

Maggy Murphy was born in Tempo, Co. Fermanagh, Northern Ireland and has lived in and around that area all her life. Her singing was first recorded in 1952 by Peter Kennedy at the house of Mr Bob Woods at Bellyreragh where she was working in service. Peter Kennedy was taken to record her by the Irish folk-song collector Sean O'Boyle. As Maggy says, "Sean was married to the daughter of Mrs Woods and he had heard that I sang while I was milking the cows and coming away from work."

Maggy spent her working life in service so it's maybe not surprising that she has several songs which feature serving maids /boys. Maggy says of her days in service, "That time you were hired at a hiring fair. Tempo fair wasn't a hiring fair - Trillick was a hiring fair and Enniskillen was a hiring fair. It was 10th of May and 10th of November, every six months and you worked then for six months in a place and if you left before the six months then they kept your wages. So you had to stay there whether you were starved or not. There was some bad places! But there was only one I didn't get treated right. All the time that I saw sausage or bacon was on a Friday and me being a Catholic I wouldn't eat it, and that was that, so the lady gave me salt and water for dinner and that's the truth. I wasn't able to stay for six months or I would have died of hunger so I left in five months and they kept my wages. I got no wages for all that work I did. It's terrible what we suffered, we were poor and my mother wanted us to quit school and go out to work. No matter if it took the skin off you, you still had to work. I left school 17 months before I was 14."

Maggy left work at Bob Woods' to get married and was married for thirty years until her husband died in 1981. She remembers: "He (her husband) was a good melodeon and spoons player. My maiden name was Chambers and Sarah was my niece. She would have been just 16 or 17 when she sang the chorus of 'Linkin' o'er the Lea' with me. My father was a good singer surely, but he wasn't as good a singer as my mother and you could never learn a song from him, but I learned the whole songs from my mother singing them, and that was at home. She'd sing them, then I'd sing along with her. then if I'd get them wrong she'd write them down for me. She got her songs from her mother but I never knew my Grannie. Now all the Chambers they could sing but only my brother Ed had songs like 'Clock striking nine'. They called him Ned. He's been dead 27 years now and he was also a terrible (good) dancer. Honest to God if he was dancing you'd swear it was drum sticks. That was dancing the old-time reels and things like that, Then my uncles on the Chambers side; one also called Ned, he was in the army and he used to go to country houses and he used to sing and lilt for people to dance to, and my Uncle Paddy he was also a terrible (good) dancer and he played the mouthorgan. I used to be great at picking up songs from other people singing them but I never sang in pubs and after I got married I only sang occasionally in country houses."

Maggy Murphy is 72 years old this October and has recently found a new audience for her songs and not only in her own locality, for she has also been invited to several singing weekends including Inishowen, Derrygonnelly and Forkhill and she has appeared on 'The Pure Drop' on RTE television. I am sure these recordings will make her even more in demand!

John Howson 1996

Linkin' o'er the Lea (The auld beggarman) Child 279

This was the original 1952 recording which was accredited to sisters Maggy and Sarah Chambers although Sarah was actually Maggy's niece. It was released on the Caedmon series 'Folk Songs in Britain and Ireland' (later to be released as Topic 12T161). It was a popular song amongst travelling people and Jeannie Robertson sang 'The Jolly Beggar' on the same album. Ewan MacColl (in 'Traveller's Songs in England and Scotland') also identifies a Scots variant called 'The Farmer and the Tinker'. In Northern Ireland Len Graham has a version he learned from Joe Holmes, Co. Antrim, and John Campbell, Co. Armagh has one he learned from a neighbour. A version which is very similar to Maggy's is found in the Madden collection (Vol 25 no.292) at Cambridge where it is described as 'a fashionable love song'. Maggy got this song from a neighbour, Mrs Johnson.

Banks of the silvery tide Laws 037, Henry 77

This is another of the fruits of Sean O'Boyle and Peter Kennedy's recording session with Maggie in '52, but this track has never before been released apart from on a BBC acetate (no. 18490). Kennedy also recorded a version from Ethel and John Findlater in Orkney and Tom Munnely has found it in Co. Wexford. In Sam Henry's 'Songs of the People' it is said that 'The silvery tide bears the mark of the genuine old ballad type, in which the sailor's name is Henry, and the romance hangs round on identifying ring'. His version came from Lizzie MacMullan of Rathlin Island, Co. Antrim in 1925. Maggy's tune is not the normal one and is in fact the air to 'Skibbereen'. She learned it from her mother.

Killyburn Brae Child 278

Keith Summers recorded Maggy singing this song in 1979 when he was working in Co. Fermanagh, and it is well that he did as Maggy rarely sings it nowadays. This is a classic story, often called 'The Farmer's Curst Wife', described in Francis Child's 'The English and Scottish Popular Ballads' as: 'The devil comes for a farmer's wife and is made welcome to her by the husband. The woman proves to be no more controllable in hell than she had been at home; she kicks the imps about and even brains a set of them. For safety's sake, the devil is constrained to take her back to her husband'. Robert Burns composed the ballad of 'Kellyburnbraes' from the older ballad version. It turns up all over Ireland: Eddie Butcher of Magilligan had a version and Seamus Ennis sang it. Hugh Shields recorded it in Antrim and Derry and a version sung by Mrs Margaret Dunne of Bellanagh Co, Cavan can be heard on the cassette 'Early Ballads in Ireland 1968-1985' (European Ethnic). The version Maggie sings is not unlike that which was issued on 78 in the 1930s by Richard Heyward.

Seven years did I have a sweetheart Laws N42, Henry 471

The broken token ballad, where the sailor and his sweetheart break a token (often a ring) in two so that they will recognize each other after the passage of time, is a classic element of a traditional singer's repertoire and Maggy has one of the best versions you are likely to hear. The song is widespread all over Ireland (Tom Munnely has recorded it in Mayo, Wexford, Cavan, Galway, Kerry, Limerick and Cork) while noteworthy Ulster recordings which have been made commercially available are from Sarah-Anne O'Neill, Derrytresk, Co. Tyrone (Topic 12TS372) Sarah Makem, Keady, Co. Armagh (Topic 12T182) John Quinn, Mullaghbawn, Co. Armagh (Outlet 0AS3018) and Jimmy Houghton, Inishowen, Co. Donegal (Inishowen Singers' Circle itsc001) This is another of Maggy's mother's songs.

Stock or Wall (Captain Emmerson) Child 46, Henry 681

Maggy enjoys singing this song and thinks she got it from her father. As she finishes singing it she often exclaims, "That's a wee funny one!" Her tune is not the usual one which is similar to 'Tramps and Hawkers' but is the air to 'Maid of the sweet brown know'. It is often called 'Captain Wedderburn's Courtship' and its origins are probably Scottish although it is also found widely throughout England and Ireland. A version was printed in 'The New British Songster, a Collection of Songs, Scots and English, with Toasts and Sentiments for the Bottle', Falkirk, 1785. In Ulster it has often been recorded and those worth hearing are: Alec Foster, Belfast (Leader 4055) Frank Donnelly, Pomeroy, Co. Tyrone (now Green Linnet SIF1005) Rose McCartin, Annalong, Co. Down, (European Ethnic) and Hughie McAlindon, Rathfriland, Co. Down.

Early, Early all in the Spring Laws K12

This song is widely distributed throughout Ireland and Britain and also turns up in America and Australia. In England it is said to date back to the time of George III and the wars with France. Versions of it can be found in just about every folk-song collection in the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library in London, under many different names including: 'The Sailor Boy', 'The Sailing Trade', 'The Sailor Boy and his Faithful Mary', 'The Faithful Lovers' and 'Sweet William'. There are many Irish printed versions including ones published in the

'Journal of the Irish Folk Song Society' (Vol. 17) and 'Irish Country Songs' (Vol. 4). Tom Munnely has recorded the song in Mayo, Waterford, Cavan, Kerry and Cork and noteworthy commercially produced recordings of Ulster singers include; John Quinn, Mullaghbawn, Co. Armagh (Outlet OAS3018) Hugh Quinn (no relation), Belfast (Folktracks FSA60-166) and Lai Smith (traveller) (Topic 12T194 and Folktracks FSA60-166). Maggy learned this song from her mother.

Crockery Ware

Maggy got this song from her father and it seems to be rare in Ireland although it has turned up a couple of times in Ulster: Eddie Butcher had the song and Hugh Shields mentions it in 'Shamrock, Rose and Thistle'. Len Graham sings a version on Claddagh CC41 which is a compilation of Eddie's version and that of O.J. Abbott, Ontario, Canada (Folkways FM4051). Maggy's tune is not the common one, which is usually the air to 'Rose in full bearing', In England the song was published as a broadside and is for more prevalent: Mike Yates recorded it in 1976 from Fred Cottingham, Kent (Veteran Tapes VT108) and George B Gardiner noted it down twice in 1906 from Isaac and Chas. Hobbes in Hampshire.

Banks of the Sweet Dundee Laws M25

Maggie sings this song to the air of 'Glen Swilly'. With innocence finally winning out against evil, even if it is with the shedding of some blood, it's hardly surprising that this song was a great favourite with 19th century singers and audiences. Under the title of 'Undaunted Mary' it flooded onto the market from most of the major printing houses including, Catnach, Fortey and Such of London, Ross and Walker of Newcastle upon Tyne, Bebbington of Manchester and Nicholson of Belfast. This widespread distribution of the printed text accounts for the song's firm foothold in the tradition, and why it has lingered on in good shape well into this century. However it is a song which seems to appear in relatively few collections in Ireland. Jimmy McBride recorded it from Jimmy Houghton, Inishowen, Co. Donegal (The Flower of Dunaff Hill 1988) and it would seem that the only Ulster recording which has been made commercially available is of Paddy Gamble, Ballymoney, Co. Antrim (Outlet OAS3011). This is another of Maggy's mother's songs.

Paddy and the ass

This was another song Maggy got from her neighbour Mrs Johnson and it's widespread all over Ireland. It's a popular theme whether it be a visitor to London from rural England or Ireland. Here Paddy turns the tables on the Cockney who tries to make him appear to be a fool. Paddy ends up in court but the judge is so taken with his answers that he sets him free. Tom Munnely recorded a fine version from Tom Lenihan, Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare (Topic 12TS363 and Comhairle Bhealoideas Eireann CBEO03) and the song turns up in Henry Glassie's 'Passing the Time: Folklore and History of an Ulster Community' and in Sam Henry's papers where the song 'Paddy Malloy' come from Dick Gilloway, Magilligan, Co. Derry. The song is thought to have possibly originated in the Irish communities of America.

My father's servant boy Laws M11, Henry 198

Scots traveller John MacDonald was recorded singing this song by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger and in their book 'Travellers' songs from England and Scotland' they say that they were unsuccessful in locating printed texts in any English or Scottish traditional collections. Although it was published by Catnach as a broadside, it does seem to be a song which is peculiar to Ireland and in fact is localised to between Dungannon and Aghnacloy, Co. Tyrone and they are only about 11 miles apart. Sam Henry notes that the song has been printed as a broadside and sold at our markets and fairs." It is often called 'Answer to the Philadelphia Lass' and Henry got it from J. MacKinnon, Craignagat, Ballycastle, in 1927. Notable commercially produced recordings are: Roisin White, Attical, Co. Down (Veteran VT126) Willie McElroy, Brookeborough, Co. Fermanagh (Outlet QAS3001) and John Quinn, Mullaghbawn, Co. Armagh (Outlet OAS3018). Maggy again got this from her mother.

Caroline and the young sailor bold Laws N17

This was a popular song amongst early 19th century broadside printers and according to a sheet by W. Taylor of London it was written by J. Morgan. He was a ballad writer employed by Catnach, although it was never published by them. This was another of the songs Maggy learned from her mother. Many classic English singers have this song in their repertoire: Walter Pardon, Knapton, Norfolk (Home Made Music LP301) and Gordon Hall, Horsham, Sussex (Veteran Tapes VT115) are both worth a listen. In Ireland Tom Munnely has recorded the song in Waterford, Cork and Mayo and it appears in the ballad portfolios of the National Library

of Ireland, Dublin, as 'Caroline', The most noteworthy Ulster recording to have been commercially produced is that of Sarah Makem, Keady, Co. Armagh (Topic 12T182).

The clock striking nine

Maggie got this song from her brother Ned and it is probable that the chorus come from another song. This is a widely found song although not in this form and it is often known as 'The false bride' or 'The lambs on the green hills'. Under the title 'The Forlorn Lover' it was first printed in broadside form during the reign of James II (1685-8) by John White of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The first line of this text starts: 'The week before Easter' and under this title the song has entered many traditional singers' repertoires. In England Jim Copper, Sussex and Harry Cox, Norfolk had versions of the song as did Lucy Stewart and Jeannie Robertson, both Aberdeenshire in Scotland. Notable Irish recordings include John Lyons, Co. Cork (Topic 12TS248), Mick Flynn, Co. Clare (Topic 12TS369) and Sarah Makem, Co. Armagh (Topic 1 2T1 82) where it is titled 'I courted a wee girl'.

Edward in the lowlands low Laws M34, Henry 113

This ballad appears in most major folk song collections although it does not often turn up within the tradition nowadays. It seems to have been a great favourite though, as versions were printed on ballad sheets by many printers in England, Scotland and Ireland and several versions have been collected in America. The hero is variously given as Young Edwin, Young Edward and Young Edmund, as in Maggy's version which was learned from her mother. In Ulster it has turned up several times: Hugh Shields has noted it in Derry and Robin Morton published a version collected from Hugh Lee, Co. Fermanagh in 'Folk Songs sung in Ulster'. The most notable recording which has been made commercially available is of Geordie Hanna, (Topic 12T372).

There was a wealthy woman Henry 203

Maggie got this unusual song from a neighbour called Jimmy Slevin. It is related to various songs about female sailors and broken tokens and it is often called 'The sailor at sea', 'The ship that I command' or 'In London so fair'. Under that name there is an excellent version sung by Mary Ann Carolan, Drogheda, Co. Louth (Topic 12T362) and Sam Henry notes a complete version from a John Thompson of Portstewart. Surprisingly Peter Kennedy also recorded a version from Ethel and John Findlater in the Orkneys (Folktracks FSA90.063).

Molly Bawn Laws 036, Henry 114

This classic ballad with supernatural overtones came from Maggy's mother and the tune is not the usual tune but is similar to 'The Banks of the Bann'. In England it is often known as 'Polly Vaughan' and all the major early collectors found versions, and it has also regularly turned up in America, Canada and Australia. A version under the title 'The shooting of his dear' was collected by Cecil Sharp in Kent and he was of the opinion that the song was of Celtic origins because of the introduction of a ghost. The events in Molly Bawn (sometimes called Molly Bawn Lowry) are located by Hugh Shields in 'Some Songs and Ballads in use in the Province of Ulster 1845' (Ulster Folklife) in Kilwarlin Co. Down, There is a wealth of recordings of Ulster singers available commercially including: John Maguire, Rosslea, Co. Fermanagh (Leader 1EE4062) Packie Manus Byrne, Ardara, Co. Donegal (Topic 12TS257) John Corry, Castlederg, Co. Tyrone (Folktracks FSA 90.178).

Boys and girls courting down the roadside Henry 518

This is another of Maggy's mother's songs which doesn't seem to turn up very often. Sam Henry has a version called 'Londonderry love song' but without a source. He tells us that the ship which is named in the song 'The Zared' was a Londonderry ship owned by Bartholomew M'Corkell, which sailed in the winter of 1861 with 500 Passengers. She was wrecked in January 1862 off the west Coast of Ireland on her return voyage. There seems to be no other contemporary recording of this song.

REFERENCES.

The numbers given with the titles of some of the songs are from the following collections:

Child - F J Child: 'The English and Scottish Popular Ballads'

Laws - J Malcolm Laws Junior: 'American Balladry from British Broadsheets'

Henry - Sam Henry: 'Songs of the People'