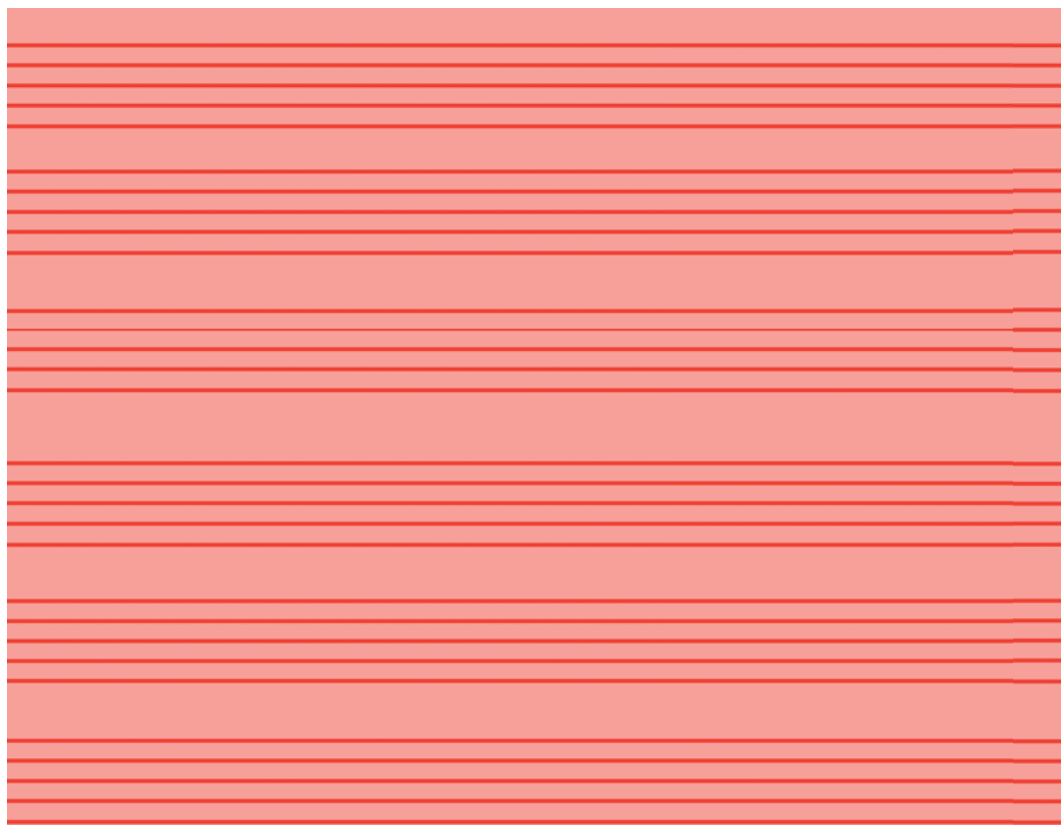


singing  
histories

**London**





London music hall scene

# Contents

4	<b>Foreword</b>	
	<b>The river</b>	
8	<i>London Wherryman</i>	
10	<i>London Steamer</i>	
	<b>Crime and punishment</b>	
14	<i>Wild and Wicked Youth</i>	
16	<i>Wild, Wild Whiskey</i>	
	<b>Love</b>	
19	<i>London Lights</i>	
20	<i>Stanley and Dora</i>	
	<b>Ditties and rhymes</b>	
23	<i>How Many Miles to London Town</i>	
24	<i>London Bridge is Broken Down</i>	
	<b>Trades</b>	
28	<i>A Maiden Came from London Town</i>	
30	<i>Hopping Down in Kent</i>	
32	<i>Lavender</i>	
34	<i>Basket and Chairs</i>	
	<b>War and farewell</b>	
37	<i>Press Gang</i>	
38	<i>The Tower of London</i>	
	<b>City songs</b>	
41	<i>Up To the Rigs</i>	
42	<i>What Will We Do if We Have Got no Money</i>	
44	<i>Maybe it's Because I'm a Londoner</i>	

# Foreword

## Backwards, rewind, play

Londoners have always had a thirst for singing – turning every newsworthy encounter into melodic form. Prior to the days of tabloid newspapers, every battle, murder, hanging, price increase or celebrity fall from grace was put into verse and then type set, illustrated and printed on a broadside press to be sung around the country.

When the broadside trade took off, in the mid 1700s, Seven Dials in Covent Garden became known for its many print houses – each one turning out page upon page of song sheets. These were sold on to an enthusiastic public in their millions and then plastered onto the walls of inns, cow sheds, workhouses and workshops to be recited and absorbed into the public conscience. Distributed via broadside sellers, pedlars and minstrels, these ‘catchpennys’ – as they were also known - used song as a common language: music did not just exist in the ears of London but in its mind and memory too.

Music has always been a feature of everyday society in London, from the singing taverns of the late 17th century to the street traders who advertised their wares by singing in the markets and on street corners. You can still hear market traders today calling out ‘a pound a punnet’ and other slogans – a form of singing advert that travels as far as the voice can carry.

Taverns grew into larger halls where feasting, drinking and smoking accompanied an increasingly diverse and skilful range of entertainers. By the 1850s these ‘music halls’ had developed far beyond just glorified inns. One of the best known of these – the Eagle’s Tavern on Shepherdess Walk in Hackney – became immortalised in the popular rhyme *Pop goes the Weasel*.

*Up and down the City Road  
In and out the Eagle  
That’s the way the money goes  
Pop! goes the weasel*

London continues to be a city of song, capturing the stories and everyday existences of its people. The songs of Londoners have spread down the centuries and throughout the country, passing from generation to generation, community to community – shifting, evolving and defining the emotional landscape of London as it was then and as it still is now.

This collection offers the stories behind some of these songs. We hope you enjoy discovering their hidden meanings and singing your way through London’s history.

*Sam Lee London Links Officer  
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## The river

The river Thames is England's largest river and the second longest in the UK. Rising at Thames Head in Gloucestershire, it eventually exits at the Thames Estuary into the North Sea. London has gained its strength and infrastructure from its position by the Thames and all along the river's banks you can see the architectural relics of industries supported by the river – often directly overlaid by new trades and cultures, as warehouses and power stations are turned into luxury flats, restaurants and galleries.

Take the OXO Tower for instance: constructed as the Post Office's own power station in the 1890s, it then passed into the hands of the 'Liebig Extract of Meat Company' (who made Oxo stock cubes) before being converted to restaurants and galleries at the end of the twentieth century. Just take a stroll along the southern banks underneath the tower and glance around the alluvial sediments: at low tide you can pick out the bones and teeth of ancient cows and horses slung into the tide. How did they get there? Were these rendered down in pre-industrial glue making factories or made into soup stock for national consumption?

The Cambria. The boat once belonging to the singer of the London Wherryman, Bob Roberts



# The London Wherryman

4 Have you ev - er heard tell of a young Lon - don  
 8 wat - er-man? Who, from Black - fri - ars did re - gu - lar -  
 14 ply, And he fea-thered his oars with such skill and dex - ter - it - y,  
 20 Pleas-ing each maid and de - light-ing each eye. And he sang — so  
 26 sweet, he sang so mer - ry The coup-les all jos-tled to hire his  
 31 wher-ry And he be-came known as the young lov - er's fer - ry But  
 he could not find a true love of his own.

Till there came a young goose girl  
 from Stratford St Mary  
 And she wanted taking  
 to Farringdon Fair  
 But she had not the hapney to pay  
 for her wherry  
 And stood on the steps in a pretty  
 despair  
 But she sang so sweet she sang  
 so merry

He put her and all of her geese  
 in his wherry  
 And her pretty face was a fair farer  
 ferry  
 And rode her across to Farringdon  
 Fare  
 They were married next May time  
 in Stratford St Mary  
 And now they have waterman one,  
 two, three, four

And they feather their oars with  
 such skill and dexterity  
 Rowing the people from shore  
 to shore  
 And they sing so sweet, they sing  
 so merry

The couples all jostle to hire  
 their wherry  
 And everyone goes by  
 the Blackfriars ferry  
 While he stays at home with a  
 love of his own

A wherry is a light rowboat that is used for racing or for transporting goods and passengers in inland waters and harbours. In 1555 an Act of Parliament set up the Company of Watermen and Lightermen to control the watermen on the River Thames who were responsible for the transportation of goods and passengers. Today Watermen and Lightermen are still licensed by the Company, with Freeman of the Company eligible to participate in the Doggett's Coat and Badge Race. Winners of the race have the honour of wearing the Scarlet coat, breeches and silver arm badge based on the original costume of 18th Century Watermen.

This romantic tale was sung by Bob Roberts and was probably picked up from either his mother, from who he learned many of his songs, or other bargemen he worked alongside. Born in the village of Hampreston in Dorset in 1907 he went to sea at 15 and worked for many years on sea-going sailing barges, regularly carrying cargo back and forth along the Thames. He skippered the last sailing barge in commercial use – *The Cambria* – which picked up cement from Everard's Wharf at Greenhithe.

Bob Roberts can be heard on the Topic LP *Songs from the Sailing Barges*. Bob's boat *The Cambria* is now being restored and is moored in Faversham in Kent. Bob Roberts can be heard on the Topic LP *Songs from the Sailing Barges*. Topic 12TS 361

# London Steamer

'Arranged - Sally Davies'

Sop. O the Lon - don steam - er sailed a - way When all on

Alto O the Lon - don steam - er sailed a - way When all on

Tenor O the Lon - don steam - er sailed a - way When all on

2

S. board and each heart was gay When all on

A. board and each heart was gay When all on

T. board and each heart was gay When all on

3

S. board and each heart was gay Oh the Lon - don steam - er sailed a - way.

A. board and each heart was gay Oh the Lon - don steam - er sailed a - way.

T. board and each heart was gay Oh the Lon - don steam - er sailed a - way.



All right we were through  
the Channel Downs  
We arrived safely at Plymouth  
Sound  
And we not far did go  
When the Tempest howled and  
the wind did blow

'Twas in the Bay of Biscay, the sea  
run high  
Danger and death was approaching  
nigh  
Nor could their sufferings none  
reveal  
What these poor souls on board  
did feel

Captain Martin around did look  
With a terrible crash our t'gallant  
mast broke  
We worked like Britons with all our  
gallant might  
To save that vessel on that dreadful  
night

Three hundred and seventy dear  
souls afloat  
In the height of the gale nineteen  
took a boat  
Out of the whole but nineteen were  
saved  
Three hundred and fifty met  
a watery grave

A steamer ship

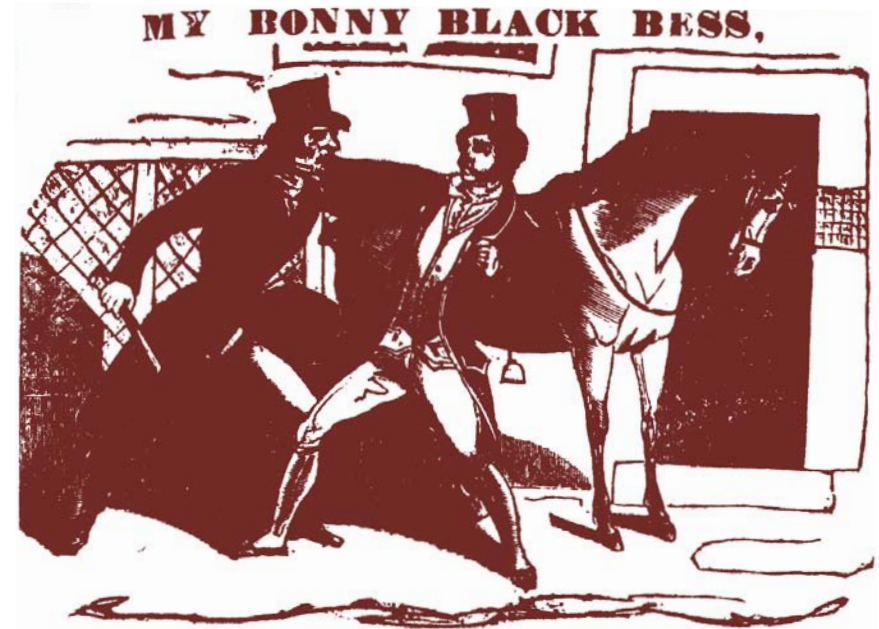


## Crime and punishment

By the start of the 19th century, Britain was the world's leading industrial power and dominated international commerce. London – the main entry point to Britain – became the world's largest port, adapting to accommodate changing technologies such as steamships. By 1886 there were seven enclosed dock systems within the Port of London. The riverside communities of East London also saw new factories, power stations and shipyards spread along the banks of the Thames.

*The London Steamer* comes from the songs of Sam Larner, who was born in 1878 in Winterton, Norfolk. Signed up as a 'Peggy' or cabin boy at only 12 years old, Sam was involved in herring fishing until his forced retirement in 1933. Towards the end of the century, traditional herring fishing techniques were revolutionised and in 1899 Sam got a job on *The Lottie* – one of the 'newfangled' steam drifters. He has said that the work on board these vessels was 'like heaven' in comparison to the old boats; that steam drifters were 'ideal for the job', but not, as the song declares, without their dangers.

This song can be heard on Topic LP *A Garland for Sam*.  
Topic 12T 244



An engraving of Matthew 'Tom' King – Dick Turpin's partner in crime – being seized at Whitechapel. This illustration was used on broadside song sheets such as *Turpin Hero and Bonny Black Bess*.

Notorious criminals have always excited the imaginations of Londoners, from the legendary highwayman Dick Turpin to Jack the Ripper. Sombre figures of retribution – such as reformed thieves who became hangmen – also loomed large. Now layered under tarmac, rerouted, paved over or simply built upon, London's roads are speckled with junctions and pathways at which mystery and misfortune have overcome many an unlucky traveller.

## Wild and Wicked Youth



For at seventeen I took a wife  
 I loved her dearly as I loved my life  
 For to maintain her both fine  
 and gay  
 I took up a robbing on the King's  
 Highway  
 I robbed Lord Dukes I do declare  
 And lovely Nancy with the golden  
 hair  
 We shuttered the shutters, bid them  
 goodnight  
 And carried the gold to our heart's  
 delight  
 Through Covent Garden I took  
 my way  
 With my pretty blowen to see  
 the play  
 Till Fielding's gang did me pursue

Taken I was by the cursed crew  
 But when I am dead and carried  
 to my grave  
 A pleasant funeral let me have  
 Six highwaymen to carry me  
 Give them broadswords and sweet  
 liberty  
 Six blooming girls to bear up my pall  
 Give them white gloves and pink  
 ribbons all  
 When I'm dead they may tell  
 the truth  
 There goes a wild and a wicked  
 youth

Robert Hurr's *Wild and Wicked Youth* is another example of the popular 'goodnight ballads'. It mentions 'Fielding's Gang', which was London's first police force (also known as the Bow Street Runners). Set up in 1749 by the author Henry Fielding, who was also a magistrate at Bow Magistrates Court, it was London's first formalised law enforcement agency. It was financed centrally through the courts, unlike the more common 'thief-takers', who solved petty crime on a freelance basis.

Sung to Vaughan Williams on the 24th November 1910 in Southwold, Suffolk, this song can be found in *Blyth Valley Voices, Folk Songs*, collected by R V Williams and published by EATMT (2003).





# Wild, Wild Whiskey

'Arranged – Sally Davies'

Tenor

5 When first to Lon - don I came down I found emp - loy - ment in

8 Cam - den Town sent mon - ey home and I did no

wrong, till whis - key sang to me, its old sweet song.

11 Chorus:  
S. It was wild, wild whis - key that caused me to roam, It was wild, wild whis - key that

11 Chorus:  
T. It was wild, wild whis - key that caused me to roam, It was wild, wild whis - key that

Chorus:  
B. It was wild, wild whis - key that caused me to roam, It was wild, wild whis - key that

18  
S. caused me to roam, It was bad, bad whis - key made me lose my hap - py home.

18  
T. caused me to roam, It was bad, bad whis - key made me lose my hap - py home.

B. caused me to roam, It was bad, bad whis - key made me lose my hap - py home.

I missed my family and my friends  
and so  
For company to the pub I go  
I started going most every night  
Till whiskey's company was my one  
delight

A gypsy warned me when I was  
a lad  
One day the drink it will drive you  
mad  
I laughed at her 'til the tears ran  
down

But whiskey laughs the longest  
in the pubs round Camden Town

So come all you people sitting safe  
at home  
Who for employment never had  
to roam  
You could wake tomorrow and your  
world's gone wrong  
You'll find yourself joining in  
whiskey's old sweet song

This song deals openly with the consoling company of drink that those taking new life and employment in London often find themselves keeping. Written as an anthem for Camden's Irish community, the sentiment crosses cultures and can be appreciated by any immigrant community starting a new life away from their homeland.

Irish citizens have lived in London for centuries. By 1851 there were more Irish-born people living in London than in any other city in mainland Britain. The 1851 census calculated that 105,548 Irish people lived in London – 4.6% of the total population. Today the London Borough of Brent is home to one of the largest Irish communities in the world outside of Ireland and Kilburn has affectionately been renamed County Kilburn to reflect this.

*Wild, Wild Whiskey* can be heard on Bob Davenport's CD, *The Common Stone*. TSCD552

## Love

Paris in the spring? How about London in the summer, when the city throbs like a cicada and friends and lovers lounge around cafés, piazzas and parks? The native Londoner is not renowned for being an outwardly romantic creature but has been known to break with tradition and whirl a lover off to the Southbank or Hampstead Heath. Hand in hand with love, however, comes loss and London has its fair share of spurned lover's retreats, hideaways and escapes. These songs are a testament to the darker side of love in London, as elsewhere.

The London skyline was first illuminated on 28th January 1807 as Pall Mall became the first street in the world to be lit by gas light. By 1823 there were 40,000 street lamps lighting 213 streets in London. In *London Lights* their melancholic glow illuminates an age-old story, as an unmarried, cast-out mother looks into the glare – exclaiming at their beauty despite her hardship and embittered circumstances.

*London Lights* was sung by Lizzie Higgins, a Scottish Traveller from Aberdeen and is probably a music hall piece that somehow found its way up to North East Scotland. It is a version of a song known often as the *Blue Eyed Lover*, which was popular amongst Gypsy communities (two verses from the Shropshire Gypsy singer May Bradley have been included in this text).

Lizzie Higgins can be heard on the Musical Traditions CD *In Memory Of*. MTCD 337-8

## London Lights



See how that young man learned  
to love me  
And he taught me do the same  
But now he's went away and left me  
And on my brow there's written  
shame.

*Chorus*  
See how those London Lights are  
gleaming  
Through the frost and falling snow  
Sleep on, sleep on my blue-eyed  
treasure  
Your mother's got nowhere to go

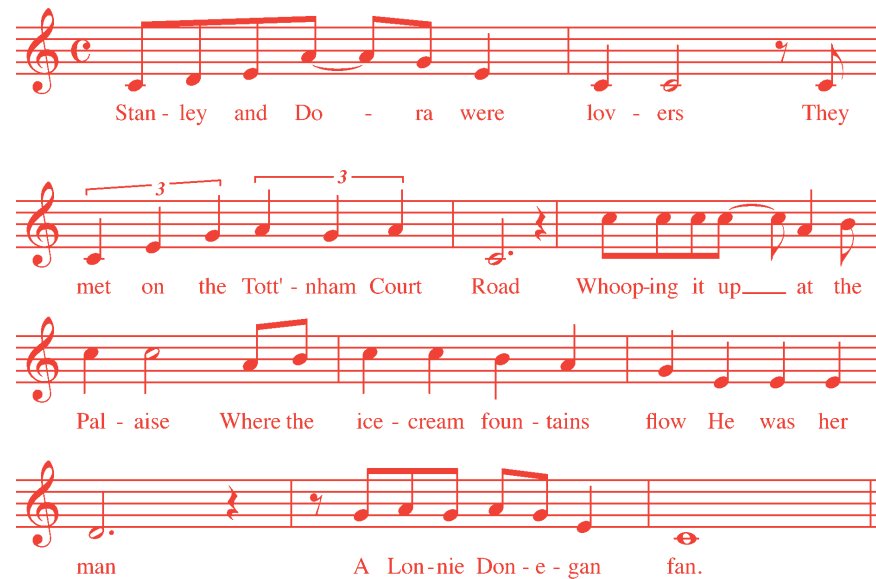
It was those two blue eyes that  
'ticed me  
'Ticed me from my happy home  
Although he ran away and left me  
He is the father of my child

*Chorus*  
See how my sisters they despise me  
And my brothers do the same  
For father says he will not own me  
And my mother hangs her head in  
shame.

*Chorus*  
Although my clothes are going  
ragged  
Still they'll keep my baby warm  
Sleep on, sleep on my blue eyed  
treasure  
Your father won't be very long

*Chorus*

## Stanley and Dora



Stanley and Dora were lovers  
They met on the Tottenham Court  
Road  
Whooping it up at the Palaise  
Where the ice cream fountains flow  
He was her man  
A Lonnie Donegan fan

Now Dora worked at the Pavilion  
The best usherette in the flicks  
She sold Stan a ticket for 1 and 9  
When it ought cost 4 and 6  
He left his cosh  
In his mackintosh

Now Dora was swiftly promoted  
To the circle she rose in a dream  
When who should she see but  
young Stanley  
With the chick what sold ice cream  
He chucked her up  
For a Walls' Ice cup

But justice came soon to poor Dora  
For Stan and his Walls' ice cream  
They both got killed in the rush  
for the exit  
When they played God Save  
our Queen  
God save our Stan  
The only one what can

The skiffle boom of the late 1950s, pioneered by the late Lonnie Donegan, brought the fresh new sound of American Rhythm and Blues to the UK. Instantly London became full of clubs and music nights emulating the style and energy of this fashionable culture. *Frankie and Johnny* became a popular hit of this genre, helping lay the seeds for the Rock and Roll revolution.

Somewhere during this musical fervour the tune to a popular song from 1904 – *Frankie and Johnny* – was used for a new set of lyrics that captured a shift in attitude in England. Remember that this song was set during a period when people were beginning to call into question the acceptability of singing *God Save our Queen* before or after every cinema showing, theatre production and music concert. The times they were a changin'!

The words can possibly be attributed to Ron Gould.



Theatre goers in the 1950s



## Ditties and rhymes

*Boys and girls come out to play,  
The moon doth shine as bright as day.  
Leave your supper and leave your sleep  
And join your playfellows in the street.*

Regardless of time or place – from an Elizabethan street scene to a bombed out Second World War ruin – children have always been the true masters of the streets. They embellish, furnish and theatricalise their turf through games, dances, stories and songs. In the process they develop their own unique folklore. This oral lore, like all folklore, is constantly evolving and being eroded, guided by the same laws of adaptation, repair and survival that govern our natural world.

'It sometimes happens that a rhyme or song which seems to be recent has in fact been marching with history for centuries changing during the years little more than its uniform before appearing on each new battlefield.'

*Opie: Lore and Language of School Children.*

Rhymes and ditties turns out to be some of the most recognised and frequently sung music in the world and we have to ask: does this reflect the strength of the song, the strength of the collective memory of the communities that sing them or the importance and purpose they serve as social play-dough?

## How Many Miles to London Town

How man - y miles to Lon - don Town? Three score and ten. Can I get there by can - dle - light? Yes and back a - gain. O - pen the gates and let me through. Not with - out a beck and boo. There's the beck, there's the boo. O - pen your gates and let us through.

This school ground rhyme and game is more often named *How many miles to Babylon* (or Bethlehem). Its transfer to London suggests the timeless association of the city with other historically significant imperial centres. In the late 1980's graffiti around the Hackney Marshes proclaimed the insightful word 'Babylondon', echoing back to the twelfth century when a section of London Wall was named 'Babylone'.

As Peter Ackroyd writes of the song: "Although the derivation and meaning of this verse is unclear, the image of the city seems to assert itself as a potent beckoning force; in a variant of this song 'Bethlehem' takes the place of Babylon, and may point to the madhouse in Moorfields rather than any more remote destination."

# London Bridge is Broken Down



London Bridge is broken down  
Broken down, broken down  
London Bridge is broken down  
My fair lady

Build it up with wood and clay  
Wood and clay, wood and clay  
Build it up with wood and clay  
My fair lady

Wood and clay will wash away  
Wash away, wash away  
Wood and clay will wash away  
My fair lady

Build it up with bricks and mortar...  
Bricks and mortar will not stay...  
Build it up with iron and steel...  
Iron and steel will bend and bow...  
Build it up with steel and gold...  
Silver and gold will be stolen away...  
Set a man to watch all night...  
Suppose the man should fall asleep...  
Give him a pipe to smoke all night...

Claes Van Visscher's depiction of Old London Bridge in 1616. Southwark Cathedral is in the foreground. In the lower right hand corner you can see criminal's heads displayed on spikes above Southwark Gatehouse



The mysterious symbolism of this song probably originates from several stories about the destruction of London Bridge. At the same time, it also refers to the symbolic implication of bridging and thus taming a river.

The current London Bridge, built in 1759, is located near the site of the first known crossing over the Thames – a Roman bridge which dates back around 2,000 years. However, in 60AD the bridge and trading settlement were destroyed by Queen Boadicea. King Olaf of Norway repeated this destruction in 1014, when he tied his boats to the timber piles in order to dislodge them and collapse the whole structure into the river.

In less precarious times, 138 houses were famously built on the bridge in 1757, including a public latrine ('vertically plumbed' direct into the river). When this structure was finally demolished it was for the unromantically utilitarian purpose of road widening.





The tobacco trade was part of the trade linking exports of manufactured goods from Britain to the North American and Caribbean colonies. Image copyright National Maritime Museum

## Trades

The position of London by the Thames estuary means that it has been the main centre of trade for Britain, from Roman times to the present day. During the 18th century, Britain rose to a dominant position among European trading empires and ships from all over the world brought a wide range of goods to London, before filling up with local produce to export abroad. As a result, people came to London from all over the country to benefit from this huge expansion in trade.

Since 1133, Bartholomew Fair, based in Smithfields, held pride of place for Londoners as the most prolific and popular market and trade fair of the year. Starting on St Bartholomew's Day on 24th August, it ran for anything from three days to three weeks. It was finally stopped in 1855 through local opposition and steady suppression by the London Authorities.

It was both larger and older than the Barnet, Southwark, Greenwich and Fairlop fairs – London's significant rivals. Initially a trade fair, it became popular for its theatrics and entertainment (like a latter day Glastonbury Festival), which made it the most anticipated highlight of the summer. Steve Roud's book, 'The Folklore of London,' describes it thus: 'Particularly known for its large booths, presenting everything from Shakespeare to the latest comedies and farces; in addition there were puppet shows, dancing booths, menageries, wild beast shows, tightrope walkers, freak shows, gingerbread stalls and of course every kind of food and drink imaginable, but particularly roast pork!'



## A Maiden Came from London Town



This song comes from the singing of Stanley Robertson, a Scottish Traveller living in Aberdeen. He was taught this song as a child along with many other ditties and ballads around the camp fire. *A Maiden Came* is a song he learnt from his Aunt Jeannie, though how she learned it is anybody's guess. It remarks upon two separate trades which have long been competing for the title of 'oldest trade in the world': a case of, 'which was sold first, the chicken or the egg?'

The pox here most likely refers to syphilis, a sexually transmitted disease often cited as being brought over in 1490 from the Americas. The incurable affliction was treated by many lethal methods, with mercury being the most popular. This treatment gave rise to the saying: 'A night in the arms of Venus leads to a lifetime on Mercury'.

Apples and pears kind sir she says  
come taste them if you please  
And if there's anything else you'd  
like please ask them at your ease  
With me tarren-en tonight tennay  
sing righ fe lar re lye  
With me tarren-en tonight tennay  
sing righ fe lar re lye

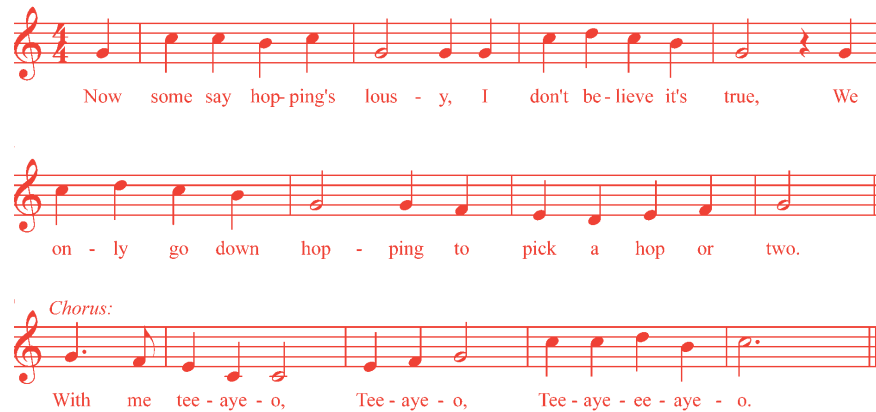
What would you take my fair pretty  
maid to lye a night with me  
And I will give you all I can I'll be  
good company  
With me tarren-en tonight tennay  
sing righ fe lar re lye  
With me tarren-en tonight tennay  
sing righ fe lar re lye

They both went back to London  
town and there the room they went  
And there he hired this fair pretty  
maid for but he would not pay his  
rent  
With me tarren-en tonight tennay  
sing righ fe lar re lye  
With me tarren-en tonight tennay  
sing righ fe lar re lye

Serves you right you silly wee lass  
for opening up your door  
Not a penny I shall give for I am very  
poor  
With me tarren-en tonight tennay  
sing righ fe lar re lye  
With me tarren-en tonight tennay  
sing righ fe lar re lye

Well I hope that you enjoyed  
yourself for playing up my locks  
I'll have the last laugh cause I've left  
you with the poxs  
With me tarren-en tonight tennay  
sing righ fe lar re lye  
With me tarren-en tonight tennay  
sing righ fe lar re lye

# Hopping Down in Kent



Now when I went a hopping,  
hopping down in Kent  
I saw old mother Reilly a sweeping  
out her tent  
With me Tee-i-o, tee-i-o, Tee-I ee-I oh

Every Monday morning just at  
6 o'clock  
You'll hear the old hoppers calling  
get up and boil your pot

Now Sunday is our washing day  
don't we wash it clean  
We boil it in our hopping pots and  
hang it on the green

Now do you want any money?  
Yes sir if you please

To buy a hock of bacon and a pound  
of mouldy cheese

Now here comes our old measurer  
with his long nose and chin  
With his 10 gallon basket and don't  
he pop 'em in

When our old pole puller, he does  
come around  
He says come on you dirty old hop  
pickers, pick em up all off the ground

Now hopping is all over, all the  
money's spent  
And don't I wished I never went  
a hopping down in Kent

Hops are flowers that are picked and added to beer during the brewing process to give it its bitter flavour. It is thought they were brought to England in approximately 1520 and the first hop garden was established near Canterbury. The hops begin to flower in July, growing petals and leaving a cone in which the yellow lupulin glands that are responsible for the bitter taste are formed. By September the cones are ready to be picked.

Hopping was big work for the families of South East London as well as Gypsies, who dominated the workforce (including the contributor of this song, Louie Fuller). Having spent the summer travelling the country picking fruit and vegetables – such as cherries, strawberries, beans and peas – the pickers would gather in September to collect Kent's most famous crop. To the working-class communities of South East London, hop picking was considered a working holiday and whole families would travel into the 'garden of England'.



Hop-pickers in Kent

# Lavender, a Street Cry

Kennedy, Folksongs of Britain & Ireland 1975



1. Won't you buy my sweet bloom-ing lav - en - der? There are  
six - teen blue branch - es a pen-ny, all in full<sup>3</sup> bloom. 2. You buy them  
once, you buy them twice It makes your clothes smell sweet and nice. 3. Come  
all you young la - dies and make no de - lay My lav - en-der's fresh from  
Mit-cham and we're round once a day. 4. Some they're large and  
some they're small Please take them in and show them all. 5. 'Twas  
ear - ly this morn-ing when the dew was a - fall - ing I ga-thered my sweet



1 la-ven-der from the val-ley, all in full bloom. 6. Now's the time to scent your  
clothes and pock-et hand - ker-chiefs And to keep those moths a -  
way. 7. Won't you buy my sweet bloom-ing lav - en-der? There are  
six - teen blue bran - ches a pen - ny all in full<sup>3</sup> bloom.

Mitcham Common, according to the census of 1881, was home to some 230 Romany Travellers and was a key place for the cultivation of herbs, particularly lavender. Bunches of lavender would be bound up by Gypsy hawkers and sold on London's streets. To advertise their wares, the sellers would sing a lavender cry to draw attention. This exotic melody would vary from hawker to hawker but was always derived from a common melody.

Janet Penfold and her mother Florrie were probably the last lavender sellers in London to sing this cry when they were recorded in 1958. They would get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to walk from Battersea to Mitcham, pick the flowers "while the dew was still on" and return to sell them throughout Chelsea, Pimlico and Sloane Square. 'It was my grandmother learned us. They done it all their life and it sort of come through from generation to generation. It's because they like the smell of it and the people like to hear the London cry' (Florrie Penfold aged 70 years).



## Basket and Chairs

Karpeles, Cecil Sharp Collection 2



For I say, ladies don't delay  
Come and buy your chairs  
and baskets today  
Buy 'em of the maker  
For we are sons of the jolly  
basket makers

We mean to sell 'em all and  
make no more  
Come and buy your parlour  
rugs today  
Buy 'em of the maker

This song, similar to the *Lavender Cry*, was sung as a way of attracting customers to buy the wares on offer. Travelling communities were often traders and came to buy and sell at fairs around London. Economic changes in the 20th Century, as well as technological leaps in industrial manufacturing, made some of the traditional trades obsolete.

This song was sung to Cecil Sharp on 16 May 1908 by Agnes Collins, a Gypsy van seller, in Adelaide Road, Hampstead. The melody for the last verse was never notated and is therefore left to you to improvise, either using the theme or not. The varied phrase lengths offer a multitude of interpretations.

## War and farewell

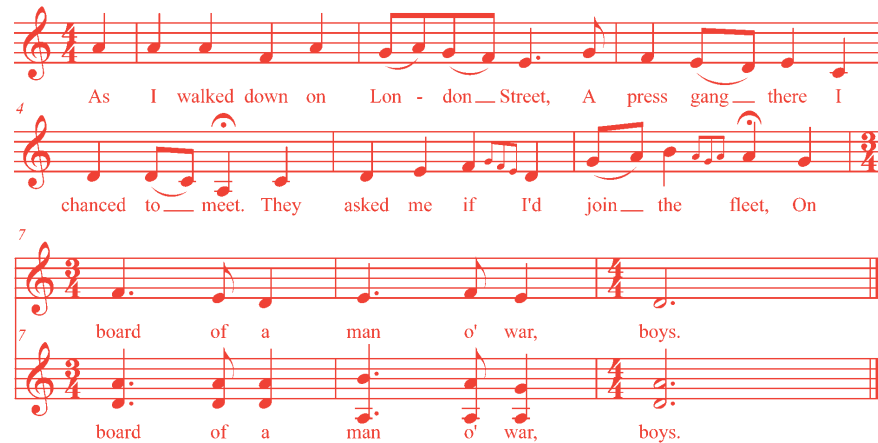
London is the control centre of Britain's military power, but has also witnessed its fair share of uprisings by its citizens. From the 'Battle of Trafalgar' poll tax riots of 1990 to 1936 Cable Street riots in the East End, certain areas of the city are inextricably linked to the brutal clashes between London's citizens and its law enforcement agencies.

On 2nd June 1780 London experienced a great uprising known as the Gordon Riots aimed against the Papist Act of 1778, 'Relieving his Majesty's subjects of the Catholic religion from certain penalties and disabilities imposed upon them during the reign of William III.' This act was implemented as a way of encouraging Catholics (previously excluded from the British Army for having to take the Protestant religious oath) to join the armed forces and fight in the American War of Independence. The ensuing uprising saw martial law declared across the City as a crowd of over 40,000 laid siege to important landmarks, such as Newgate prison and the Bank of England, as well as churches and homes.

The army also employed more devious ways of recruiting men (and occasionally women) and the press gang phenomenon gripped the public imagination like a grown man's Bogymen. Songs arose from these reckless gangs gleaning the city taverns and occasionally civic buildings for young blood to man the war ships.

# The Press Gang

'Arranged – Sally Davies'



Come brother shipmates tell me true  
What kind of a treatment they  
give you  
That I may know before I go  
On board of a Man o' War Boys

When I got there to my surprise  
All that they told me was shocking  
lies  
There was a row and a jolly old row  
On board of a Man o' War Boys

The first thing they done they took  
me in hand  
They lashed me with a tar of  
a strand

They flogged me till I could  
not stand  
On board of a Man o' War Boys

Now I was married and my wife's  
name was Grace  
T'was she that led me to shocking  
disgrace  
T'was she that caused me to go  
away  
On board of a Man o' War Boys

When next I get my foot on shore  
To see those London girls once more  
I'll never go to sea no more  
On board of a Man o' War Boys



The forcible enlistment of soldiers through the 'press gangs' was once quite common and during the 18th century, seventy percent of soldiers were 'pressed' into the King's fleet by this method. Teams called 'Lobsters' roamed the streets for hapless victims and kidnapped able-bodied men. Understandably, this caused widespread discontent throughout 'press-scoured' districts and many songs have grown out of the pain of lovers being separated. However, it was not unknown for protective parents to pay off the 'Yellow Admirals', leaders of these gangs, to 'remove' unwanted lovers. From the singing of Ewan MacColl: Antiquities SMDCD149

# Tower of London or the Female Drummer

From the singing of Ewan MacColl

When I was a young girl the age of six - teen, I from my par - ents  
ran a - way and went to serve the queen; I \'list - ed in the arm - y like an -  
oth - er pri - vate man And ver - y soon they learnt me for to beat u - pon the drum,  
For to beat u - pon the drum, for to beat u - pon the drum, And  
ver - y soon they learnt me for to beat u - pon the drum.

Female soldiers and sailors were rare but celebrated figures and fought bravely while trying to keep their identity disguised. Hannah Snell (1723–1792) was one of the most famous of these valiant women. She fought in battles across the world and after finishing her service – and subsequently revealing her gender to her shipmates – she was granted a military pension. Married three times, she went on to open a pub in Wapping called the *Female Warrior*.

This song was recorded by Ken Stubbs from the singing of Elizabeth Smith in Surrey, 1966. It is included in the book *Life of a Man* (1970).

They sent me to my quarters, they  
sent me to my bed  
And lying by a soldier's side I did not  
feel afraid  
For in taking off my red coat I often  
times did smile  
To think myself a drummer but  
a maiden all the while...

They sent me up to London for there  
to mind the Tower  
And there I might have been until  
this very day and hour  
Till a young girl fell in love with me,  
I told her I was a maid  
She went unto my officer, my secret  
she betrayed...

My officer sent to see me to see  
if it was true  
I smiled, oh I smiled, I told him  
it was true  
He looked upon me kindly and these  
are the words he said  
It's a pity we should lose you such  
a drummer as you made...

Oh fare you well, dear officer,  
you have been kind to me  
And fare you well, dear Colonel, will  
you please remember me  
If the war it should break out again  
and you are short of men  
I'll put on my hat and feathers  
and I'll beat the drum again...



Hannah Snell



## City songs

Not only have Londoners written songs about mischief and illegal behaviour but they have used music itself as a means to regulate misdemeanours and petty crime and admonish those who step out of line with the community's code of conduct. The tradition of 'rough music' is an example of this – a practical way of keeping law and order as exemplified in the following account about the hat-dyeing industry in Southwark around 1770: 'They took one of their brother journeymen into custody, whom they charged with working over hours without anymore pay, and for taking under price. They obliged him to mount an ass [backwards usually] and ride through all the parts of the Borough where hatters were employed... a label was carried on a pole before him, denoting his offence; and a number of boys attended with shovels, playing the rough music; at all shops they came to in their business, they obliged the men to strike, in order to have their wages raised.'

More ferocious forms of 'Rough music' were employed to drive out unwelcome neighbours. This could last legally for up to three nights, with pots, pans, shovels and dustbin lids being bashed by a mob outside the victim's home. It was generally inflicted on those who crossed the mark of reasonable domestic behaviour, including widows and widowers who married too soon, adulterers and those breaching the parameters of sexual morality.

## What We Do if We Have Got no Money



What will I do if I'd marry a tinker?  
*All true lovers, what will we do then?*  
 Only sell a tin can and walk on with me man  
*And we'll yodel it over again*  
 What will we do if we marry a soldier?  
 Only handle his gun and we'll fight for the fun

What will we do if we marry a sailor?  
 Only sail on his ships and we'll play on his lips  
 What will we do if we have a young daughter?  
 Only take her in hand and walk on with me man

From the singing of Mary Delaney, still said to be alive today and living in London. Mary is an Irish Traveller, blind and a singer of terrific vigour. Her repertoire includes many old songs learnt from her family as well as ditties, such as this one, which have no known origin but were probably invented around the fires and on the road. This song was recorded from Mary while she was living in a caravan underneath the Hammersmith flyover. The song was recorded by Jim Carroll and Pat Mackenzie and can be heard on the Musical Traditions CD Puck to Appleby Fair. 325-6.

## Up to the Rigs of London Town



She took me to some house of fame  
And boldly did she enter in  
Loudly for supper she did call  
Thinking I was going to pay for it all

The supper o'er, the table cleared  
She called me her jewel and then  
her dear  
The waiter brought white wine  
and red  
While the chambermaid prepared  
the bed

Between the hours of one and two  
She asked me if to bed I'd go  
Immediately I did consent  
And along with this pretty girl  
I went

Her cheeks was white and her lips  
was red  
And I kissed her as she laid in bed  
But soon as I found she was fast  
asleep

Out of the bed then I did creep  
I searched her pockets and there  
I found  
A silver snuffbox and ten pound  
A gold watch and a diamond ring  
I took the lot and locked me lady in

Now all young men wherever you be  
If you meet a pretty girl you use  
her free  
You use her free but don't get plied  
But remember me when I was up  
Cheapside

Before the London Blitz of 1940, Cheapside was one of the main markets of London. It traded much of the food produce that is recorded in the local street names – Milk Street, Poultry, Bread Street and Honey Lane. Cheapside is a common English street name meaning market-place, from the Old English word 'ceapan', meaning 'to buy'.

Charles Dickens, Jr. wrote in his 1879 book *Dickens's Dictionary of London*: 'Cheapside remains now what it was five centuries ago, the greatest thoroughfare in the City of London. Other localities have had their day, have risen, become fashionable, and have sunk into obscurity and neglect, but Cheapside has maintained its place, and may boast of being the busiest thoroughfare in the world, with the sole exception perhaps of London-bridge.'

This misogynistic tale of deceit and wanton theft was very popular amongst country singers but not often noted down by Victorian and Edwardian collectors (who probably deemed it far too vulgar). Luckily this version was recorded from the Dorset singer Charlie Wills, born in 1875. He was taped in 1952 by Peter Kennedy singing this song with magnificent glee and spirit. It can be heard on the CD *Voice Of The People: First I'm Going To Sing*. TSCD 657

## Maybe it's Because I'm a Londoner

4 May-be it's be-cause I'm a Lon-don-er That I love Lon-don so—

7 — May-be it's be-cause I'm a Lon-don-er That I

10 think of her wher-ev-er I go I get a fun-ny feel-ing in-

14 side of me When walk-ing up and down— May-be it's be-cause I'm a

Lon-don-er That I love Lon-don Town. Town.

Gregg Hubert is the forgotten composer of this song. He wrote the classic in 1944 – after watching German doodlebugs flying over his home – and described it as 'a love song to my city'. Like the best songs, it entered quickly into the communal repertoire and is often thought of as an older song than it actually is.





# Credits

Further materials relating to these songs can found in the following libraries and archives:

Vaughan Williams Memorial Library at Cecil Sharp House – [www.efdss.org/library.htm](http://www.efdss.org/library.htm)

National Sound Archive at The British Library – [www.bl.uk/nsa](http://www.bl.uk/nsa).

Further EFDSS resources on folk song can be found at:

[www.funwithfolk.com](http://www.funwithfolk.com)

[www.teachingfolksong.com](http://www.teachingfolksong.com)

<http://library.efdss.org/archives>

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