One Saturday evening in 1953, Alan Lomax and Peter Kennedy, with tape-machine in tow, visited The Ship Inn, a pastoral public house situated in the village of Blaxhall, Suffolk, East Anglia. The Ship was by that time already well-known for its vigorous afternoon sessions of folk-singing and step-dancing, which had been going strong since at least the early days of the century.

Under the stern direction of chairman Wicketts Richardson — who calls the crowd to order and announces the singers — “the old boys” performed ballads (“The Three Jolly Sportsmen”), topical pieces (“The Bonny Bunch of Roses”), bawdy numbers (“The Nutting Girl”), and step-danced to tunes pumped out on the melodeon, while the publicans, Mr. and Mrs. Hewitt, kept the pint glasses filled.

“In 1955, Kennedy and Lomax returned to Blaxhall, where they made a short film, called “Here’s A Health to the Barley Mow” and featuring many of the same singers on “Singing At the Ship.” It can be viewed online via the East Anglian Film Archive.)

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