



The Crown and Thistle, Rockcliffe

## PASS THE JUG ROUND

In the late 1940s and early 1950s two Carlisle friends, Robert Forrester and Norman Alford, spent many happy hours biking around the north Cumbrian countryside sketching, fishing and doing a little drinking in the nearest pub in the evenings. At these pubs they met and made friends with "some grand old lads", eventually encouraging the men to sing some of the old songs they knew. How this came about can perhaps best be described in the words of Robert Forrester himself:



Inside the  
Crown and Thistle

"Norman was the driving force behind this venture, and I myself happened to have fallen heir to some songs and tunes from my father, and his father before that. In those days, flagstone floors, oil lamps and oak settles were still very much in evidence in the pubs. Countless gallons of beer swilled down everyone's throats during these song-collecting expeditions, though it was a bit of a struggle at first to get the old singers going. However, Norman with his tin whistle and myself with the mouth-organ invariably set their feet tapping and opened the way to some fine singing usually with the preliminary of 'Thoo young lads disn't want to hear sek oald fashinned stuff as this ...'

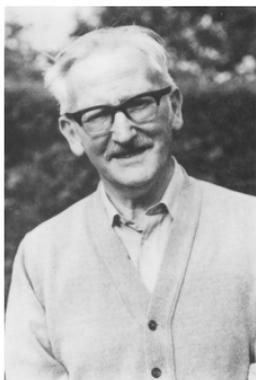
"Tom Gray, late librarian at Tullie House Library and Museum in Carlisle, somehow got to hear of our song-collecting and contacted the BBC in Newcastle, which resulted in my broadcasting some of these songs and tunes on regional radio. Norman, in the meantime, after a long illness, died - and his death shattered my ambitions for any further research." Fortunately for us, the year before Norman Alford's untimely death Mr Gray had enlisted the help of Jack Little, a local sound recording enthusiast, in order to record this music for posterity. These recordings, directly cut on to acetate, were then lodged in the county archives for safe keeping and largely forgotten.

Robert Forrester again: "In the days when we collected, the public's mind was so brain-washed to saccharin confections, that the rich folklore of our grandfathers was being swamped and drained back to the earth from which it came. However, Norman Alford and I did manage to catch the final echoes of some fine old songs and tunes, and before final obscurity they deserve to be known to a far larger audience."

Few people were aware of the existence of these recordings, and those involved in the making of them had either died since 1954 or had simply forgotten all about them. Many years later, in 1975, when I was looking for local song collections in Carlisle the recordings came to light in the County Record Office in Carlisle Castle. Now this music, originally recorded directly on to 78rpm acetates by Jack Little, will, as Robert Forrester hoped, reach and be appreciated by a far wider audience than the singers could ever have dreamed of.

## The Men .....

### Robert Forrester



Born in 1913 near Carlisle, Bob lived in the city and worked as a commercial artist for the Metal Box Company. He painted and sketched all his life, exhibiting in London as well as in Cumbria. His best known works locally are his two large, dramatic mountain murals, one showing 'Ancient Britons' at Castlerigg stone circle and the other a railway scene at Carlisle's Citadel Station, which are both exhibited prominently at Tullie House Museum in Carlisle. His songs and tunes (he plays the *Cumberland Waltz* and sings *Copshawholme Fair* and *Corby Castle* on these recordings) came to him from his grandfather Joe, a well-known fiddler in the Bewcastle area at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Joe apparently enlivened the proceedings at many a wedding, christening and kern supper in that remote part of Cumberland. Robert Forrester died in 1988.

### Norman Alford

Born at Low Heskett, south of Carlisle, Norman and Robert Forrester were friends from boyhood and were apprentices together in an art studio in Carlisle before going to the local art school to study painting. Norman joined the army as an artillery officer during the Second World War and was wounded in Normandy. After the war he and Robert Forrester got together again, biking around the countryside, fishing, drawing and painting, and hunting out singers and songs in the many pubs they fetched up in. Gauging the right moment to take up their instruments, playing quietly at first, until the old men chose to join in: according to Forrester "Norman had a nose like a bloodhound. He would whisper to me "I think we'll be reet tonight." In these recordings he plays the tin whistle on a number of tracks. Tragically, Norman died of leukaemia in 1954 aged only 39.



Norman Alford & Tommy Davidson

**Mickey Moscrop**, who sings the hunting songs *Pass the Jug Round* and *John Peel*, was born in the Bewcastle area and was well-known as a singer around the pubs and village halls of north Cumbria.

**Tom "Copper" Brodie**, born at Cargo, near Carlisle, in 1906, sings *The Birds Upon the Trees*. He was a fisherman and later a water bailiff on the rivers around Carlisle, until his retirement in the late 1960s. He learned the song he sings here from one Jack Hind of Rockliffe, another great fisherman.



Tommy 'Copper' Brodie



Mickey Moscrop

**Joe Thompson** was born at Calthwaite, not far from Carlisle, and followed foxhounds all his life. He here sings three hunting songs: *The Horn of the Hunter*, *The Welton Hunt* and *Joe Bowman*. According to his grand-daughter his singing of hunting songs at home thoroughly irritated his wife, but when he used them as lullabies for his baby daughter they worked a treat!

**Jim Nixon** sings *The Keach in the Creel*, a song he says he learned from his grandfather. He was a farmer at Peastree Farm in the valley of the River Caldew, which runs from the Caldbeck fells to Carlisle, where it joins the River Eden. Jim was born at Linstock, just north of Carlisle, in 1902.

**Harvey Nicholson** of Wreay, who sings *The Copshawholme Butcher*, was born at Sebergham in 1892 and after spending his early life being hired out on farms, later became a plate-layer on the railway. Harvey was killed in an accident on the railway shortly after these recordings were made.

**Wat Graham** was a native of Longtown in the north of Cumberland, almost on the Scottish border. The border country is full of Grahams, and Watty here tells about the clan and plays the *Cumberland Reel* on his melodeon.

**Len Irving**, who sings *The Lish Young Buy-a-Broom*, was born at Wreay in 1889, and was station master there for 12 years.

**Jim Matthews**, born in 1878 at Chalkfoot near Dalston, was a retired rural overhead linesman with the GPO. He here sings the nonsense song *My Uncle Pete*.



Norman Alford (with tin whistle), Tommy Brodie (in top hat) and friends in fancy dress at Rockliffe

# The Songs & tunes .....

## **Pass the Jug Round**

Also known as *The Ullswater Pack*, this is a song of the Ullswater Foxhounds, one of the six fell packs which hunt the fells of the Lake District on foot, not mounted. Each of the fell packs, and the two mounted packs of Cumbria, have their own songs. These songs continue to be written and sung at hunt meets and suppers today. *Pass the Jug Round* is typical of the genre in that it relates the story of one particular day's hunting, naming most of the places and many of the hounds. This song was written by W. H. Marshall, a former Master of the Ullswater Foxhounds. 'Old Joe' mentioned in the fourth verse is Ullswater's most famous huntsman, Joe Bowman.

## **The Birds Upon the Trees**

This song sounds very much like something from the Victorian music hall. Tom Brodie apparently learned the song from a man who died in 1947, aged 90, so that would certainly put it in the right period. The sentiments are typically Victorian: the free spirited birds on the trees contrasted with those trapped in cages - a metaphor for the human condition?

## **The Horn of the Hunter**

Also known as *John Peel's Echo*, this song is a lament for the death of the huntsman John Peel. It was written by Jackson Gillbanks of Whitefield (Overwater) and is as widely sung in Cumbria as *D'ye Ken John Peel*. The tune is often used for other hunting songs, or even played as a waltz at Hunt Balls.

## **The Cumberland Waltz**

Robert Forrester, who plays this tune on mouth-organ, accompanied by Norman Alford on tin whistle, says that he learned the tune from his grandfather, and that to his knowledge it has never been published and may be unique to Cumberland. However, some years ago I heard an ostensibly American tune played in a TV Western which was a version of this waltz, so it may indeed have been published.

## **Copshawholme Fair**

This story of a country hiring fair is set in Copshawholme, now called Newcastleton, just over the Scottish border in Liddesdale. The tune is *The Wild Hills of Wannie*, a border tune well-known from the playing of Northumbrian piper Billy Pigg. Hiring fairs were held twice yearly at Whitsuntide and Martinmas, and were in effect a rural labour exchange as well as being great social occasions. Those servants and farm hands wishing to be hired for a half year term would line the streets of the town, and wait for the 'maister' to come along and engage them. After the negotiations were completed, the hired man or woman was given a shilling 'earnest money' to seal the bargain. This shilling would then very often be spent at the many stalls and booths of the fair, or on street entertainment, dancing and drinking. The young girl in the song is hired for £5 for the half year, which suggests that this hiring took place in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as by 1900 the wage for women was £13 to £18. Hiring fairs largely died out after the First World War, although a few in Cumbria continued into the 1940s.

## **The Welton Hunt**

Another typical hunting song, being mainly a list of places covered during a day's hunting. The Cumberland Farmers' Foxhounds, one of the two mounted packs in the county, have their hunt kennels at Welton. Around 1980, neither the whipper-in nor one of the joint masters, both notable singers, knew of the song, despite it seeming to refer to the Cumberland Farmers' Hunt. However, it came to light after a search through old hunt records from many years ago, and is now sung again after a meet. The tune is one used for a number of other Cumbrian hunting songs.

## **The Keach in the Creel**

This song is a version of ballad No. 281 in Professor Francis Child's *English and Scottish Ballads*. In the collection, Child notes that the ballad was printed first in 1845 by 'a Northumbrian gentleman' and after that was published in a number of other Northumbrian and Scottish collections. However, a reference in a letter to Walter Scott in 1824 indicates that the song was well-known before the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed the theme of the song is very much older, and known throughout Europe. The tune is a variant of one given by Child for the ballad. A 'keach' is an upset or shaking-up; a 'creel' is a basket, and the 'blue' mentioned in the last verse is a coverlet.

## **The Copshawholme Butcher**

This is a 19<sup>th</sup> century broadside ballad found in various parts of the country, and known variously as *The Brisk Young Butcher*, *The Exeter Butcher* and *The Christmas Goose*. The place names and some details vary in these versions, but the basic story remains the same. Harvey Nicholson, who sings this song, says he learned it on his travels. Copshawholme, now Newcastleton, was once a railway centre and it is quite possible that Harvey, a railway plate-layer, worked there for a period. This is the one recording which was not lodged at the county archives, as it had been considered 'too earthy' for that! Fortunately Jack Little, who recorded the song, kept the recording himself, otherwise it might have been lost for ever.

## **Joe Bowman**

Another song from the Ullswater Foxhounds. Joe Bowman was as renowned a huntsman in his native Cumberland as the famous John Peel. Indeed there are those who would say he was the better hunter, and certainly Peel's equal in the breeding of hounds. 'Auld

Hunty' as he was known, was born in 1850 and became huntsman of the Ullswater Foxhounds in 1879. During his 41 years in that job he killed over 2,000 foxes. He died in 1940. This song is still very popular at hunt suppers in the county, when everyone joins in the chorus and provides sound effects for the 'crack' of the whip and sound of the horn.

### **Story in Longtown dialect /The Cumberland Reel**

The dialect from the northern most corner of Cumberland, in which sits Longtown, is quite unique in the county. It is a kind of sing-song cross between Cumbrian, Northumbrian and Border Scots. A mid 19th century manuscript fiddler's tune book from Carlisle has a tune by the name *Cumberland Reel* but, suprisingly, it is completely different from the one played here. Wat Graham's version is a very well known country dance tune and appears in a number of printed collections and is usually called *King of the Cannibal Isles*.

### **Lish Young Buy-a-Broom**

Len Irving, who sings the song, says that it was supposed to have been written by the Cumberland poacher William Graham. This gentleman achieved some fame, according to two local broadsheet songs, when he was accused of murdering a gamekeeper. At his trial in Carlisle the charge was reduced to manslaughter and he was convicted and transported. A native of Ainstable in the Eden Valley, Graham can certainly not be proved to have written this, or any other song, but on the other hand it can't be proved that he didn't! 'Lish' by the way, is Cumbrian dialect for lithe or sprightly. The song was apparently also collected by Geoff Woods of Leeds from some singers around the Keswick area.

### **My Uncle Pete**

This nonsense song could be another stemming from the music hall tradition. The tune is very similar to the comic song, *Dick the Dasher*, sung by the County Antrim singer, the late Joe Holmes.

### **Corby Castle**

Robert Forrester, who sings the song, also calls it *Wetheral Green* and says he learned it from his father. Corby and Wetheral are villages just a few miles east of Carlisle. The song has a 'literary' air to it: it could have been written perhaps by one of the prolific writers of local ballads in the nineteenth century. Such writers such as Susannah Blamire of Thackwood or Miss Gilpin of Scaleby Castle and Peter Rigby, who wrote many sentimental songs set in the villages around Carlisle, including Corby in the 1850s. Many of these songs were published as broadsheets by a Brampton printer, and are now in a collection in the local history library in Carlisle. The origin of the lovely air to which the ballad is set is unknown.

### **John Peel**

Arguably Cumberland's most famous son, the statesman farmer and huntsman John Peel lived from 1776 to 1854 in the Caldbeck area. He would probably never have been remembered today if his friend John Woodcock Graves of Wigton had not in about 1832 written the song which was to spread his fame worldwide. The song was published by Carlisle writer and bookseller George Coward (under the pseudonym of Sidney Gilpin) in his 'Songs and Ballads of Cumberland' in 1866 in an anglicized form - the original had been in broad Cumbrian dialect. A few years later William Metcalf, organist at Carlisle Cathedral, heard the song being sung to its original air, the Border rant *Bonnie Annie*, and it took his fancy. He altered the tune somewhat and it was performed in public in 1869 in Carlisle and also at a Cumberland Benevolent Society dance in London, where Metcalf sold 100 copies of the song. From that time it just took off until it was sung, whistled and hummed everywhere. The tune changed again, becoming a somewhat simpler version of Metcalf's and in this form it was published in the 'National Song Book' in 1906. It is now regarded as the archetypal Cumbrian song, and is certainly still sung widely in the county, especially at hunt meets, as well as being adopted as the regimental marching tune of the Border Regiment.

### **Notes: Sue Allan**

The back entrance to the Plough Inn, Wreay.  
1st left  
Mickey Moscop and 3rd left  
Robert Forrester.

