugby songs some of which are included in this medley. All the items involve Oldham players, whether from the mother club or the now defunct St Mary's Amateur Rugby League Club, which perpetuated the traditions of St Mary's school.

Other teams featured are Swinton ('The Boys in Blue'), Huddersfield, Broughton Rangers, Rochdale Hornets and 'The Mossley Lads' of 1884, when rugby football was more important in Oldham than politics. In the songs about Swinton and Huddersfield, the lads were assisted by George Clarke, an octogenarian and a friend of Larry.

McCarthy's Party

This is not the first time that McCarthy's Party has been recorded and folk might wonder why the Oldham Tinkers are singing an Irish song. There are many answers. One is the 'Irish Connection': the lads are second-generation Irish. Also, in the environment in which John, Gerry and Larry were reared, Irish songs and customs were far from uncommon. In addition, McCarthy's Party became the hallmark of St Mary's Amateur Rugby League Club. Whenever ex-players congregate socially, the gathered multitude is treated to McCarthy's Party, accompanied by enthusiastic actions and much elbow power on the backs of chairs. The surnames heard in this version of the song are those of lads who played for St Mary's in the '50s.

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