

The Elliots of Birtley / A Musical Portrait of a Durham Mining Family

Compiled and Edited from Material collected by Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl / Folkways Records FG 3565



SIDE I

Band 1: Family History, Stanley Market
Band 2: Begging rhymes, guisers, lullabies, children's
songs and rhymes, Henry My Son
Band 3: The Three Welshmen; Old Johnnie Booker;
Hunting of the Wren; The Sucking Pig
Band 4: Finger games, hand-warming games, children's
street songs, skipping and ball-bouncing games,
taunts, chants, etc.

SIDE II

Band 1: Anecdotes, local history, pit-poetry, the
depression, Our Gudeman
Band 2: Pit-lore, Big Hewer legends, tales, anecdotes,
The Celebrated Workingman, Little Chance
Band 3: Miner's wit and humour, jokes, local tales,
parodies, The Collier's Rant

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A Musical Portrait of A DURHAM MINING FAMILY

Compiled and Edited from material collected by
PEGGY SEEGER and EWAN MACCOLL



Pithead, Chislet Colliery, Kent

THE PLACE

Durham, the county in which the township of Birtley is situated, lies in the north-eastern part of England. On the other side of its northern boundary lies Northumberland, and to the south and west lies Yorkshire; the county's eastern boundary forms part of England's North Sea coastline.

Along with Northumberland, County Durham has the distinction of being England's oldest coal-producing region. For several hundred years coal has been mined in the western zone of the county, where the seams lie close to the surface of the earth. With the working-out of the more accessible seams, the mines have moved eastwards and downwards so that today many of the deepest and most productive workings are located two or three miles out under the North Sea.

Many of the pits are 'wet' and a typical remark heard among colliers is: "It's so wet where I'm working that we're using alligators for pit-ponies". Thin seams are common and it is not unusual for men work at faces where the distance from floor to roof is a mere twenty inches. Of such places it is said that "The roof is so low that even the rats are born bowlegged". or "The mice get callouses on their backs from scraping against the roof".

The landscape is a curious mixture of the pastoral and the industrial, of green fields and black pit-head gear, of small farms and large slag-heaps.

The pit towns and villages are, for the most part, small compact settlements of two-story red-brick, or occasional sandstone, houses. In the larger towns one encounters an occasional Regency terrace and even the isolated row of 17th. century cottages but, on the whole, the 19th. century red-brick terrace is the dominating architectural feature of the area.

Throughout the entire coalfield, the centre of community life is the 'club', an institution maintained and run exclusively by the miners of the locality. The club

may consist of a couple of rooms equipped with a bar and a liquor licence, or it may house a theatre auditorium, lecture rooms, youth-club premises, games rooms, library, etc. But regardless of size or the amenities it disposes, the club is the focal point of every mining community.

The people who make up these communities all depend, in one way or another, on the pit for their livelihood.

The Durham miners are a tough, hardworking body of men and, like miners everywhere, they are extremely militant and politically articulate. The long, harsh years of the depression has left its mark on the population and the comparative prosperity of the post-war era has not succeeded in eradicating the bitter memories of the thirties. Even those young miners without personal experience of the hunger and humiliation of the 'means test' years, appear to have assimilated from their elders some of the fear and bitterness which is part of the make-up of every man and woman over forty years of age living in the mining communities.

The antiquity of the Durham coal-mining industry and the type of community created by it has done much to preserve popular traditions and customs which, in other types of communities, have tended to disappear. The best traditional sword-dance teams in Britain are to be found in Durham; guising ceremonies live on among the children in some of the more isolated pit villages and, in addition, the county has produced Britain's largest single body of industrial folksongs and ballads.

Among a number of traditional pastimes still popular with Durham miners is the breeding and training of homing pigeons; almost every village club has its pigeons-fancying fraternity.

Another important pit-village phenomenon is the brass or silver-band. These ensembles are the

object of fierce local patriotism, for, a village which produces a prize-winning band acquires special status throughout the coal-field. To understand something of their importance to the community one should visit Durham City on the day of the 'big meeting', the annual miners' gala, when the colliers and their families march behind their bands and lodge-banners through the streets of the ancient county seat.

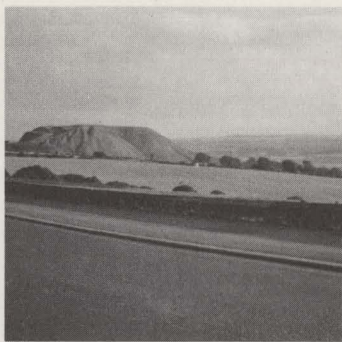
Last, but not least, of the popular pastimes pursued by the Durham colliers, is the growing of prize-leeks. This occupation has, in recent years, acquired some of the special character of a sacred ritual. The leek growers have their own terminology, their own carefully guarded secrets and their own folklore. The authors of these notes were recently told by a young miner that: "It grips you. It's like a fever!" He went on to say: "Now, as leek showtime comes near you must be careful to allow only the visitors you can trust, because then comes leek slashing. They're really quite jealous about this. Your whole status in the club can be increased by getting in the 'top ten'. So that you have to keep watch, particularly if you have an allotment. I don't know if you'd go so far as to sleep with it....I've heard reports about sleeping with them".

In addition to these local pastimes, the Durham mining communities participate in the more widespread forms of cultural activity such as amateur drama and operatic groups, concert parties, painting circles etc. There is even a pitmen's chamber-music circle.

Finally, there is beer! The north-east is famous for its strong ales and the Durham men, along with their Tyneside neighbours, display a hearty contempt for the weaker brews of the decadent south. Among many older miners a man's capacity for beer is an important factor in determining his status.

Politically, the miners belong to the 'left' and the mining constituencies of Durham are regarded as traditional Labour strongholds. On the issue of the nationalization of the coal industry they are unanimous in declaring that they would fight any attempt on the part of any government to reverse the nationalization decision.

The Durham dialect is, of all English dialects, the one least affected by the acculturating influences of radio, films and television. It is extremely rich both in vocabulary and idiom and some of Britain's leading scholars in the field of linguistics have stated that the dialect is probably a close approximation to the English spoken in the time of Shakespeare. In the pit, the dialect is broadened to the point where it becomes incomprehensible to the most talented dialect scholar. Colliers refer to their underground language as 'pitmatick'. To talk pitmatick is to identify oneself as a 'real Durham collier'.



A Pit Heap Above Birtley

BIRTLEY.

Birtley, the home of the Elliott family is a typical Durham pit town. The name is from the Anglo-Saxon: Berht-bright; ley-field. It lies between Durham City and Newcastle-on-Tyne and has a population of 12,000 (approx).

Presumably it was once a bright field but that was before men discovered coal there. Today the fields are slashed by roads and scabbed with the creeping detritus of numerous pits.

Brown's Buildings, which is the name given to the street in which Jack and Em. Elliott dwell (and where these recordings were made), is a single row of grit-stone houses dating back to the late-seventeen-hundreds. Jack and Reece Elliot can remember the time when the street was surrounded by open country but, in recent years, the fields have given way to council-estates with their rows of trim but somewhat unimaginative houses.



John, Em, and Jack Elliott

THE FAMILY

The Elliott name is an important one in the north-east and it would have been gratifying to have been able to link the Birtley Elliotts with the clan who, with the Nobles and the Armstrongs, harried both sides of the border from the outlawed territory of 'the debatable land' and whose exploits figure so prominently in the border-ballads. There is, however, no real connection; Jack and Reece Elliott can only trace their family back to their peternal grandfather who, as a infant, was found abandoned in a ditch with a slip of paper bearing the name "Elliott" pinned on him.



Reece Elliot

REECE

Is 66 years old. He retired from Harraton Colliery two years ago after working there for fifty-two years. He is a big, shambling man with the voice of an amiable bear. He has an inexhaustible fund of good stories about the 'pit' and the men he has known. When he talks about the bad old days, his voice drops in pitch and the words are delivered with slow deliberation, so that he sounds like a biblical patriarch describing the plagues of Egypt. He has two sons, both of whom work in the pit.

JACK

Is fifty-five years old and, like his brother Reece has spent the whole of his working life down the pit - 41 years in fact. At present he is employed underground as a 'token man' but the greater part of his underground life has been spent working at the coal-face, mostly on night-shift. For a quarter of a century the two brothers (both big men) worked as 'marrers' (mates) often in the same twenty-inch seams. In spite of a lifetime of hard work, Jack can, at times, look extraordinarily youthful. He has a ready wit and a real appreciation of the community in which he lives. His feeling for 'the old songs' is profound and of long-standing.

EM (Wife to Jack Elliott)

Is fifty-eight years old and has spent the whole of her life in mining communities. She is a slightly-built woman with an extraordinary degree of vitality and a wonderful capacity for enjoying life. She is splendidly articulate and well-informed on matters of local history, politics and municipal affairs. Like her husband, she loves the traditional songs and has played an important role in keeping them alive in the family.

JOHN (son of Jack and Em Elliott)

Is thirty-two years old and is a foreman fitter at the Harraton Colliery. He is married and the father of 3 children.

PETE (son of Jack and Em Elliott)

Is thirty-five years old and works as a Draughtsman in Newcastle on Tyne. He is the father of four. He plays the guitar and takes an active interest in folksong revival.



Pete and Pat Elliot

DOREEN (daughter of Jack and Em Elliott) is married to a bricklayer and is the mother of two children. She carries on the family tradition of teaching the old songs to her children.

LEN (son of Jack and Em Elliott)

Works as a fitter at the Harraton Colliery. He is married and appears to have inherited his father's story-telling abilities. He describes himself as "a good club man".

KIT (Wife to Len)

Is the twenty-nine year old daughter of a disabled miner.

ALAN (son of Reece Elliott)

Is twenty-eight years old and works as a hewer in the Harraton colliery.

BRIAN HENDERSON (Husband to Doreen)

Is twenty-eight years of age and works as a bricklayer. He has worked down the pit and in steel-foundries in Canada.

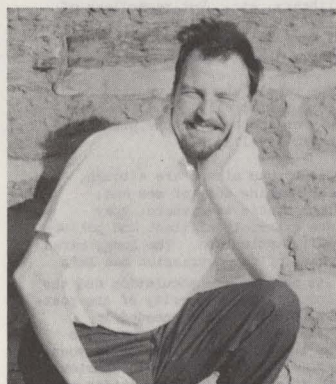


Doreen Elliot



BILL (son of John)

Is eleven years old and wants to be an artist.

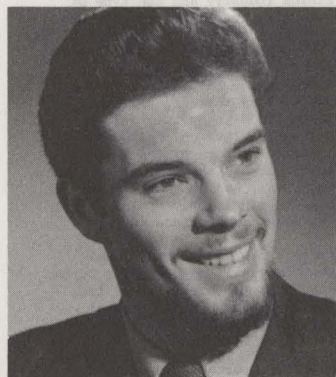


Len Elliot

TESS STOBBERT

Is a 26 year old hewer in the Harraton Colliery and a friend of the family.

PAT (Wife to Pete is the 26 year old daughter of a Gateshead miner.



Brian Henderson

MALCOLM HENDERSON (brother to Brian, Doreen's husband, age 21, is a surveyor at the Harraton Colliery.

THE RECORDINGS

The Elliott family were recorded by Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl on three separate occasions: July 24, July 25 and Aug. 4, in the kitchen of the home of Em. and Jack Elliott.

The procedure was extremely simple; we introduced ourselves as the authors of a folk-documentary radio programme dealing with coal miners, a programme to which Jack and Reece Elliott had contributed several passages of conversation and one song (The Celebrated Working Man). The first members of the family we met were Jack and Em. who made us welcome and then proceeded to talk and sing. During the first hour of our acquaintance we recorded part of a guising play (The Seven Champions of Christendom) and several songs and fragments. In the course of the four hours which followed, various members of the Elliott 'clan' dropped in and contributed songs, stories and anecdotes. There was not, at any time, the slightest trace of microphone 'fright' or embarrassment. Everyone ignored the microphone and talked and sang, laughed and argued in a way that was completely natural. At one point there were 17 people in the small kitchen and it became increasingly obvious that we were faced with a choice of either making high technical-level recordings free from background noise, microphone-lead bumps etc., or of making recordings which would capture the informality and spontaneity of this typical family gathering. We chose to do the latter.

On the following evening we again spent four hours recording the family and, a fortnight later visited them again. The recordings made on the three occasions totalled 13 hours and included some sixty songs and fragments, fourteen traditional 'Big Hewer' tales, thirty-two pit tales, part of a traditional play, forty-nine anecdotes common to the Birtley area, and detailed descriptions of eighteen children's games common in the North-East.

STYLE AND MUSICAL REPERTOIRE

Generally speaking, what we hear when we listen to the Elliott family singing is a typical example of a traditional style and type of music heavily influenced, but not destroyed, by 19th century popular musical ideas. The most important of these influences has, undoubtedly, been that of the music-hall. The North-Eastern variant of this 19th. century national institution was an interesting phenomenon and, unlike the music-halls of the larger manufacturing and commercial centres such as London, Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester, drew much of its sustenance from the traditional songs and dances of the region. Again, unlike the Music Hall traditions of the larger urban centres, the North-East music-hall songs were generally local in character and dialect and were, more often than not, the creations of working-men turned 'professional'. They were miners, carpenters, bricklayers etc., who wrote directly out of their own experience. Whereas the heroes of the Cockney music-

hall songs are, all too often, sentimental dustmen or costermongers vending Panglossian chestnuts, the heroes of the North-East music-hall songs are pitmen, rowdy keelmen and fishwives ready to fight at the drop of a hat. It is true that they are often presented as a drunken, roystering, hell-raising crew but this is not always the case; there are times when we get glimpses of striking miners and starving children and, whether they are drunk or sober, these heroes and heroines insist on bringing us face to face with a real world in which the Saturday night 'booze-up' is followed by the Monday morning hangover. The world of the North-East music-hall songs is a world of pawnshops and epic street-outings, of Saturday night fist-fights, of evictions, of five-in-a-bed to keep warm, of dog fights and quayside belles like Cushie Butterfield. It is a world where the policeman and the pitman are always on opposite sides.

The Elliott repertoire occupies a very important place in the family's social life and, while it is not treasured as an heirloom, it is used frequently and enjoyed immensely. Everyone in the family, from Billy aged 11 to Reece aged 66 appears to be on the most familiar terms with all the tunes and all the words of the songs. There is, however, a very definite distinction drawn in the family between the function of the soloist and that of the chorus. One voice, or occasionally two voices, carry the verses of a song while the rest of the family carry the refrains. This rule appears to apply in everything except fragments and parodies, these being regarded as 'free for all' material. The extent to which all members of the family identify themselves with the music, is extraordinary. This is particularly noticeable when they sing children's songs; there is never a hint of condescension or embarrassment in their approach to this type of material. Doreen, for example, herself the mother of two children, is transformed into an eight-year old child when she sings a piece like 'Are you Going to Golf, Sir?' There is no premeditated striving after an effect, the performance is instinctive, a perfect example of emotion-memory. The same is true of every other member of the family. Reece, who is heard in 'On a Mountain Stands a Lady' abandons none of his massive dignity when he sings and yet, in that moment one's ear can detect the echo of the small boy's voice behind the big man's rumble.

At the same time there is never any suggestion of a nostalgic crossing of dead frontiers; the children's songs still live in this family and it is refreshing to see fathers and sons, mothers and grown-up daughters vying with one another to see who can remember the greatest number of songs, games, rhymes, taunts and chants.

SINGING STYLE

The family singing style is straightforward with very little melodic or structural variation and no modal variation whatsoever. The only type of external decoration is that used in the singing of 'Pit Lie Idle'.

As is to be expected in a repertoire in which group of chorus songs predominate, the family tendency is to sing rhythmical songs in strict tempo. There is a marked preference for triple-time songs and roughly two-thirds of the strictly adult songs belong to this category.

STATISTICAL ANALYSES OF MUSICAL ITEMS

I. Classification of songs

Traditional Ballads	3
Music Hall songs	6
Songs concerned with Mining	7
Classic folk songs	5
Children's street songs	19
Children's Ballads	1
Local Songs	5
Children's Song Games	9

2. Rhythmical Structure

25 items are in triple-time.
30 items are in duple or quadruple time, children's songs and rhymes accounting for two-thirds of this total.

3 Keys and Modes

In Full Major:	30
In full minor:	1
Mixolydian:	1
Pentatonic: (cdefg)	7
Pentatonic: (cdega)	1
Gapped Scales (major)	6
lacking fourth interval;	7
lacking seventh interval;	1
lacking sixth interval;	1
Gapped Scales (minor)	1
lacking sixth interval;	1

THE ELLIOTTS OF BIRTLEY

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SIDE "A" BAND II

Begging rhymes, guisers, lullabies, children's songs and rhymes, Henry my Son.

SIDE "A" BAND III

The Three Welshmen, Old Johnnie Booker, Hunting of the Wren, The Sucking pig.

SIDE "A" BAND IV

Finger games, handwarming games, children's street songs, skipping and ball-bouncing games, taunts, chants etc.

SIDE "B" BAND I

Anecdotes, local history, pit-poetry, the depression, Our Gudeman.

SIDE "B" BAND II

Pit-lore, Big Hewer legends, tales, anecdotes, The Celebrated Working-Man, Little Chance.

SIDE "B" BAND III

Miners' wit and humour, jokes, local tales, parodies, The Collier's Rant.

SIDE 'A' BAND I

NANCY GREY AND BETSY GREY (Betsy Bell and Mary Grey. Child 201)

According to popular tradition, the two young women whose names form the title of this ballad, built a hut in the countryside outside Perth in a vain bid to cheat the plague of 1645. The ballad, popularized in the 19th. century by broadside texts, was known as far back as the end of the 17th. century. Alan Ramsey made a drawing-room adaptation of the ballad, retaining the opening stanza. A nursery rhyme version of the song exists.

The 'rashes' (rushes) of the early Scots' version has been changed into 'ashes' in the stanza sung by Reece Elliott and the girls' names have been altered.

SIDE 'A' BAND II

HI, CANNY MAN, HOI YA HAPP'NY OOT
(Hi, canny man, have your half-penny out!)

It was a well established custom at weddings, particularly in the North of England and Scotland, for the best man to distribute coppers in the street after the ceremony had been performed. In Edinburgh, the children (always jealous guardians of traditional rights) would cry "Poor oot! Poor oot!" In Tyneside and Co. Durham the cry was the one quoted by Jack Elliott.

HOW MUCH HAS THA GETTIN'?
(How much have you got?)

Towards the end of the 19th. century, the brake trip or 'outing' became a regular urban custom; working class townies formed 'outing clubs' to which they made regular contributions. Usually the club was limited to a particular street, workshop or mine. In the course of time the money collected was used to book a horse-drawn brake and club members would spend a day visiting a seaside resort or touring the countryside. Commercially-minded children made a practice of congregating at stopping-places on the brake routes (usually at a pub or tea-room) and singing and begging for coppers. The share out chant sung by Jack Elliott was an important part of the begging ritual. The custom was fairly widespread; in London, children greeted the brakes with the cry of "Throw out your mouldies!" (old or mouldy coppers). In Salford, Lancashire, during the week preceding the first of May, Children go round the streets singing from door to door. In the share-out which follows each night's work they sing the following ditty:
"Share out! Share out! Share out the lot;
A penny for me, a penny for you,
and a penny for the pot;
Some gave coppers, some gave lead,
An old Granny Apple-skirts gave a piece of stale bread".

GUIISERS

Guising plays are remarkably persistent in the British Isles; they have survived more than two centuries of industrialism and one still encounters them, even in large urban centres like Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester. In the older mining communities of Durham and Northumberland they were still popular with children until the nineteen-thirties. The substitution of King George for St. George, in this Birtley version of 'The Seven Champions of Christendom', is a fairly common phenomenon.

MY FATHER DIED A MONTH AGO

For the last century-and-a-half, at least, children have been singing variants of this Rhyme. 'Willie Winkie's Testament' (Orpheus Caledonius, 1725) is similar enough in style to be named as a possible ancestor. A version from the United States has lines which suggests that it goes back to the War of Independence. The endpiece sung here by Doreen Elliott is common throughout the British Isles.

LOOK ON THE WALL AND YOU'LL SEE A BIG SPIDER

This hymn-style rhyme does not appear in any of the standard collections of nursery-rhymes. Jack Elliott learned it as a child but cannot remember the source.

I'LL TELL MY MA WHEN I GET HOME

A children's street rhyme common throughout Britain.

SALVATION ARMY FREE FROM SIN

A street rhyme common throughout Gt. Britain in a host of variants. It is found also in the English language areas of the British Commonwealth and in the United States.

MARY-ANN TEACAKE

A children's nonsense rhyme common in Durham and Tyneside.

PIT LIE IDLE

This is possibly a song of the 'marvels and lies' type. The term 'lie idle' is used of a collier out of work or of a pit not being worked. During a strike, for instance, a pit lies idle.

COME UP AND SEE YOUR GRANNIE

Common in Scots urban centres and the Tyneside area of England.

HENRY, MY SON.

In the 15 versions of this ballad printed by Child, the poison victim is called by a variety of names: Lord Randall, Lord Donald, King Henrie, Laird Rowlande, Lord Ronald, Billy, Tiranti, and Willie Doo. In more recent times a number of versions have been recovered in which the hero is called simply 'Henry, my Son'. The Elliott version was recorded on two separate occasions, a week's interval having elapsed before the more complete song was recovered. At the first

session there was family disagreement concerning the sequence of stanzas and in order to settle the dispute Mrs. Reenie Green (nee Pearson) from whom the song had originally been learned, was visited by Mrs. Elliott. The version given here is the result of that meeting. There are a number of unique features in this version: 1. Gypsies as agents of the poisoning (the young man's sweetheart is the person most frequently accused of the crime). 2. Snails as the source of the poison; fishes, frogs, eels and sometimes poison berries are the most common sources. (The churchyard mentioned in the third verse is also an unusual feature). 3. The absence of the legacy or retribution theme. Mrs. Green, the Elliott's informant, had no difficulty in recalling the text given here and, as far as she was concerned, it is the complete song.

Another unusual, though not a unique, feature is the 'drink' question; it occurs in only one of the Child versions and in three of the 103 texts published by Bronson (The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads).

SIDE 'A' BAND III

WE WENT ALONG A BIT FURTHER

Commonly known as 'The Three Jolly Jovial Welshmen', the song usually concerns three hunters/farmers who may be Welsh (though occasionally they are an Englishman, an Irishman and a Scot) who give absurd identifications to objects and creatures encountered in the course of their travels. 'Bold Reynolds' and 'The Three Jovial Hunters' are related pieces. Though fairly common in the United States, the song is rarely found in Britain.

BILLY THE BOB (The Cutty Wren, The Hunting of the Wren)

In most of the English and Scots versions of this strange song the prey is a wren and the hunters a quartet of oddly named individuals who attack the wren with a veritable arsenal of weapons, carry it home in wagons, cook it in a furnace and feed the body to the poor. A.L. Lloyd has argued, convincingly, that the piece is a codified protest song, possibly dating back to the English peasant revolt. A considerable body of literature exists concerning the hunting of the wren on Christmas/St. Stephens Day and it is supposed that the old form of the rhyme was chanted in a ceremonial procession after the wren had been killed. In Jack Elliott's version of the song, the wren has become a cock-sparrow and details concerning the transportation and roasting of the carcass have disappeared. The celebration theme (with a pint of whiskey!) still remains.

THE SUCKING FIG

This is probably a barrack-room remake of 'The Derby Ram', that most famous 'song of marvels and lies' which, as Margaret Dean Smith has observed (Guide to English Folk Song Collections) "properly belongs to a winter luck visit, pastime of masking similar to the Old 'oss of the Cheshire Soul-Cakers, the Hooten horse of Kent, the 'osses of Padstov and Minehead who perambulate in May." The Elliott version was learned from a work-

mate who spent some time in India with the British Army.

SIDE 'A' BAND IV

OLD JOE BADGER

Used for telling off an infant's fingers. In a slightly different form, the song is used for a singing game of the 'London Bridge' type.

KNOCK AT THE DOOR

A finger game in which eyes, nose and mouth are used to suggest the windows, door-handle/latch, sneck and door of a house.

MY MOTHER SAYS I NEVER SHOULD

A well-known nursery rhyme generally used in conjunction with hand-warming or a hand-clapping game.

IGGLEDY-PIGGLEDEY, ICKLE-OCKLE, ENGINE ON THE LINE, ORANGES FOUR A PENNY, NATHAN-MARK-LUKE AND JOHN.

Counting-out or 'dipping' rhymes and formulas. Used to determine which person or side shall be 'on' in a game.

ON A MOUNTAIN STANDS A LADY, PITCH PATCH PATCH MY BRITCHES, HANKY PANKY

Rhymes used to accompany ball-bouncing games. The pavement or wall may be used as the bouncing area, according to the type of game in progress.

NOW YOU'RE MARRIED, COMES A LITTLE BLUEBIRD, ROMAN SOLDIERS, MY SOLDIER LADDIE, THERE CAME A GYPSY RIDING.

Rhymes used to accompany ring games. The players are generally girls between five and fourteen years old and boys under six years old.

GEORDIE'S LOST HIS PENKER

This epic story of a boy's efforts to recover a marble from a sewage-pipe is popular in Tyneside and Co. Durham but appears to be unknown elsewhere.

SIDE 'B' BAND I

IN THE BAR-ROOM (The Celebrated Working-man)

The original version of this witty song was written by Ed. Foley, a minstrel of the American anthracite industry and was first sung by him at the wedding of a niece, at Mt. Carmel in October 1892. The Elliott's version, now naturalized by half a century's domicile in the Durham coal-field, was learned in 1916 from Yankee Jim Roberts, an anarchist coal-miner from Louisville, Kentucky, who settled in Birtley, Co. Durham, and where, in the period following the first world war he played an active role in the Miners' Union.

SIDE 'B' BAND II

LITTLE CHANCE

At least half-a-century old, this Durham miners' song appears to be fairly well known throughout the coalfield. The version given here has some markedly different features from the one published in 'Come all ye Bold Miners', A. L. Lloyd's collection of ballads and songs of the British Coal-field.

SIDE 'B' BAND III

UP AT STANLEY MARKET

This is the work of Thomas Armstrong, the Tanfield Colliery bard (1843-1919), many of whose songs have passed into traditional currency. The tune is 'Hey ye seen wor cuddy, O?'

IN WAS COMIN' INEYE

Of all the jobs down a pit, none calls for more brute strength and patience than the one done by the putters. Sometimes alone and sometimes with a pony to help, he pushes and manhandles the fourteen-hundred weight tubs along the rails, often bent almost double in seams where the roof is so low that "even the rats are born bowlegged". This wry parody on an Olde Tyme 'pop' tune ('Moonlight Bay') is a real cry from the heart.

THE BLIND POOL (Our Gudeman, Child 247)

First published by Herd in 1776, this droll (and often obscene) ballad is still fairly well known throughout Britain. The version sung by Jack Elliott is particularly popular in the North of England where the adjective in the title is used to denote a state of absolute drunkenness.

JOHNNY BOOKER

Numerous versions of a sea-shanty, used for sweating-up, are sung about Johnny Bowker/Boker/Poker/Polka. Doerflinger (Shantymen and Shantyboys) suggests that the shanty may have had its origins in a black-face-minstrel piece or in a Negro folksong. The version given here is certainly reminiscent of a minstrel-type song. Williams (Folksongs of the Upper Thames) collected a fragmentary version in the South of England.

WAS IT IN THE KITCHEN?

This is an urban variant of a bawdy song common in East-Anglia and Eastern Scotland. The well known barrack-room piece 'Never let a Soldier get an inch above your knee' appears to have fathered the version given here.

MY LAD'S A CANNY LAD

This epigrammatic verse is probably known to every teen-age worker in the coal industry throughout northern England. It is a neat and economical piece, right in the folksong tradition of the region.

THE COLLIER'S RANT

First published in Joseph Ritson's 'Bishopric Garland' in 1784, the 'rant' is probably the best known collier's song. It has been frequently anthologized and has been featured in numerous radio broadcasts.

Side I, Band 1:

JACK: (Sings)

I dreamt I had died and to heaven
did go,
"Where do you come from?" they
wanted to know.
"I come from Brown's Building."
My, how they did stare.
"Come right inside, you're the
first one from there."
Alley O, alley O,
For we kill all the bobbies
that come down our way.

(Talks)

I was born in this street, number
twenty-five Brown's Buildings.

LEN:

And I was born in this street.

JACK:

Ay, I've never been any place else.
My father lived in a colliery
house. These are all colliery
houses, you know. Very old place.
My Grandfather came here in 1872,
when he shifted from Springwell
Colliery. He was born about 1825.
Eight year old he was bound to the
pits, in the 'bindings' up at
Blackfell. That's up on the top
here. You were bound to the pit.
What they call 'the bindings' in
those days. You were tied.

REECE:

Tied.

JACK:

You were tied; the bindings and
for this shilling a year...that's
what you got...we...he had to
go down the pit in an arse-loop,
that's just a piece of chain with
a board across. And he had to
sit on a man's knee in the open
shaft...no lamp...he hadn't a
lamp...

REECE:

No cage.

JACK:

And he had to sit at this trap
door, trapping...for the tubs to
go through for the ponies. That
was his first job, at eight year
old. My father asked him if he
could remember any of his child-
hood. He said, he was taken
down to London, black from the
pit, by somebody. Met him at
the pit, went to the train,
whipped him down to London.
That was all; never got to know
anything, he was very secretive
about it. So...My father was

three year old when he come
here. So, he started at the pit.
So there's quite a few years
been spent at the Harraton
Colliery, Cosher (laughs).

EM:

You must tell them about his old
melodeon.

JACK:

He used to enjoy himself when
he got tight at a week-end.
He'd get his old melodeon out,
the button-melodeon and he used
to play the...his favourite
"Anchors are weighed" naturally,
and then "Nancy Grey and Betsy
Grey".

REECE: (Sings) & PETE:

Nancy Grey and Betsy Grey they were
two bonnie lassies,
They built a hoose upon the hill and
covered it ower wi' ashes.

JACK: (Talks)

And he would get a bit exuberant
with the squeeze-box and bust the
bellows and during the week, when
he was sobered up, the glue-pot
would come out and somebody would
be looking for a pair of old kid
gloves to cut a piece of finger
out and patch the bellows up,
ready for the session on the
Saturday night again.

JACK: (Sings)

If you're bad and off your meat
And would like to be put reet,
Take a walk some Friday neet
Up at Stanley Market.
All kinds of doctors there you'll
see,
They're all as busy as can be,
It's who to tell the biggest lee
(lie),
When telling ower what they
can dee (do),
To hear them all, they are that
clever
They can make new lungs and liver,
In fact they'll make you live
forever,
Up at Stanley Market.
Fol de ral de raldy dee
Fol de dal de daldy dee
Fol de ral de raldy day,
Up at Stanley Market.

There they stand and gape and shout,
And when the crowd gets round about,
They'll tell you they can cure the
gout,
Up at Stanley Market.
They preach away and never smile,
It's really grand to see their style,
They can tell a man they can cure
the piles,
Tumours, ulcers, throats or biles.
There they'll stand from six till
ten,
And tell the good they've done for
men,
They think the pitmen doesn't ken
(known)
That gans (goes) to Stanley Market.

And when you get mixed up with the
thrang,
You'll find it hard to travel
along,
And you'll hear some stranger sing-
ing a song,
Up at Stanley Market.
There's a chap wi' second-hand
claes (clothes)
And boots and shoes, he's full o'
praise,
But take no notice of what he says,
He only wants your bits of paws.
There's sausage, ducks and saveloys,
And there's a stall wi' nowt
(nothing) but toys,

To please the little girls and
boys,
Up at Stanley Market.

There's bullets and spice and pies
and wigs,
Taty (potato) choppers, brakes and
gigs,
And you'll often see a chap wi'
pigs,
Up at Stanley Market.
There's black-puddings nearly
white,
They're made to suit your
appetite;
One will serve from six till eight,
They're made to suit the chap
that's tight.
In rain or snow you needn't fret,
There's umbrellas for you to get,
To keep you dry among the wet,
Up at Stanley Market.

There you'll see a grand machine,
It shines like silver, nice and clean
It tries the nerves of fat and lean,
Up at Stanley Market.
There's legs of pork from Rotterdam,
Bacon, beef and homefed-ham,
Blackcurrent and strawberry jam,
And any amount of veal and lamb;
You can get a tip but do not heed
(worry)
If you divent (do not) know how
the horse is bred;
There's pots to stand below the bed,
Up at Stanley Market.

Side I, Band 2:

EM: (Talks)

It's only fragments I can remember
now. Oh, I must have been...Oh...
four or five...When there was
a wedding, the custom was to throw
pennies out and the kids used to
run alongside and they used to say:

(Sings)

Hi, canny man ha' your ha'penny oot?
My father's in the spout and I
canna get him out.
Hi canny man ha' your ha' penny
oot.

JACK:

After the brake trips had gone past...
these people were going for a day
to the seaside or a day at the
town-moor or...Well, naturally they
had money in their pocket. We knew
that.

EM:

There was always a fleet of them
but you caught the first one, you
see, and you picked up what they
had thrown out and you were waiting
for the second one coming on...

JACK:

And you used to sing:

How much has tha gotten (got)?
Only a ha'penny.
The greedy pigs, they might ha' gie
(given) mair (more).
Ha'd tha fa'n gob man, (hold your
foolish mouth) somebody's
passing;
I love Jesus, yes I do.

EM:

Tell them the little play that you
had, New Year's Eve I think it
was, wasn't it, or Christmas.
The Little play.

JACK:

Oh, aye. We used to go round what
we called guising, on Christmas,
when we wanted some coppers, go
round from house to house. You

used to black your face and get
a mask or turn your coat inside
out if that's all you do and you
used to start off:

I life this sneck (latch of a door),
I enter in. I beg your pardon to
begin,
Stir up the fire and make a light,
For in this house there'll be a
fight.

And somebody would come in:

In comes in King George. King
George is my name,
With sword and pistol by my side
I hope to win the game.

The game, sir!

Somebody else:

Come in!
And by my power,
I'll slash you into mincemeat in
less than half-an-hour.

And we'd all join in:

O, what have I done? What have I done?
I've killed my father's only son.
Is there a doctor in the house?
Here comes in old Doctor Brown,
The best old doctor in the town.
Who made you the best old doctor
in the town?

By my travels.

Where do you travel?

England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales,
Back to my own fireside again.

Can you cure a dead man?

Yes. I have a little bottle in my
inside pocket goes Tick tack, rise
up Jack and sing a song.

(SINGS)

Once I was dead but now I'm alive,
God bless the doctor that made me
alive.
A pocket full of money and a
cellerfull of beer,
I wish you a merry Christmas and
a happy new year.

EM:

We used to sing, you know three or
four of us linking arms coming from
school:

My father died a month ago and left
me all his riches,
A feather bed and a wooden leg and
a pair of leather breeches;
A coffee jug without a spout, a
cup without a handle,
A baccy box without a lid, and half
a farthing candle.

DOREEN:

For I hit wor (our) Mick with a
shovel and a pick,
And I made him join the army.

(Laughter)

JACK:

Another one that's a good one is er...
We can all join in with this one.

ALL:

Look on the wall and you'll see a
big spider,
Glory to his big long legs.
Wibbly, wobbly, hit him on the
noddly,
Then we'll have no more cob-webs.

EM:

And there was another one we use to sing:

Tell my ma when I get home,
Boys wont leave the girls alone;
They pull my hair and break my comb,
Tell my ma when I get home.

PAT:

Salvation Army free from sin,
Went to heaven in corn-beef tin,
The tin upset and down they fell,
Instead of going to heaven, they
all went to Hell.

JOHN:

Mary-Anne Teacake, how do you like
my hat?
Upset the tea-pot and nearly killed
the cat,
The cat start to bubble, I hit it
with the shovel,
I knocked it in the corner with the
rheubarb-pudding.

EM:

I saw a mouse run up the wall,
Pit lie idle, pit lie idle,
Saw its arse and that was all,
Pit lie idle, pit lie idle

This was a lullaby that we used to
sing to the bairns when they were
small, and you got them to sleep.

ALL:

I saw a mouse run up the wall,
Pit lie idle, pit lie idle;
Saw its arse and that was all,
Pit lie idle, pit lie idle.

PAT:

Come up and see your granny,
Come up and see her now,
Come up and see your granny,
'Cos she's all brand new,

She's got a broken table,
A chair without a back,
A door without a handle
And a window with a crack.

PETE:

When we were kids we used to do
what you call 'boody concerts',
and your entrance fee was a piece
of 'boody'; this was what you
paid to get in to the 'boody
concert'. Boody was a precious
commodity to children, and it
was little pieces of pottery,
any piece of a broken cup or
anything like that, because cups
were hard to come by. And all
the kids sang a song... who-
ever was running the boody show,
whoever was going to end up as
the boody bandit...the boody
baron of the neighbourhood...
and this was where I first heard
this...was at a boody concert
given by Renie Pearson, the
girl who lived next door to us.

(SINGS)

Where have you been all day,
Henry my son?
Where have you been all day,
my precious one?
Drinking, dear mother, drinking,
dear mother.

O, make my bed for there's pains
in my head,
And I want to go to sleep.

And she sang that song. Her name
is Renie Green now.

JOHN:

We sang that one though: "Where
have you been all day, Henry my
son? Fields, dear mother.
And the next verse was:

Who took you there, my son,
Henry my son?
Who took you there, my son,
my beloved one?
Gypsies, dear mother; gypsies,
dear mother.
O, make my bed, for there's
pains in my head,
And I want to go to sleep.

DOREEN:

What did you eat all day,
Henry my son?
What did you eat all day,
my beloved one?
Snails, dear mother; snails,
dear mother,
O, make my bed for there's
pains in my head
And I want to go to sleep.

EM:

Where Doreen sang "Fields, dear
mother", that ought to have been
the last verse. O, just start
again. Doreen, should you and I
do it?

EM. & DOREEN:

Where have you been all day,
Henry, my son?
Where have you been all day,
my beloved one?
Gypsies, dear mother; gypsies,
dear mother.
O, make my bed there's a pain
in my head,
And I want to go to sleep.

What did you eat all day,
Henry, my son?
What did you eat all day,
my beloved one?
Snails, dear mother; snails,
dear mother.
O, make my bed, for there's
pains in my head,
And I want to go to sleep.

Where did you find the snails,
Henry my son?
Where did you find the snails,
my beloved one?
Churchyard, dear mother;
churchyard, dear mother.
O, make my bed, there's a pain
in my head,
And I want to go to sleep.

What did you have to drink,
Henry my son?

What did you have to drink,
my beloved one?
Water from the flowers; water
from the flowers,
O, make my bed, for there's
pains in my head,
And I want to go to sleep.

Where did you sleep all day,
Henry my son?
Where did you sleep all day,
my beloved one?
Fields, dear mother; fields,
dear mother.
O, make my bed, there's a pain
in my head
And I want to go to sleep.

Side I, Band 3:

JACK:

We went along a bit farther and
nothing could be found,
We came across Durham Gaol and
that we left behind;
The Englishman said it was Dur-
ham Gaol,
The Scotchman he said "Nay!"
Pat said it was a lodging house
and we had no money to pay.
So look at that now,
So look at that now,
Titti fa la fala falay
Titti fala falay.

We went along a bit farther and
nothing could be found,
We came across a hedgehog and
that we left behind.
The Englishman said it was a
hedgehog,
The Scotchman he said "Nay!"
Pat said it was a picushion with
the pins stuck in the
wrong way.

We went along a bit farther and
nothing could be found,
We came across a cow-plat
(cow dung) and that we
left behind;
The Englishman said it was a
cow-plat,
The Scotchman he said "Nay!"
Pat said it was a tea-cake with
the currents all blown away.

(Laughter)

JACK:

Old Johnnie Booker he lived by
himself,
As long as he had perfect health,
He took unto himself a wife
To look after him for the rest of
his life
Singing, I do believe, I
will believe,
Old Johnnie Booker was a gay
old Booker
And a gay old Booker was he.

Now old Ma Booker, she had a bad leg,
The doctor ordered her to bed,
He called Johnnie in and he says to
him:

"You've got to rub your wife's left
leg with gin.
Old Johnnie Booker thought it was
a sin,
To rub his wife's left leg with
the gin,
He poured the gin right down his
throatle,
Rubbbed his wife's left leg with
the bottle.

The Lord made the bees, the bees
made the honey,
The Lord made man and man made
money,
The Lord made Hitler and Hitler mad
sin,
The Lord'll have to make a hole to
put the bugger in.

JACK:

"Where's tha gamin'?" says Billy
the Bob,
"Where are you gamin'?" says
Billy the Bob,
"Where you gamin'?" says Jack my
lad,
"Where you gamin'?" says everyone.

"Well, I'll gan a-shooting", says
Billy the Bob,
"Well, I'll gan a-shooting", says
Billy the Bob,
"Well, I'll gan a-shooting", says
Jack my lad,
"Well, I'll gan a-shooting", says
everyone.

"What'll we shoot?" says Billy
the Bob
"What'll we shoot?" says Billy
the Bob,
"What'll we shoot?" says Jack
my lad,
"What'll we shoot?" says everyone.

"We'll shoot a cock-sparrow," says
Billy the Bob,
"We'll shoot a cock-sparrow," says
Billy the Bob,
"We'll shoot a cock-sparrow," says
Jack my lad,
"We'll shoot a cock-sparrow," says
everyone.

"What'll we dae (do) wi' it?" says
Billy the Bob,
"What'll we dae wi' it?" says Billy
the Bob,
"What'll we dae wi' it?" says Jack
my lad,
"What'll we dae wi' it?" says
everyone.

"We'll sell it for a tanner", (six-
pence) says Billy the Bob
"We'll sell it for a tanner", says
Billy the Bob,
"We'll sell it for a tanner", says
Jack my lad,
"We'll sell it for a tanner", says
everyone.

"What'll we buy?" says Billy the
Bob,
"What'll we buy?" says Billy the
Bob,
"What'll we buy?" says Jack my lad,
"What'll we buy?" says everyone.
"We'll buy a pot of whiskey", says
Billy the Bob,
"We'll buy a pot of Whiskey", says
Billy the Bob,
"We'll buy a pot of Whiskey", says
Jack my lad,
"We'll buy a pot of Whiskey", says
everyone.

"What if we get drunk?" says Billy
the Bob,
"What if we get drunk?" says Billy
the Bob,
"What if we get drunk?" says Jack
my lad,
"What if we get drunk?" says
everyone.

"How'll we get hyem (home)?" says
Billy the Bob,
"How'll we get hyem?" says Billy
the Bob,
"How'll we get hyem?" says Jack my
lad,
"How'll we get hyem?" says everyone.

"We'll ride in a train", says Billy
the Bob,
"We'll ride in a train", says Billy
the Bob,
"We'll ride in a train", says Jack
my lad,
"We'll ride in a train", says
everyone.

"Why, how will we pay him?" says
Billy the Bob,
"Why how will we pay him?" says
Billy the Bob,
"Why how will we pay him?" says
Jack my lad,
"How will we pay him" says everyone.

"We'll pay him with the poker"
says Billy the Bob,
"We'll pay him with the poker"
says Billy the Bob,
"We'll pay him with the poker"
says Jack my lad,
"We'll pay him with the poker"
says everyone.

O, it's nose was a long as the
Temple Bar,
With a ton a bristle on it,
And when its tail was stretched
out straight,
It was larger than the comet.
O, perhaps you may think that
O, it's not all true,
But I don't care a fig;
What I say, I know it's true
About this sucking-pig.

Seven thousand men got set to work
Armed with knives and choppers,
It took them all about seven years
To chop off one of his trotters.

They sent the bones up to the mill,
To grind them into flour,
They filled about seven thousand
bags
In less than half-an-hour.

Side I, Band 4:

CHILDREN'S STREET SONGS AND GAMES

DOREEN:

Old Joe Badger had a little Indian,
Old Joe Badger had a little Indian,
Old Joe Badger had a little Indian,
One little Indian boy.

He had two, he had three,
Little Indians;
Four little, five little, six little
Indians,
Seven little, eight little, nine
little Indians,
Ten little Indian boys. (Etc.)

EM:

Knock at the door. Peep in. Lift the
sneek. Walk in, mind you don't fall
right down there. You know, knock at
the door on your forehead. Peep in,
lift your eyelid up. Lift the sneek,
tilt your nose up. Mind the stairs,
mind you don't fall right down there,
put your finger in your mouth. I
learned 'em that from being very
little.

EM. & DOREEN:

My mother says I never should
Play with the gypsies in the wood.
If I do my ma will say,
"Naughty girl to disobey!"
John get up and light the fire,
Turn the gas a little higher,
Go and tell your Aunt Maria,
Baby's got the toothache.
The night was dark, the grass was
green,
Here comes Tommy with his
tambourine,
Tambourine, tambourine,
Here comes Tommy with his
Tambourine.

EM:

We always said, "Who's going to be
'on'?" "That was the head figure,
of course, in the games. Every-
body stood in a ring and 'on' went
round and counted and repeated this
verse until there was only the one
left and the person that was left
was on, you see.

Iggledy, piggedly, allegaloo,
Dick, stew, molcazar,
Holka-polka, peelagar, la France.

BILLY:

Ickle-ockle black bottle, fishes
in the sea,
If you want a canny lass please
choose me.

BRIAN:

Engine, engine on the line, wasting
water all the time,
How many gallons does it waste in
one hour?

EM:

Oranges, oranges, four a penny,
My father got drunk with eating
so many,
Gee-jar, bull snout, you're in
and I'm out.
Like a dirty dishelout,
Turned inside-out.

PETE:

Mathew, Mark, Luke and John,
Hold my Cuddy (donkey) while
I get on;
If it kicks, pull its tail,
If it shits, hold a pail.

PAT:

There's a games' season and a
ball season and skipping season,
you know. And they take their
tops and whips and roller-skates,
you know. Everything has its
season.

PETE & FAMILY:

What's the one that...

On the mountain stands a lady,
Who she is I do not know,
She has lots of gold and silver,
All she wants is a nice young
man.

So come in my Johnny, dear,
Johnny dear, Johnny dear,
So come in my Johnny, dear,
While I go out to play.

PETE:

There's one skipping in the ropes,
you see; the one comes in...whoso-
ever name it was that was shouted,
you see...

EM:

Pitch, patch, patch my britches,
How many stitches?
One, two, three, four, five,
six, seven, eight...

and as much as you could skip was
the number of stitches it took to
patch your britches.

JOHN:

Hanky, panky, sugar on a hanky,
French almond ROCK.

DOREEN:

One, two, three a-loopy,
Four, five, six, a-loopy,
Seven, eight, nine, a-loopy,
Ten a-loopy oop!

You know, when you threw the
balls that way and then you put
one, two, three, then threw one
ball up, caught it and three...
you know.

DOREEN:

We used to sing:
Will you have a game of golf, sir?
No, sir. Why, sir?
'Cause I've got a cold, sir.
Whereabout, sir?
On my chest, sir.
Let me hear you cough, sir.
Ahem! Ahem! Ahem!

(Laughter)

PAT:

We used to play with two balls up
against the wall and we used to
say:

Orie, Orie, Juggerie, Juggerie,
Onie, Onie, pom-pom ponie,
Aloocalla whiskey, Chinese chunks.

EM:

Of course there was the ring, you
know. Two chosen ones danced on
the inside of the ring:

Now you're married I wish you joy,
First a girl and then a boy;
Seven years after, seven years
older,
Now's the time to kiss and give
over.

PAT:

Comes a little blue-bird through
my window,
Comes a little blue-bird through
my door,
Come a little blue-bird through
my window,
Hi diddle om pom day.

Take a little step and dance in
the corner,
Take a little step and dance on
the floor,
Take a little step and dance
through the window,
Hi diddle om pom day.

EM:

There were two lines, you know, you
faced each other and there was the
Roman soldiers on the one side and
the English soldiers on the other.
And whichever was singing...well,
they danced forward towards the
facing line and they used to sing:

We will bring you bread and wine,
Ee, ee-i-over,
We will bring you bread and wine,
We are the Roman soldiers.

Then the English side dance
forward:

We don't want your bread and wine,
We are the English soldiers.

You must send your captain now,
We are the Roman soldiers.

We will send our captain now,
We are the English soldiers.
And you had a tug-of-war, the two
captains, and whoever crossed the
line, that side had won:

We've got your Roman soldiers.

EM:

My sailor laddie, he's gone far
away,
Red rosy cheeks and black curly
hair,
He'll send me a letter when he's
coming back,
My sailor laddie with his hair
curly black.

BILL:

There came a gypsy riding, riding,
riding,
There came a gypsy riding.
Why are you?

I'm riding here to marry, to marry
etc.

Will you marry me, sir? etc.

You're far too stiff as pokers, etc.

Can bend as well as you, sir.

You're far too black and dirty.

Round and round the bannister,
bannister, bannister,
Round and round the bannister.
Why are you?

LEN:

Our Geordie's lost his penker,*
Our Geordie's lost his penker,
Our Geordie's lost his penker,
Doon the double raw.

It rolled into the cundy*
etc.
So I went and got the claes-prop,
etc.

And I rammed it up the cindy,
etc.
But still it wouldn't fetch it,
etc.

So went and got the terrier,
etc.
And I tied it to the claes-prop,
etc.
And I rammed it up the cundy,
etc.

But still it wouldn't fetch it,
etc.
So went and got gun-powder,
etc.
And I rammed it up the cundy,
etc.

I set fire to the powder,
etc.
There's nowt (nothing) left o'
the cundy, etc.
I've blawn down double-raw,
etc.

Wor* Geordie's found his penker,
etc.

It was in his bloody pocket,
It was in his bloody pocket,
It was in his bloody pocket,
And I've blawn down double-raw.

penker - chief marble.
cundy - grid over a drain.
wor - our

Side II, Band 1:

JACK:

This is an old book, an old diary
belonging to my grandfather. It
starts from 1767. "Explosion at
Fatfield, 39 lives lost, March
the 27th. Thomas Saite beat R.
Smith down the Blackfell with
forty-six ounce bowls. 1866,
February the 24th. The Binding
was at Springwell Colliery.
December the 12th. Explosion at
the Oaks Colliery, upwards of
four hundred men and boys were
lost. October the 31st. Explo-
sion at Pelton Fell Colliery, 24
lost." And there's some poetry
here, aye...pit poetry:

"Who sets men to metal rig,
Has no more idea than a pig
How many stones a man should dig?
J. Hall."

(Must have been quite a character,
this J. Hall!)

"Who stands o'er men just like a Turk,
And tells them to go on and work,
Who when he wrought did always lurk?
J. Hall."

Who when round the pit he goes,
Oft with his workmen he has rows,
But tells the master all he knows?
J. Hall."

(He must have been a bit of a pimp
too.)

Who is it, so the shifters say,
Lay many an hour but got his pay,
In the Blackfell Pit many a day?

Who is it thinks it no disgrace
To smile on Mr. Swallow's face,
Who really is not worth a place?
J. Hall.

Who is it thinks would be as well,
If such as Jack were sent to Hell,
And better men on earth to dwell?
W. Carr."

"November the 17th. Wylam Colliery inundated by the flood which destroyed Tyne Bridge, North Biddick...North Biddick! Buttony Pit we call it...Buttony Bay. The official name is North Biddick but I never knew it as anything else but Buttony.

REECE:

Some used to call it Botany Bay and there was a song...something about Botany Bay, Send you to Botany Bay.

EM:

That's right. Yes, it was supposed that the boats used to come up and bring these prisoners waiting for deportation to work the pits. Let them work the pits during the day and shackle them at night again, chain them at night, you see.

REECE:

Convicts...anything...anybody could get a job in Buttony. And they were importing these Irishmen for to work the pit cheap.

LEN:

Lord Londonderry, wasn't it?

PETE:

Y'know, they got them because the poor Irishmen would work for bloody spuds (potatoes). That's all they had when the potato famine was on. And they brought them over here and put them in what was little more than hovels. They'd work for less wages than the miners locally, you see; so they set a few Irishmen on working for less and then they told the pitmen "Your bloody wages comes down to theirs!" and that was the way the...

LEN:

That was at Seaham wasn't it?

JOHN:

O, the blacklegs was hated...

PETE:

Blacklegs! ...Blacklegs is the lowest of the low.

EM:

There was a tremendous surge of feeling against blacklegs, you know.

JACK:

They used to tin-pan them out of the street.

REECE:

There was about three down this street and two up the next street

that blacklegged, I would say about nineteen-hundred-and-seven. I remember... 'cause I was only a kid. And they come down with their tin-pans and baths, and they would tin-pan outside the doors and shouting "Blacklegs", throwing bits of stones and all sorts up at the windows and that was the end of the blacklegs.

PETE:

My father reckons that there was never a window in people's houses that blacklegged in the '26 strike.

REECE:

The nineteen-twenty six...that's the big strike. The management after nineteen twenty six in this area, and at Harraton Colliery...the manager at that time he picked his men...who he was going to have. From 1926 almost to 1936 was terrible in this area.

JACK:

You couldn't do anything...you daren't answer the bosses back because you know what happened. There was plenty men waiting for your job. We used to work sixteen hours. No overtime...just got what I cut.

REECE:

It was the coal-owners that had the piece-rates screwed down to a fine art, as it was only possible that a man had to be all out to get a living wage in them days. The only thing else was the dole. Now we're talking about the days of the depression. The days of the depression, I had the suit that I went to work at, my pit suit, what I was left with at home was a pair of odd trousers and a jacket and waistcoat. And the staple diet in them days was corn-beef, potatoes, turnip, of course bread, and margarine. No butter.

EM:

As it was a nine-months strike, they just got progressively worse. But the men had to go back, of course, under a reduction. Really they weren't much better after they'd gone back to work. Then, of course, Jack having his accident just before the war broke out and it was an awful time and... Even when Jack was working he was nearly always on night shift, you know, and I had all the worry. When I was first married if Jack didn't come home when he should do. Oh, it use to horrify me.

One of the things that stands out...I must have been very, very young at the time. I remember there was two men killed at the Birtley New Pit. And I'll never forget the indignity of those men being brought home. They picked them up, put them in a sack and trundled them to their home in an open hand-cart. And I was very, very young. I know this man, they called him Fawcett and he'd left seven or eight bairns. And I was only tiny but I remembered them...this hand-drawn cart coming up and these two bundles, you know, and coarse sacking on the thing. And it struck me, what a...no respect for them alive and less for them when they were dead.

JACK:

That was the conditions in those days, it was horrible! But we could still sing at the week-end, anyway. We got a pint or two, got into the club and listened to old Jim Roberts and Bart Bowllemand a few more used to...

EM:

Oh, yes, they were happy days for all that. Any minute there was always somebody singing, either one or the other or we'd all get together.

JACK:

As I was walking home one night as drunk as a man could be, I went into the stable, another man's horse I see; I said "Wife, dearie, Wife, whatever's this I see, Another man's horse, not my old horse, where my old horse should be". She said "You blind fool, silly fool, can't you plainly see, It's only a milking cow my mother gave to me." "Miles I have travelled, ten thousand miles or more, But I bridal on a milking cow I never before did see."

As I was walking home one night, drunk as a man could be, I went into the hallway, another man's hat I see; I says "Wife, dearie, Wife, whatever's this I see, Another man's hat, not my old hat, where my old hat should be". She said "You blind fool, silly fool, can't you plainly see, It's only a chamber-pot my mother gave to me." "Miles I have travelled, ten thousand miles or more, But a hat-band on a chamber-pot I've never seen before."

As I was walking home one night,
 drunk as a man could be,
 I went upstairs to bed another
 man's pants I see;
 I says, "Wife, dearie, Wife, what-
 ever's this I see,
 Another man's pants, not my old
 pants, where my old pants
 should be".
 She said, "You blind fool, silly
 fool, can't you plainly see,
 It's only a pair of bloomers my
 mother gave to me."
 "Miles I have travelled, ten
 thousand miles or more,
 But braces on a pair of bloomers
 I've never seen before".

As I was walking home one night,
 drunk as a man could be,
 I went upstairs to bed, another
 man's face I see;
 I said "Wife, dearie, wife, what-
 ever's this I see,
 Another man's face, not my old
 face, where my old face
 should be".
 She said "You blind fool, silly
 fool; can't you plainly see,
 It's only sister's baby boy, I've
 got in bed with me."
 "Miles I have travelled, ten
 thousand miles or more,
 But whiskers on a baby's face I've
 never seen before".

Side II, Band 2:

JACK:

There was hewing matches down the
 pit. Yes, oh yes! This Towers,
 he couldn't be beat this George
 Towers I was telling you about...

REECE:

Robert Towers!

JACK:

Bob Towers.

REECE:

What they call the County of
 Durham Big Hewer. He was a big
 man. Could you imagine? He was
 18 stone. No fat. Eighteen
 stone of man.

JACK:

Aye. He was a big fella.

REECE:

You never saw any little Big Hewers
 in the County of Durham, they were
 big men, big strong men.

JACK:

He used to eat three chops while
 he was waiting of his dinner, if
 his dinner wasn't ready. And he
 had a Gallows' and trap; that's

a pony and trap, to take him to
 work, and it was there when he
 rode out of the pit, to bring him
 home again. He never had a marrer,
 because there was no-one that could
 keep up with him. A man and a half!

REECE:

Bye, he was a big man.

JACK:

He could fill a set, the chummins
 set was ganning (going) past, he
 could hew them, fill them with a
 pair of broken limmers and a plank,
 haul his gear on the last tub,
 jump on the set and ride outbye;
 he was that good.

The Big Hewer if he wanted a chew
 and he hadn't any baccy, he just
 used to pull a rivet out of the
 tub and chew it with his fingers.
 Of course, The Big Hewer started
 at our pit, at Harraton and they
 hadn't enough money to pay him
 his wages the first week, so they
 just gave him a couple of Gallows
 to make 'em up. Big Hewers, they
 can hew with a pair of broken
 limmers and fill them with a plank.

This Big Hewer was on his death-
 bed; send for his three sons,
 there was Billy, Tommy and Jack.
 So he says: "Well, lads, I haven't
 much time to live," he says..and
 Jack was the blacksheep of the
 family, of course. "Tommy," he says,
 "I'm leaving you a hundred, and
 Billy - you a hundred. And Jack",
 he says, "I can only leave you
 fifty." So Jack says, "Why,
 father," he says, "where the hell
 are you getting all the money?"
 He says, "It's not money I'm talk-
 ing about, it's tokens."

(Laughter)

When the Big Hewer died they didn't
 carry the coffin in the same way as
 they do anybody else. His three
 marrers, then the new marrer,
 carried the coffin, with two pick-
 shafts for handles. They carried
 the coffin; and the last tokens
 that he'd filled were on top of the
 coffin. And when they got to the
 graveside, there was no preacher,
 just the checkweighman; he would
 get up and say a few words; how
 good a workman he was, always
 filled his tubs well up. And his
 new marrer, that took his place,
 he would have to get up and say:
 "Well, I hope that I'll be as good
 as him. I'll try my best but I know
 that I've got a job on. This was
 the Big Hewer's funeral.

Josh Patterson was a Big Hewer,
 not as good as Towers, mind. But
 he was a big strong worker. And
 he couldn't talk about anything
 else but pit work, coal hewing or
 ...and whenever he was in a bar

he was always hewing and, you
 know how many tubs he's getting.
 So somebody says to his mate, he
 said: "I'll tell you what I'll do,"
 he says, "I'll bet you a dollor
 that you cannot get him to talk
 about anything else but coal hew-
 ing." So these two fellows have
 a bet. So one of them goes up
 to Josh: "Josh," he says, "I've
 got an alarum clock there," he
 says, "I've had it to the watch-
 makers," he says, "I've had it all
 over," he says. "I canna get it
 to gang no how." He says, "What
 would thou do wi' it?" He says,
 "I'd hew the face right off the
 bugger."

JACK & REECE:

I'm a celebrated working-man, from
 work I never shirk,
 I can hew more coals than any man
 from Glasgow down to York;
 And if you like to see my style
 then call around on me,
 When I've had several beers in the
 bar-room,
 In the bar-room, in the bar-
 room,
 That's where we congregate,
 To drill the holes and fill
 the coals
 And shovel back the slate;
 And for to do a job of work,
 O I am never late,
 That's providing that we
 have it in the bar-room.

At putting I'm a dandy, I hope
 you will agree,
 And gannin' along the gannin-
 board I make the chummins
 flee;
 Your canny sweeps and back-ower
 turns they never bother me,
 When I'm sitting on the limmers
 in the bar-room.

I can judge a shot of powder to
 a sixteenth of a grain,
 I can fill my sixteen tubs though
 the water falls like rain,
 And if you like to see me in the
 perpendicular vein,
 It's when I'm setting timbers in
 the bar-room.

Now my song is ended, perhaps
 we'll have another,
 Now don't you dire any shots
 in here or we will surely
 smother;
 The landlord here would sooner
 sup beer than go to all
 the bother,
 And to put up the ventilators
 in the bar-room.

JACK:

This big putter was hand-putting
 up at the winning here, you know,
 no ponies. And he's a big lad, Oh,
 he's a lad about seventeen stone.
 So, they sent a laddie in, about
 fifteen year old, to help him up
 ...what they call helping up... So

when the lad he come in, Jimmie says: "What are you going to do, son?" "Why," he says, "the overman sent us in to help you up." "Oh, aye! Why," he says, "here's a bunch of tokens," he says. "When I come to this turn, lash my bloody legs."

(Laughter)

JACK: (Cont'd)

Two ponies work near the shaft, beside the overman's cabin. Why... the overman makes a pet of them, gives them sweets, you know, the hard boiled sweets. And he was in his cabin, you call it, office ... and these two ponies was in the cabin with their heads over the desk, and he's feeding them sweets, you see. And the sonemen came down the pit at half-past four, this is in the afternoon...and they'd been short in their pay, and they were going in to see this overman. And one of them happened to pop in his head at the door. "Oh, Hell! It's no use going in there," he says, "even the bloody Galloways is short."

MALCOLM:

Again this famous Geordie Bennett, who is now a deputy in the Low Main... And he was in the Main Coal when a friend of mine, Eric Turnbull, was putting up there. He was keep getting off the way at this bad turn. And Geordie says: "I...I...I'll stand down here and t...t...t...tell you wh...wh...when to t.t.twine." So Eric says: "Alright, Geordie." So he come down from the flat, from inbye rather, where he's filling, and he's come belting down. Geordie shouts: "T.t.t.t.t...t...ower late! Ower late!"

(Laughter)

JACK:

You gan over the Busty fields to gan down the pit,
You get your lamp out, you gan inbye and there you sit at the kist,
The deputy says, "This place is holed, thou'll ha' to gan straight on",
I says to him: "What's the matter wi' my own?" he says, "She canna gan on."

I filled sixteen out of judd,
Titty fa-la, titty fal-ay;
Hey, by Hell, she was good,
Titty fa-la, titty fal-ay;
I came oot to get a shaft,
The timber it gave a crack,
When a stone fell on me back,
Titty fal-la, titty fal-ay.
Tra-la la-la-la-la, ower the wall,
oot.

Now, you're sure to ken my brother Bill, he's sae full of wit,
He got a job at putting, up at Coshier pit,
Now when Bill comes home from work he's like a drooned rat,
Instead of gannin upstairs to bed, he lies upon the mat;
Now he puts a thousand or more Titty fa-la, titty fal-ay,
They pay him by the score,

He fills his tubs sae quick,
Without any delay,
But he can never find his pick.

Now Jack and Bill two marrers,
were in a public house,
The talk about the cavills, lads,
it wouldn't frighten a mouse;
Jack says to Bill: "By gock, she's hard!
The tops is like bell metal but the bottoms is not so bad.
I only got ten the day,
Titty fa-la, titty fa-lay,
I only got ten the day,
I would ha' gotten* other four,
I was wishing the shift was ower (over),
When the putter got off the way."

Now my name is Jackie Robinson,
my name I do advance,
I drive a little Gallowa', they call him Little Chance;
Two greasy feet, likewise a kittle back,
And gannin along the gannin-board he makes the chummins knock;
I was gannin' around the turn,
Titty fa-la, titty fa-lay,
Chance, he wouldn't haad (hold) on,
The tubs they give a click,
I got off the way to switch,
"You beggar!" I smashed the deputies kist.*

Now me and my wife, my mother-in-law, we went to the silvery sea,
My mother-in-law got into a boat, a sailor she would be;
She hadn't gone passing twenty yards, when all of a sudden there's a shout,
My mother-in-law fell into the sea and there she's spalshing about.
She shouts: "Help, I cannot swim,"
Titty fa-la, titty fa-lay,
I said "Now's the time to try,"
My wife, she says, "You hound, Tha's not ganna watch her drown."
I says: "No, I'll shut my eyes."

EM:

I've never in all my days, I've never met such cheerful people as pitmen going to work. When I go to my daughter's at Fatfield and the men are going to work, without fail when they meet each other there's a witty remark passed. There's not a soul living would believe they were going down a mine to earn their living.

MALCOLM:

This story that I hear coming up in the cage, it wasn't very long ago; the pitmen were talking, and this was quite serious.. the wit that they have there. And...one said to the other: "Why did the chicken cross the road softly?" He said, "Because he couldn't walk, hardly."

REESE:

The discussion in the pub was hewers shifting from one colliery to another. So this man, they

call him Geordie Marsden, and his version of it was this: "Ah, to Hell!" he says, "one colliery is as good as another and a bloody sight better."

JACK:

When I had to go into hospital, the nurse came round with some stuff in a bottle and rubbing your hips...for bed sores, she said, when I asked her what it was for. But she started rubbing me and she says: "Hey, what's this on your hip, this thick skin?" "Oh," I says, "that's the work I do, it's lying, wriggling about." She says: "I've never seen anything like this." I says: "No? What are you doing, by the way?" She says: "I'm rubbing you for bed-sores, so you'll not get sore lying in bed." I said: "Oh, just throw a few small coals in; I'll be happy here."

PETE:

The chaps are talking about the pits being bad, this pit was bad and that pit was bad, and one of the old fellas said: "They want to close all the bloody mines!" you see. So one of his mates said: "Why, what are you going to do for coal, how are you going to keep the fire on?" He says: "Why, anyone'll give you a bucket of coal."

REECE:

It was in the same public-house in Portobello, the discussion was the bonnie cemeteries and churchyards there were, and where they would like to be buried when they die. So this absent-minded Geordie again, he says: "Why," he says, "if I live to be spared, I want to be buried in Birtley."

(Laughter)

JOHN:

He was an Irishman and he'd been over here about thirty years. About two years ago he'd gone back to Ireland for a holiday. And we was sitting over at the club one Saturday night and we got on cracking about this holiday..he'd had in Ireland. And I said to him: "Why, what's it like now, Johnnie?" "Why," he said, "it's a beautiful place, Ireland, I should never have left it." "Oh, ay," I says, "Johnnie, they're as far back as the Chinese. Aren't they?" "Nothing of the sort!" he says: "It's as up to date now as it was thirty year ago".

(Laughter)

JACK:

There was a fellow that was tight and he was going across...going home, he had to cross this field and there was a pond in the middle of the field, you see. And he was standing on the edge and the moon was shining. But the reflection of the moon was in the pond, you see. And he's

swaying and looking down. He says: "How the hell have I gotten up here?"

These two fellas was arguing whether it was the sun or the moon. A foreign fella he come along. He says "Hey Jack, we've got a bet on," he says, "whether that's the sun or the moon." He says: "We want thou to settle it." He says: "Divent ask me. I don't know naught about that. I don't belong about these parts."

There's a lot of superstitious people in the pits and I had a brother-in-law, he used to put the cat in the oven..on cavilling day. Aye! That's a fact. For Luck! Yes, there was a hell of a lot of cats got cremated. They forgot about the cat...if they got a bad cavill, I doubt the cat had had it.

REECE:

When they first put the machines in there was an awful lot of old second-handed stuff and they were having break-downs. And you never knew when you were going to get home. Fourteen hours, sixteen hours, and maybe a couple of shifts. So, they were talking about the length of shifts, the length of hours they'd worked. Johnny come out with this one: "Well," he says, "I don't know," he says, "my own bloody dog turned on us!" he said. "He didn't know who it was, I'd been away that long out of the bloody house."

JACK:

Somebody said: "What time is it, Johnnie?" "Bejeeze" he says, "I don't know what day it is."

(Laughter)

That's real pit humour.

Side II, Band 3:

ALL:

I was gannin' inbye on the injun (engine) plane,
I could hear the putters shouting:
"I'm off the way!
Ah, way! give us a life, my arse is sair (sore),
If I had this tub put I would put nae mair (more)".

JACK:

Oh, I learned it at the pit, on the cutters. They always sing down the pit if they... if things are going right, mind you, they sing. But it was while we were getting out clothes off, or after we were getting finished; had a good shift, maybe a five-hour shift instead of a fifteen-hour shift...we would start and sing. Well, there's something to sing about then.

Was it to the sailor, a tailor ar a clerk,
Or was it to the pitlad that met you in the dark?
It wasn't to the sailor, the tailor or the clerk;
But it was to the pitlad that met me in the dark.

Was it in the kitchen, the parlour or the hall,
Or was it in the backyard right up against the wall?
It wasn't in the kitchen, the parlour or the hall,
But it was in the backyard right up against the wall.

Listen all you maidens, take this as a tip from me,
Never let a pitlad get an inch above your knee;
Let him tie your garter, or squeeze you as he likes,
But never let him wave his Union Jack beneath your apron.

JOHN:

My lad's a canny lad, he works down the pit,
He never comes to see me, unless he wants a bit.

PETE:

As me and me marra was gannin to wark,
Wor met wi' the devil, it was in the dark;
I up wi' me pick, it was in the neet,
I knocked off his horns, likewise his club feet.
So follow the horses, Johnnie me laddie,
Follow the horses, Johnnie lad O,
Follow the horses, Johnnie me laddie,
Hey, lad, lie away, me canny lad O.

O, marra, O marra, O what do you think?
I've broken me bottle and spilt all the drink;
I've lost all me tools amang the big stanes,
Draw me to the shaft, it's time to go gang hame.

As me and me marra was loading the tram,
The light it went oot and me marra went wrang;
Ye would ha' laughed at such a fine gam,
Old Nick got me marra and I got the tram.

Noo here is the timmer and here is the tram,
Two horns full o' grease will mak' to gang;
There's me marra, stretched oot on the ground,
You can tear up his share for his mining's a' done.

GLOSSARY.

AH, WAY!.....An exclamation
BAIRN.....a child
BLAAN.....blown
BOBBIES.....policemen

CANNY.....trim, tide, handsome
CAVILLS.....lots. A periodic allotment of working places at the coal-face.
CLAESPROP.....clothes prop
COO-PLAT.....cow-dung
COSHER.....the Cosher Pit, local name for the Nova Scotia Pit.
CUDDY.....donkey
DIVENT.....do not
DOUBLE RAW.....a double row of houses
GAN, GYAN.....go
GANNIN' BOARD.....a board used for transporting coal from the workings to the crane, flat or station.
GALLOWA'.....(Galloway) a pit pony.
GOB.....mouth
HA'.....have
HA'P'NY.....halfpenny
HOO'LL.....how will
HYEM.....home
INBYE.....in the workings or away from the shaft
JUD.....a portion of the seam prepared for blasting
KEN.....known
KIST.....chest (box) located in the deputy's cabin
LIMMERS.....wooden or steel supports which connect the pit-pony's harness with the leading tub
LOW MAIN.....name given to a particular coal-seam in Durham and Northumberland
MAIN COAL.....name given to a particular coal seam in Durham and Northumberland.
MARRER, MARRA.....mate
MOOSE.....mouse
NE, NA, NAE.....no
NEET.....night
NCO.....now
NOWT.....nothing
OVERMAN.....an underground official in charge of several districts
PENKER.....a glass marble
PUTTER.....one who moves tubs of coal from the workings to flats or stations
REET.....right
SHORT.....to be paid short is to receive less wages than one has earned
SNECK.....the latch of a door
THA.....thou
TIGHT.....drunk
TAE.....to
TARRIER.....a terrier dog
TOKENS.....numbered metal discs used by colliers to identify the tubs filled by them
TRAPPER.....a boy whose employment down the pit consists in opening and shutting a trap-door when required
WOR.....we, and also our
DEPUTY.....an underground official in charge of a district
CUNDY.....A metal grid leading to a drain

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