

Maggy Murphy was born in Tempo, Co. Fermanagh, Northern Ireland and lived 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 (1995) 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 was 72 years old when these notes were written and she was finding 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, Derrygonelly and Forkhill and she has appeared on 'The Pure Drop' on RTE television. She died in 2006.

MAGGY MURPHY Linkin' o'er the Lea



traditional folk songs and ballads
from Tempo Co. Fermanagh

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