

Singing the Child Ballads

Rosaleen Gregory

Robert Rodriguez was kind enough to point out an *erratum* in the last issue; “Queen Eleanor’s Confession” was wrongly given the Child #115. The correct number is 156. Apologies to Robert and to anyone else who noticed this. Child #115 is actually “Robyn and Gandeleyne”, a Robin Hood ballad and a rather dubious one at that.

Here are this issue’s offerings.

Child #183, “Willie Mackintosh”

Also known as “Burning of Auchindoon” (or Auchindoon). A *cappella*, learned from the singing of Maddy Prior and June Tabor on their 1976 LP *Silly Sisters*. The burning of Auchindoon (which belonged to the Earl of Huntly) was an act of revenge for the murder of the Earl of Murray (cf. the ballad known as “The Bonny Earl of Murray”). These events took place in the sixteenth century.

On to Book 1V of the five volumes of English and Scottish Popular Ballads.

Child #200, “The Gypsy Laddie”

Stephen Sedley’s *The Seeds of Love* (1967, published by Essex Music Limited in association with the English Folk Dance and Song Society), has a particularly appealing version of this well-known ballad (I like the nutmeg and ginger bit). The text is collated from Child, the Sam Henry Collection, and Alfred Williams’ *Folksongs of the Upper Thames*. The tune is from *The Caledonian Museum*, collated with

Smith’s *Scottish Minstrel*, but I have modified it in a few places. In deference to one member of my family who objects strenuously to the (no doubt more realistic) tragic ending, I now leave out the last four lines, thus allowing the imagination to provide, if not a happy ending, at least the possibility of one (though not for the unlucky husband).

Child #209, “Geordie”

Another popular item, so much so that I’ve been unable to choose between two versions, so I do the first unaccompanied and the second with guitar. The first is from the same *Silly Sisters* LP as “The Burning of Auchindoon”, where it is sung by June Tabor. It is a livelier version than the gentle lament in the *Joan Baez Songbook* (Ryerson Music Publishers Inc., 1964), which has a quite different tune and a pleasant guitar accompaniment.

Child #214, “The Braes of Yarrow”

Unaccompanied. I first learned this fine tragic ballad as a university student in the sixties from the singing of American folksinger Carolyn Hester on her 1962 Columbia LP, *Carolyn Hester*. This later reappeared as a Columbia CD in 1977. Carolyn Hester calls the song “Yarrow”. After singing her version for many years I decided to alter things a bit, so now I keep the tune she uses but sing the text provided under the title “The Dowie Houms of Yarrow” (a “houm” is a water meadow) in Arthur Quiller-Couch’s *The Oxford Book of Ballads*. It has an interesting final verse.

Willie Mackintosh (The Burning of Auchindoon)

As I came in by Fiddich side
On a May morning
I spied Willie Mackintosh
An hour before the dawning

“Turn again, turn again
Turn again I bid ye,
If ye burn Auchindoon
Huntly he will head ye”.

“Head me or hang me,
That will never fear me;
I will burn Auchindoon

Ere the life leaves me”.

As I came in by Fiddich side
On a May morning
Auchindoon was in a blaze
An hour before the dawning

Crawing, crawling
For all your crows crawling
You’ve burnt your crops
And tint your wings
An hour before the dawning.

Willie Mackintosh (Burning of Auchindoon)



LISTEN

www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue41_4/Burning_of_Auchindoon.mp3

Traditional

Voice

As I came in by Fidd-ich-side on a May morn-ing.

I spied Wil-lie Mac-in-tosh an hour be-fore the dawn-ing "Tum a-gain, tum a-gain,

tum - a-gain I bid ye. If ye bum Auch-in - doon.. Hunt-ly he will head ye."

Gypsy Laddie



LISTEN

www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue41_4/Gypsy_Laddie.mp3

Traditional

Voice

There were sev-en gyp - sies all in a gang, And

they were brisk and bon - ny, They rode till they came to

th'Earl of Cas-sil's gates, And there they sang so sweet - ly. The Earl of Cas - sil's

la - dy came down And all her maids be - fore her As soon as her fair

face they saw, They cast the glam - er o'er her.

There were seven gypsies all in a gang
 And they were brisk and bonny
 They rode till they came to th'Earl of Cassil's gates
 And there they sang so sweetly.

The Earl of Cassil's lady came down
 With all her maids before her
 As soon as her fair face they saw
 They cast the glamourie o'er her.

They gave to her the nutmeg brown
 And they gave to her the ginger
 She gave to them a far better thing
 The gold ring off her finger.

She's pulled off her high-heeled shoes
 All made of Spanish leather
 And she's put on her highland brogues
 To follow the gypsy laddie-o.

At night when my good lord came home
 And asking for his lady
 One she cried and the other she replied
 "She's gone with the gypsy laddie-o".

"Come saddle me my milk-white steed
 The black rides not so speedy

For I will neither eat nor sleep
 Till I have found my lady-o".

He rode all the summer's night
 And part of the next morning
 Until he spied his own wedded wife
 She was cold and wet and weary.

"Last night I lay in a well-made bed
 With my good lord beside me
 Tonight I will lie in the cold open fields
 Along with the gypsy laddie-o".


"Come home come home my own wedded wife
 It's get thee on behind me
 And I will swear by the handle of my sword
 That a gypsy never will come nigh thee".


"O I have lain on the grass so green
 And I have drunk of the heather
 And as I brew so will I drink
 And I'll follow my gypsy laddie-o".

There were seven gypsies all in a gang
 Black but they were bonny
 And they were hanged all in a row
 For stealing the Earl of Cassil's lady-o.


Geordie

Traditional

 www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue41_4/Geordie1.mp3

Voice 

There was a ba - tt-le in the north, And nob les there were many. And



they have killed Sir Char - lie Hay..... and laid the blame on Geor - die.

There was a battle in the north
 And nobles there were many
 And they have killed Sir Charlie Hay
 And laid the blame on Geordie.

O he has written a long letter
 And sent it to his lady;
 "You must come up to Edinburgh town
 To see what news of Geordie".

When first she looked the letter on
 She was both red and rosy
 She had not read a word but two
 When she grew pale as the lily.

"Go fetch to me my good grey steed
 My men shall all go with me
 For I shall neither eat nor drink
 Till Edinburgh town shall see me".

Then she has mounted her good grey steed
 Her men they all went with her
 And she did neither eat nor drink
 Till Edinburgh town did see her.

And first appeared the fatal block
 And then the axe to head him
 And Geordie coming down the stair
 With bands of iron upon him.

Though he was chained in fetters strong
 Of iron and steel so heavy
 O not a one in all the court
 Was so fine a man as Geordie.

O she's down on her bended knee
 I'm sure she's pale and weary
 "O pardon, pardon, noble king,
 And give me back my dearie".

"Go tell the heading man make haste",
 Our king replies full lordly
 "O noble king take all that's mine
 But give me back my Geordie".

The Gordons came and the Gordons ran
 And they were stark and steady
 And ay the word among them all
 Was "Gordons, keep you ready".

An aged lord at the king's right hand
 Says "Noble king, but hear me,
 Let her count out five thousand pounds
 And give her back her dearie".

Some gave her marks, some gave her crowns
 Some gave her dollars many
 She's counted out five thousand pounds
 And she's gotten again her dearie.

She glanced blithe in her Geordie's face
 Says "Dear I've bought thee, Geordie;
 But the blood would have flowed upon the green
 Before I lost my laddie".

He clasped her by the middle small
 And he kissed her lips so rosy
 "The fairest flower of womankind
 Is my sweet bonny lady".

Geordie

 **LISTEN** www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue41_4/Geordie2.mp3 Traditional

Voice



As I walked out _____ ov-er Lon - don bridge..., _____ One mist-y

morning ear - ly, _____ I ov-er heard a fair pret ty maid, _____ Was la-

ment-ing _____ for her Geor - die. _____

As I walked over London Bridge
 One misty morning early,
 I overheard a fair pretty maid
 Was lamenting for her Geordie.

"My Geordie will be hanged in a golden chain
 'Tis not the chain of many

He was born of king's royal blood
 And courted a virtuous lady.

"Go bridle me my milk-white steed
 Go bridle me my pony,
 For I will ride to London's court
 To plead for the life of Geordie.

“Ah, my Geordie never stole nor cow nor calf,
 He never hurted any,
 He stole sixteen of the king’s royal deer,
 And he sold them in Bohenny.”

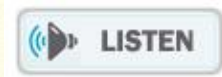
The judge looked over his left shoulder,
 He said “Fair maid, I’m sorry”;
 He said “Fair maid, you must be gone,
 For I cannot pardon Geordie.”

“Two pretty babies have I born,
 The third lies in my body,
 I’d freely part with them every one
 If you’d spare the life of Geordie.”

“Ah my Geordie will be hanged in a golden chain,
 ‘Tis not the chain of many,
 Stole sixteen of the king’s royal deer
 And he sold them in Bohenny.”

The Braes of Yarrow

Traditional



www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue41_4/Braes_of_Yarrow.mp3

Voice

Late at e'en, drink in the wine, And ere they paid the
 law in, They set a combat them between, To fight it in the dawn in.

Late at e'en, drinkin' the wine,
 And ere they paid the lawin',
 They set a combat them between,
 To fight it in the dawnin'.

“O are ye come to drink the wine,
 As ye hae doon before, O?
 Or are ye come to wield the brand,
 On the dowie houms o' Yarrow?”

“O stay at hame, my noble lord!
 O stay at hame, my marrow!
 My cruel brother will you betray,
 On the dowie houms o' Yarrow”.

“I am no come to drink the wine,
 As I hae done before, O,
 But I am come to wield the brand,
 On the dowie houms o' Yarrow”.

“O fare thee weel, my lady gay!
 O fare thee weel, my Sarah!
 For I maun gae, tho' I ne'er return
 Frae the dowie houms o' Yarrow”.

Four he hurt and five he slew,
 On the dowie houms o' Yarrow,
 Till that stubborn knight came him behind,
 And ran his body thorow.

She's kissed his cheek, she's kamed his hair,
 As she has done before, O;
 She's belted on his noble brand,
 An' he's awa' to Yarrow.

“Gae hame, gae hame, good brother John,
 An' tell your sister Sarah
 To come an' lift her noble lord,
 Who's sleepin' sound on Yarrow”.

O he's gone up yon high, high hill –
 I wat he gaed wi' sorrow –
 An' in a den spied nine armed men,
 On the dowie houms o' Yarrow.

“Yestreen I dreamed a doleful dream;
 I ken'd there wad be sorrow;
 I dreamed I was pullin' the heather green,
 On the dowie banks o' Yarrow”.

She gaed up yon high, high hill –
I wat she gaed wi' sorrow –
An' in a den spied nine dead men,
On the dowie houms o' Yarrow.

She's kissed his cheek, she's kamed his hair,
As oft she did before, O;
She's drunk the red blood frae him ran,
On the dowie houms o' Yarrow.

“O haud your tongue, my dochter dear,
For what needs a' this sorrow?”

I'll wed you on a better lord
Than him you lost on Yarrow”.

“O haud your tongue, my father dear,
An' dinna grieve your Sarah;
A better lord was never born
Than him I lost on Yarrow.

“Tak hame your ousen, tak hame your kye,
For they hae bred this sorrow;
I wish that they had a' gane mad
Whan they came first to Yarrow”.

Treasures from Our Archives

Fifteen Years Ago

Bulletin 26.4 (Winter 1992). The radio column had a name (Over the Waves), but the magazine column was still seeking one, and the magazine was still photocopied and corner-stapled. Bill Gallaher's song “Three Dollar Dreams” and reviews of Len Wallace's recording *Wings of Change* and Ed Whitcomb's book *Canadian Fiddle Music* accompanied the feature article, George Lyon's profile of fiddler Roy Logan.

Ten Years Ago

Bulletin 31.3/4 (September/December 1997). This fat issue featured several interviews as well as articles. Interviewees were Richard Johnson (composer/arranger, transcriber of Edith Fowke's songs for her books, interviewed by Phil Thomas), Gord Menzies (co-ordinator of Winnipeg's Irish Fest, by Pauline Greenhill) and Grit Laskin (luthier, singer/songwriter, performer, record company honcho, by George Lyon and John Leeder). Other articles included “Mr. Flash and Miss Click” by Anne Lederman and “Tune-Recall Among Traditional Fiddlers on Prince Edward Island” by Ken Perlman. Fiddle tune “The Brae Reel” accompanied Ken's

article, while Grit's songs “My Turn” and “Guitar Maker” complemented his interview. Blues song “She Makes Her Own Way” by Ken Whiteley was there as well. The magazine column now had a name, “The Centrefold”, and the issue included the Folk Festival Directory and lots of reviews.

Five Years Ago

Bulletin 36.4 (Winter 2002). This issue was devoted entirely to the late Alan Lomax, and included articles “Alan Lomax, Citizen Activist” (by Ronald D. Cohen), “Spain: Lomax Remembered” (by Judith Cohen and Rosaleen Gregory), and “Alan Lomax: A Life in Folk Music”, “Lomax on Canadian Folk Music”, “Sampling *The Alan Lomax Collection*” and “Some Other Field Recordings by Alan Lomax” (all by David Gregory).

These issues (and all back issues, either in original form or as photocopies) are available from CSTM Back Issues, 224 20th Ave. NW, Calgary, Alta. T2M 1C2. For pricing, see the Mail Order Service catalogue or website (www.yorku.ca/cstm and follow the links), or contact john.leeder@nucleus.com. Cumulative Tables of Contents of all issues since 1982 are available on the website as well. [JL]