

My Colleen by the Shore

Bruce Scott was born in 1941 in Everton, Liverpool, an 'FBI' or foreign-born Irish: his maternal grandparents were Dublin Catholics and on his father's side the family were Derry Protestants. The oldest of six children, Bruce was lucky to survive the blitz in Liverpool, when at the age of two months, his home in Towson Street was bombed. His uncle, Jimmy Ferns, who eventually died from injuries received in the bomb blast, drew a cross of soot on the infant Bruce's forehead, and that and the whisky added to his bottle of milk by his mother, are reputed to have pulled the tiny baby through an horrific experience which led him to scream continuously for six months, and the doctors to rate his chances of survival as minimal. Bruce reckons fighting for more whisky is what kept him alive!



Bruce in 'Ye Old Cracker' pub, Rice Street - 1980

Bruce's early years were spent on the move as his father was in the British Royal Navy, and the family followed him around to Edinburgh, the Firth of Forth, Cleethorpes and Portsmouth, returning to Everton after the War. Towson Street had gone, but the adjacent streets were still standing, so the community was able to maintain some cohesion.

From that period, Bruce recalls hearing his mother's mother singing Irish ballads and Percy French songs and other family members singing too: "I suppose the first song I ever got was *Kevin Barry*. I must have been a bit political when I was a kid - that was off my mother, she always sang it. I would have been about twelve maybe. In those days people would have dos in their houses and I'd be listening in. They used to have what they called 'Jars Out' after the pub, because the pubs shut at ten then, so they'd bring some drink back from the pub and the kids stayed up. There was no records or anything like that, it was always singing."



Bruce holds forth in the Liverpool Irish Centre - 1995

Photographs:

Front cover,
Barry Halpin
John Howson

Back Cover
Dot Scott

All others
from the Scott
family photo
album

She Moved through the Fair Roud 861

Also known as *Our Wedding Day* this is a popular song in Ireland and Bruce says that he just picked it up over the years. Sam Henry has five versions in 'Songs of the People' and states that the text was reworked by Padraic Colum from an 'old ballad' to a Donegal air collected by Herbert Hughes in 1909.

Recordings of the song sung by traditional singers are few but do include 1950s BBC recordings of Frances McPeake in Belfast, Robert Cinnamond in Co. Antrim and Bridget Tunney in Co. Fermanagh. In recent years the singer who made the song her own was traveller Margaret Barry and her remarkable rendition can be heard on RCD1774 'I played through the fairs'. Since then, many versions of the song of varying length and each more beautiful than the other have surfaced on the traditional singing circuit.

Buck St John's Black Army Roud 9228

This song is related to the *The Kilkenny Louse-house* and Bruce says that the gas-light that is mentioned was the first to be installed in the centre of Carrick-on-Suir and this became a place for people to visit. *Carrick-on-Suir* was recorded by the BBC from Christy Purcell of Belfast in 1952 and *Burke's Engine* (the title was mis-heard by collectors) was recorded from Tommy & Gemma McGrath in Ross, Co. Waterford and can be heard on Topic TSCD557 'First I'm Going to Sing You a Ditty'. As *The Kilkenny Louse-house*, the song can be heard sung by Mary Delaney of Co. Tipperary on MTCD325-6 'From Puck to Appleby' and by The Dubliners on various compilation CDs. Bruce learned his version in Carrickbeg from Patrick Galvan in Galivans pub in the 1960s.

Other songs on the same theme, such as *Gut-'Em's Damnation Buck Fleas* or *The Black Rag of Hill of Hilltown* will be known to some Irish singers and we are sure that visitors to Rothesay in Scotland will have some trepidation about booking into lodgings there for a night as it is the setting for the most famous of all the flea-battle songs. (Roud 2142)

My Colleen by the Shore

One of Bruce's newly composed songs which gave him the title, for the first time, of All Ireland Champion in the category of newly composed ballads - English' (Amhráin Nua Cheaphtha Bearla) at the 2004 Feadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Clonmel, Co. Tipperary. The air he used is *Fainne Gael an Lae* or *The Dawning of the Day* which, at a brisker pace, is often used as a marching tune.

Bruce recalls the way people entertained themselves in the pubs, and the religious and political divides reminiscent of Belfast and Glasgow: "There were loads of pianos, in fact I'd say most pubs had a piano. They'd sing anything but there was a big Irish input and loads of Music Hall songs. Over Everton Brow coming down to the Liverpool football ground there was a pub called the Park Hotel, but it was known as Eave's because that was the landlord's name. When I was old enough to go to the pub I used to go in there and the parlour was really good, with people making their own entertainment. But in Liverpool it depended on what areas you were in as to what you'd sing. You wouldn't hear *Kevin Barry* sung in a pub in an Orange area, just like Belfast or Glasgow. But my father he'd try and wind people up - he'd say to my mother 'Go on, Kitty, give us *Kevin Barry!*' and she'd say 'No! I can't sing that here!' There really were set areas, there were lines, like coming in the north end from Shaw Street to Islington, all them streets there were all Catholic and I suppose Republican, and then you'd just go past Prince Edwin Street to Netherfield Road and that would be all Loyalist and Orange. And the voting went the same way. They were all deprived areas but Catholics voted Labour and the Loyalists voted to the right for the Protestant Party."

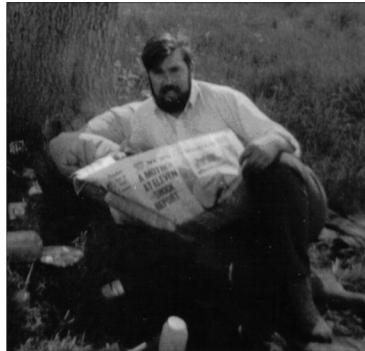
Another pub that Bruce was drawn to was the Criterion in Brunswick Road, where the landlord was a Kerryman from Killarney, Peter Scott by name. He and his sister Peggy ran a 'good Irish pub' - not an Irish theme pub but a place where singing was part of the 'craic' and the regular clientele of largely Irish emigrants was regularly swelled by navvies from the west coast of Ireland working in Liverpool on short-term contracts. Bruce comments: "There was a lot of ballads sung, not a lot of traditional music, but the ones coming from Ireland would bring in masses of new songs and they would be from every county in Ireland. I always gravitated towards them. I met a lot of singers, particularly Noel Scanlon who was always known as 'Singer Scanlon'. At that time he lived around West Derby Road, but he was a Kerryman and he had a great store of songs and could sing in Irish as well. He was from Cahirciveen which was an Irish speaking area. When I first heard him he was singing *The Rocks of Bawn*. I got a lot of songs from him like *The Deck of the Baltimore* and *Erin's Lovely Lee*. Then from time to time the Traveller families would come, like the Dorans and the Driscolls and the O'Connors. Black Jimmy Kelly, he was related to the Dorans and he had a great host of songs. Then the Dorans would play pipes as well. They came into other pubs too, wherever they were settled - often in and around Everton, particularly when there were slum clearances and there were large plots of land left vacant for ages and Travellers would come in and pitch caravans on them. There was one particular pub they'd get into,

The words of the songs on this CD
are available on our website
www.veteran.co.uk

called the London Exchange, at the top of Breck Road. They'd pick a pub that was Traveller-friendly, although not all were, and the Travellers can spend money!" When the folk revival started Bruce got interested in Scottish songs, and it was on a trip to Glencoe in 1957 that he first met Barry Halpin who was to become a long-term musical friend. Bruce and a group of friends had travelled up there singing songs, and were staying in the Youth Hostel. Barry had done his National Service in the RAF and was based at Kinloss, in the mountain rescue team. Barry's family were from Waterford and Tipperary, and he was also musically-minded: "There's Barry playing his banjo and he asked if I'd sing a song and I sang my mother's song *Kevin Barry* and he was knocked out. He said we ought to get together."

Bruce and Barry saw each other intermittently over the next couple of years, and in 1960 Bruce went along to a pub that Barry kept telling him about, in St Helens, just outside Liverpool. This was the Railway in Moss Bank where Barry ran a folk club. Bruce had been doing a variety of jobs since he left school, including builders' labourer and sheet-metal worker's labourer on the Camel Laird shipyards, and by this time was engaged to Dot, whom he'd met when working as a delivery driver for Barker and Dobson's (makers of the famous Everton Toffees).

In the early 1960s Bruce spent several months each year in Ireland, busking with Barry Halpin. Bruce explains, "It really just started as a holiday with four couples. We went out from Liverpool on the old ferry just with the intention of going to the west of Ireland. We took some instruments. Barry was very good on five-string banjo and tin whistle and we had an old Stella tape recorder. We headed out from Dublin and hitch-hiked in twos and we said we would head for Galway Town and we'd meet up in the nearest pub to the Post Office, and we all got over to Galway. The whole of the west in them days was very down and poor. The area round the Spanish Arch was just ramshackle. The place we went was Greene's Bar down on the quayside by the lifeboat house and a lot of people used to come over from the old Claddagh estate.



Barry Halpin - c.1963

sincerity of feeling one of oldest themes in traditional song - the story of a young girl betrayed and abandoned by her wealthy lover cast by cruel parents into the snow".

Bruce thinks he learned it from her son Tommy Makem while in Carrick-on-Suir where he would regularly meet up with him and the Clancy Brothers. Other available recordings include Paddy Tunney on TSCD656 'Tonight I'll Make You my Bride' and Geordie Hanna on 'The Fisher's Cot'.

The Deck of the Baltimore

Another from Peter Scott's pub in Liverpool where Noel Scanlon would be asked to sing *The Deck of the Baltimore*. The song, which tells of the adventures of an Irish man who stows away on a ship in the Liverpool docks seems to be rare. This story of an Irishman who is taunted by others who live to regret it is a recurring theme in Irish folksong; *Erin Go Brágh* possibly being the most popular song in the genre. This song is much rarer, being particularly favoured in the maritime states of North America. It is also known as *The City of Baltimore* and *Bold McCarthy*. Joseph Ranson collected a fine version in Wexford in 1948 from Mary White of Ballyhack.

The last verse was added by Bruce who was asked by American singer Bob Milner to contribute to a session at Sidmouth Folk Festival on songs of emigration, the only criterion being that all the songs should start in Liverpool and finish in New York. The story of *The Deck of the Baltimore* was thus completed!

My Liverpool Rose

Bruce's own song for his wife Dot whom he usually calls 'Polly', written some twenty-five years ago as a Valentine's present after she complained that he had never written a song for her. The air he used is *Mo Cailin Deas (My Lovely Girl)*.



Dot and Bruce - Turkey - 1993

On the Deck of Patrick Lynch's Boat

Yet another song that Bruce got from Noel Scanlon. It is usually called *The County of Mayo* or *The Mayo Exile* and is said to have been translated from the Irish by 17th century writer Thomas Lavelle and was put to the tune of *Billy Byrne of Ballymanus* by George Fox some time after 1815. Well known throughout Ireland nowadays, particularly from the singing of John Lyons, this translation of *Condae Mhuigh Eo* was hugely anthologised after its first appearance in the 'Irish Penny Journal' in 1840. It is the only known poem of Belfast man Fox of whom not a lot is known. Born in 1809 and educated in Trinity College, Dublin, he was a friend of the executed rebel, Robert Emmet. He emigrated to America at the height of the Famine, in 1847 and he is believed to have died in New Guinea sometime around 1880.

Bruce got this song from a Cork singer called Denis McCarthy who was in Carrick-on-Suir at the same time as Bruce and Barry Halpin in the 1960s. McCarthy called it *The Kinsale Herring* which sets it in Co. Cork and although it has been recorded in just about every county in England it doesn't turn up very often in Ireland. The BBC recorded Thomas Moran singing the *The Herring Song* in Co. Leitrim in 1954 and Jim Carroll and Pat MacKenzie recorded Mikeen McCarthy in Co. Kerry in 1976. The latter version can be heard on TSCD664 'My Troubles They Are But Few'. On Veteran two English versions can be heard from Gypsy singer Phoebe Smith on VT136CD 'The Yellow Handkerchief' and from Suffolk's Ted Chaplin on VTC5CD 'When the Wind Blows'.

Lowlands of Flanders

One of Bruce's own compositions which was inspired by an article in the Irish Post about a peace tower which had been built in Belgium. The tower was styled on an Irish round tower and was built from stones from all over Ireland.

President Mary McAleese inaugurated the Peace Tower at the Peace Park in Mesen (Messines) on 11th November, 1998 in the presence of King Albert II and Queen Paola and Queen Elizabeth II. The Peace Tower is dedicated to the memory of those from the island of Ireland who fought and died in the First World War. It is erected at the site of the Messines Ridge Battlefield, the only location in that conflict where the 36th Ulster Division and the 16th Irish Division fought side by side. The Memorial not only recalls the sacrifices of those from the island of Ireland from all political and religious traditions who fought and died in the war, but also serves as a powerful symbol of reconciliation in the present day.

The Bold McShane

Bruce got *McShane* from Dublin singer Tommy Dempsey who lived in Birmingham in the 1960s. The song, which recounts his adventures in Scotland as a migrant labourer, seems quite rare although it would be surprising if such a good song had not been taken up by a broadside printer sometime. The only other collected version we know of was collected by Tom Munnely in 1972 from John Joe Murphy, Darynahenlish, Roslea, Co. Fermanagh.

It Was in the Month of January Roud 175

A fine narrative song from the Northern Irish singing tradition. Herbert Hughes printed a fragmentary version of this song called *The Fanaid Grove*, in 'Irish Country Songs, Vol 1', and says that he knows of no other folk song composed to the same melody - "a beautiful example of a modified Soh Mode", while in Joyce's 'Old Irish Folk Music and Songs' there is a fragmentary set sung by a reaper in a harvest field, containing the aromatic line: 'My love is as sweet as the cinnamon tree.' It is a song that Co. Armagh singer Sarah Makem made her own and on the notes of the 1968 Topic LP 'Ulster Ballad singer' Sean O' Boyle writes, 'This was Sarah Makem's greatest contribution to the annals of folksong. Here she treats with great

That was an old village of thatched cottages that was knocked down in the thirties. They were all Gaelic speakers with their own customs and traditions and of course, that's where the Claddagh ring came from. Anyway, a lot of people used to come over and work on the docks and use Greene's bar and it was there we met a lot of good ballad singers. Even then their first language was Irish. I always remember one man, Martin Oliver, he had a great host of songs. We stayed in Galway for quite a long time. They let us use this old boat-house, we put sleeping bags in it, so that was where we were based and we would go and do a bit of busking in the square. I remember a crowd around two fellas in a bar and it was Tom Clancy and Joe Heaney, and Barry said 'Let's go and have a word,' because the Clancys were from where Barry's father was from, the Waterford side of Carrick-on-Suir. So we went over and introduced ourselves and had a craic with them. They were booked into a ballad session in one of the hotels, so we said, 'Why don't you come down to our session at Greene's bar with all the lads from the Claddagh estate?' So they came down and we had some good nights with them! Another time Andy Irvine, Joe Dolan and their mates came down. They were on the road travelling around as well.

"So all this time we were singing and collecting songs - we hadn't really got into the busking! Not until we went over to Aran from Galway. It was a shocking trip, everyone was sick, even Barry himself who was supposed to be a great seafarer. We landed in Kilonan on Inis Mor and couldn't afford digs, we'd run out of money, ended up staying in a cave. In fact we couldn't afford the fare back on the boat, so we went to McDonagh's bar and we started singing there and they said we could go round with a hat. But we didn't do that well so I went and cadged a lift back on an old turf boat, one of the old turf hookers from Connemara with sails. Anyway, I negotiated with the skipper, who would normally only speak Gaelic, and I got him down to five shillings each, plus some rum for him. So we had a final session in McDonagh's and he got his rum and they had unloaded the turf and we got on and they put the sails up. Anyway, we were half-way across and the captain talks to his mate in Gaelic and then the mate says it's time to pay him the ten shillings. I said, 'He said it would be five shillings!' So they dropped the sails and said 'We'll stay here all day then!' So Barry got out his primus and some bacon and pretended to start cooking. Me and Halpin then said 'We're not American tourists, you know, we're just from Liverpool, and we're skint!' Suddenly the captain's speaking in English and argues away and eventually he says, 'Alright, but you Liverpool men are hard men, God bless you.'

"So the shortage of money was getting serious and the first time we busked properly

was Clifton in Connemara. We had this girl with us from Yorkshire called Susan, and she went round with the can and it was brilliant, just loads of silver coming into the can! The first time the money hit the can we all burst out laughing! There were hundreds of people around and we stayed in Clifton for quite a long time. We were living rough, in barns and that. We made a deal that the women would look after the food money and the men would look after the money for drink, but the men's money ran out rather quickly!

"This was before the music revival in Ireland, I mean now you've got kids playing everywhere! We wouldn't make a penny now, busking. Them days it was a novelty. We went from Clifton to Westport, county Mayo, where we were based in a pub called the Mermaid - it's called McHale's now. We busked in the squares and hundreds of people came in. It was all locals, no tourists. In fact anywhere where there was tourists you wouldn't make money!"

Barry Halpin stayed in Ireland and Bruce returned to Liverpool to work on demolitions, but returned every now and again to see Barry. Then Dubliner Jerry O'Reilly moved to Liverpool, and he and Bruce would regularly take the ferry back to Dublin and meet up with people like Christy Moore, whom Bruce already knew from when Christy had been a guest at Barry Halpin's folk club in St Helen's. "In fact we brought a lot of people over from Ireland who weren't known in England, like the Crehan Sisters and Seamus Ennis, and Michael Gorman up from London." There was an emerging traditional music scene in Dublin, which Jerry introduced Bruce to: Slattery's in Capel Street, was a favourite music pub where he met Kevin Conniff and Frank Harte. Sometimes, passing through Dublin on his way to see Barry, he'd pick up other singers who then made the journey down to Carrick-on-Suir with him.



On the demolition - Bruce in the fore ground - 1965

Soverign of Naas; it is only within comparatively recent years that the town reverted to its older name. Situated where the Clody River converges with the Slaney, it is an extremely pretty village made all the more attractive by the fact that 'the stream of Bunclody' runs the full length of the main street. Up until the early 1970s it was a fruitful place for the collecting of traditional songs.

This song was said to have been written by a homesick emigrant and is often called just *Bunclody* or *The Maid of Bunclody*. Like most songs composed mainly of 'floating verses' it has turned up not just in Wexford, but all over Ireland, including several versions from Northern Ireland. The text is related to *The Cuckoo* which is even more widespread through England and America and in Steve Roud's Folk Song Index there are 205 versions under that title. Its widespread recent popularity in Ireland in the '60s was due not only to Margaret Barry, but to a recording made by the Emmet Spiceland ballad group which became a hit for a while.

Summer in Bunclody

Bruce wrote this song in 1999 to remind him of the good times he had in Bunclody. He came second in the All Ireland 'Newly Composed Ballads' competition with this song which is set to the air of *The Flower of Magherally*.

Easy and Slow

This has always been known as a Dublin song and in his book about songs from that city, the late Frank Harte says that he had heard the song for years and the first person he ever heard singing it was Dominic Behan who said that he had got some of it from Sean O' Casey and the rest from a woman in England. Frank said that whenever he asked anyone else he heard singing it what was the source, it would inevitably be traced back to Dominic and indeed Bruce first heard Behan sing it at one of the early Keele Folk Festivals.

The Herring Roud 128

Herring Processions in Ireland were riotous cavalcades which took place in many towns and villages, usually on Easter Saturday at the end of Lent, celebrating the end of abstinence from meat and the dominance of the King of the Sea from the diet. Not surprisingly the processions were often led by butchers who had just come through a very frugal 40 days. The herrings were usually mounted on decorated poles followed by musicians and various revellers and led through the streets to an ignominious end such as being dumped back into the sea or in some cases a butcher's boy would pull a line of dozens of herrings through the streets and it was beaten by other boys until not a shred of herring remained on the rope. In spite of *The Herring* belonging to a popular genre such as *The Cutty Wren*, *The Sow Took the Measles*, *The Derby Ram*, and others, I do not think it too unlikely to conjecture that our song here had its origins in a Herring Procession.

The Songs *(notes by John Howson and Tom Munnelly)*

Rocks of Bawn Roud 3024 *(Steve Roud Folk Song Index)*

Bruce got this song from a Kerry singer called Noel Scanlon who lived in Liverpool in the 1960s. The English folklorist A.L. Lloyd in notes to the 1960s Joe Heaney album 'Irish Songs in Gaelic and English' said of *The Rocks of Bawn*: "In 1652, Oliver Cromwell 'subdued' Ireland, a process that often recurred in history before and since. Many Catholic landholders were dispossessed and forced to take their families and belongings beyond the Shannon, to the hard country of Connaught. While English and Scottish Protestant newcomers settled on the lush vacated farms, the dispossessed Irish hacked out a thin living among the 'rocks, bogs, salt water and seaweed' of the barren west coast. In the ensuing centuries, to many a farmhand even the British Army offered better prospects than the stony plough-defying soil of Mayo, Galway and Clare. The lament of the Connaught ploughman has become one of the most popular of all Irish folk songs, seemingly within the last few years."

Sam Henry in 'Songs of the People' (1923-39) comments that it took two years searching to obtain the words and that Pat Magill, the famous author, told him that he heard the song in Strabane Fair where it was sold as a broadside. Henry also tells us that Bawn or Bawnboy is in Co. Cavan. In Dominic Behan's 'Ireland Sings' (1965) his notes on *The Rocks of Bawn* say that the man who wrote this song was Martin Swiney who hadn't died all that long ago.

In 1954 the BBC recorded two versions in Co. Galway from Colm Keane and Mamó Clancy and in 1968 Hugh Shields recorded it from John Ban Byrne (Co. Donegal) and Eddie Butcher (Co. Derry). Further south in Clare Tom Munnelly recorded Tom Lenihan singing the song in Miltown Malbay (CBE 03 'Mount Callan Garland') and in the same town Willy Clancy played it as a slow air on the pipes (CC32CD 'The Piping of Willie Clancy Vol.1'). Probably the most well known rendition of the song comes from the Connemara singer Joe Heaney and his version can be heard on no less than three recordings OSSCD22, TSCD655 and CIC020.

The Tipperary Tinker

While travelling Ireland one of Bruce's favourite spots was Carrickbeg on the Waterford side of Carrick-on-Suir and it was there he heard *The Tipperary Tinker* sung by Patrick Galvan in Galivan's pub. This song doesn't seem to turn up anywhere else.

Streams of Bunclody Roud 3000

Another of place in Ireland where Bruce spent a lot of time busking was the Bunclody area in Co. Wexford and he learned this song from Barry Halpin's uncle, Jim Halpin, who also lived on the Waterford side of Carrick-on-Suir. Bunclody was called Newtownbarry for many years after its patron, James Barry,

This was also the period when Bruce first became involved with Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Éireann. Bruce was encouraged to enter the All Britain traditional ballad competition and won.

"The All Ireland was in Clones and I sang there, but I got too drunk. I'd already met up with Christy (Moore) and we were having great craic. I said I didn't want to sing, my voice had gone, but they carried me in on their shoulders. I sung

The Month of January and *The Verdant Braes of Skreen*. The Furey brothers and everybody was there: in them years everyone was at the Fleadh."

At that time, one of the strongest North West English Comhaltas branches was over in Ashton-in-Makerfield. Barry Halpin was around in St Helens again, teaching, and making regular visits back to Ireland, and was teaching children to play tin whistle and concertina in Comhaltas classes, and after school in his classroom. Bruce recalls the enthusiasm for this aspect of music-making, exemplified by an occasion on which piper Jimmy Dowling actually missed his boat back to Dublin because Bruce and Barry altered the clock so that he would carry on teaching the kids a bit longer! "That's when I first started associating with Sean MacNamara, Eamon Coyne, Peadar Finn and all the Liverpool Ceili Band. The Irish Centre opened then (in Liverpool) at the top of Mount Pleasant. The building was a Gentlemen's Club, but that's closed now of course. That was the regular place then. Comhaltas meetings and really good traditional singers and show bands as well."

The Liverpool folk scene was then also in full flow with clubs running every night of the week. Clubs run by the Spinners, The Calton Three and Tony Wilson's (later known



Demolition team - Bruce 4th from the left - in the Caledonian pub, Lime Street, before they knocked it down! - 1966

as Molyneux) Merseyside Traditional Gathering were thriving and Bruce would make the odd guest appearance, but he was always more comfortable with the Irish scene. He did however introduce some of his old friends to the MTG which booked them as guests, particularly Kevin Conniff who is now well known as a member of the Chieftains. On one occasion Bruce met Kevin off the boat, took him for a 'few drinks' and finally arrived at the club fifteen minutes before the club was due to finish. Another time Kevin was booked at a dockland pub, a fight broke out and he went back to Dublin with a broken nose! Bruce became a regular at Irish Centre sessions during the seventies and eighties and also started writing his own songs.

"The first song I ever wrote was twenty-five years ago, it was during the period when all the political things were going on, the hunger strikes and all that. I was always interested in the Irish tradition of songs of rebellion, and Irish history. I wrote a song for Bobby Sands who died in the hunger strike called *The People's Own MP* and some of the families over there heard about it and Christy Moore heard about it and he rang me up and said he was doing an album called *The Spirit of Freedom* with socialist songs from all over the world and asked if he could put it on the album and he did. And I've written songs about Liverpool and Liverpool characters, like one about the assassination of John Lennon, and some set in Scotland and of course Ireland. Then people said to me 'You know there's a newly-composed ballads section of Comhaltas,' and I wrote a song called *Easter Week*. It got through the All Britain. In fact all the songs I've entered have got through the All Britain. But when you get to Ireland it's tough because you've got the songs written from all over Ireland and even America. Not all sing their own songs, some ask for a singer to sing them, but I sing my own. I've been second or third in the All Ireland five times running and then last year (2004) I finally got first with *My Colleen by the Shore*. I've written a new one this year it's a love song set in Donegal, and I'm now through to the All Ireland with it!"

One of the strangest happenings in Bruce's life was in 2003 when a journalist on a national newspaper maintained that he had found the much publicised exile, Lord Lucan. The photograph shown was in fact



Bruce and Christie Moore - 1995

Barry Halpin who had been living in India. The folk singer and broadcaster Mike Harding contacted another national paper and said that he had known Halpin in the 1960s and he was definitely not Lucan! Mike suggested they talk to Bruce and the next morning he found Sky Television cameras in his garden! The saga continued for weeks and the original journalist refused to talk to Bruce but his story was finally found to be flawed and his subsequent hardback book was, to Bruce's delight, quickly remaindered.

In recent years Bruce's own songs have been regularly featured on BBC Radio Merseyside and he still travels to Ireland each year with the reformed Liverpool Ceilidh Band. He has also appeared at Sidmouth Folk Festival in Devon, the National Folk Festival in Leicestershire, Whitby Folk Week in Yorkshire and the Keith Summers Memorial Festival in London, as well as being involved in the Liverpool Irish festival each October.

Now various members of Bruce's family have become involved in the music: "My son Kevin played the fiddle for a bit. Then Tracy's daughters are into the music - Jessica and Melissa - and my other daughter Debbie has Jamie who played drums for the Liverpool Ceilidh Band, and Jodie, she's the youngest and she sings a couple of songs, she's been singing *Molly Malone* since she was two!"

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann is a national organisation which aims to promote Irish traditional music, song and dance and has over 400 branches. It organises the *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann* which is the annual festival where the All Ireland Champions are judged. During the preceding year regional *Fleadhs* including the All England are held and this is where competitors qualify for the All Ireland.



Bruce with Eddie Lenihan, Jim Eldon and Packie Byrne
National Folk Festival 1992



Bruce and Jerry O'Reilly - Dublin - 2005