FROM HERE AND THERE

Alan Lomax’s 1951 gleanings of children’s lore were gathered in a crowded city, a sparsely populated island, a suburban street in Aberdeen, a school playground in Edinburgh, a vigorous singing class in South Uist, and in quiet conversations with people not yet famous.

Early in his visit to Scotland, Lomax had the good fortune to encounter the remarkable and gifted collector of children’s lore, James T. Ritchie, whose books and films give an unparalleled view of the richness of Edinburgh children’s games, songs, and play activities in the 1950s. Ritchie led one of his principal informants, sweet-voiced Peggy MacGillivray, through the complexities of skipping game and song. Lomax’s subsequent visit to record Ritchie’s Norton Park pupils reprising their singing role in Ritchie’s film The Singing Street provides a neat comparison between MacGillivray’s singing style in an interview context and singing with her peers in the natural open-air habitat of the songs.

Later in his visit, Lomax recorded a group of Aberdeen children under the leadership of 10-year old Jack Mearns, who 50 years later provided a fascinating account of Lomax in action and reconstructed who performed what.

We have included a number of English rhymes on this CD, in part because Lomax recorded very few children’s songs in England in 1951, and in part because of the high quality of the material from singer Ewan MacColl. His upbringing in a Scots family living in Salford, England, gave him a wonderful command of Scots adult song, yet the childlore he recorded here for Lomax was almost all English.

Alan Lomax’s continuing interest in children’s game songs led to the creation of a wonderful CD (Rounder CD 1716) and a book on children’s game and pass-play songs in the eastern Caribbean, Brown Girl in the Ring: An Anthology of Song Games from the Eastern Caribbean, written with J. D. Elder and Bess Lomax Hawes (1997).

CONTINUOUS RE-CREATION

These recordings are not nursery rhymes — rhymes or songs taught by adults to children. Rather they are the folklore of children themselves, first heard from their pre-teen elders, learned along with their peers aged seven to ten, and abandoned when puberty struck. Some of these children’s songs travel the globe in multiple guises. Others droop and wither before they can be collected and preserved. Those that survive adapt to local languages and conditions, and versions multiply like those of the Child ballads made and preserved by adults. The children’s songs are created and re-created as they are adapted, glued together, or chopped into fragments. They drop their tunes and become rhymes, other tunes are then applied to them. Sense becomes nonsense and is rewritten to become sense again.

They function to develop language, memory and physical co-ordination. Children utilize many of them to accompany physical play activity: group or individual selection for games (“counting out” and elimination), group game songs, for use with a ball, and for skipping, hand-clapping, elastic ropes, and so forth. Others are used for performance and include
wordplay and parody verses, or narrative ballads of more than one stanza, often featuring surreal humor.

In general, the girls learn and use the play songs, and the boys sing the songs about football and violence and earth, bawdy songs and rhymes. Some performance songs and ballads are performed in common by girls and boys. Many songs of all types exist in both bawdy and “polite” versions (see “Aunty Mary Had a Canary”), but few bawdy songs were offered to Lomax; children tend to protect tender adult ears.

Variants of songs and rhymes blossom like flowers in a meadow, but children and adults tend to have strong views about which text is the “correct” one, the associated activities, and where the songs originated. “The Wind Blows High” is considered to be Irish because the folk group the Dubliners recorded an Irish version; “Johnny Todd” is stated to be from Liverpool because the tune was used for a TV police drama series set in that city; the Newcastle version of “When The Boat Comes In” is claimed as the original and definitive text. Yet there are old, distinctively Scots versions of all three songs.

HOW MANY SONGS?

Here is a small number-crunching exercise to illustrate variety and change in the repertoire. Of the 50 Scottish and 20 English children’s songs and rhymes on this CD, only 10 overlap with the 130 or so that Gavin Greig and Rev. James Duncan* collected in Northeast Scotland in the early twentieth century. In the 1960s and ’70s, the teacher Ian Davison collected over 500 distinct songs, rhymes, and ballad fragments from Glasgow schoolchildren and found versions of 15 of the items on this CD. (Although versions of nine items included here were found both by Greig-Duncan and Davison, the texts in each collection vary radically.) Finally, of the 18 items from the streets of Salford in the early 1920s recalled here by Ewan MacColl, only two were also collected by Lomax in Scotland.

TWO TO SING

Some of the songs heard on this disc are always associated with particular tunes, but many draw on a limited supply of floating tunes that are amended as they are applied to and shuffled for texts. They include march and dance tunes, music hall tunes, and the tunes of popular songs. Mostly only the first strain of a melody is employed, sometimes only the first line.

A few tunes that are applied to numerous children’s texts have a long Scots pedigree. The internationally known tune for “London Bridge” derives from one part of the nine-part “Gabhaidh Sinn An Rath Mor” (“We Will Take the High Road”) bagpipe march that in the fifteenth century belonged to Clan MacIntyre of Cruachan. The march was appropriated by the Stewarts of Appin, who played it in battle. This eventually led to it being called the “Sherramuir March,” a Scots text about the 1715 Battle of Sheriffmuir. “The Merry Matanzie,” more widely known as “The Mulberry Bush” or “Nancy Dawson,” appears in the Scottish Skene manuscript of around 1620.

IN PERFORMANCE

We are fortunate that these recordings include not just lyrics, tunes, and descriptions of how the songs and rhymes were used, but also a variety of performance styles. Alan Lomax noted in a 1951 BBC radio broadcast how the singing styles of five- to seven-year olds differed from those of older children. In his spoken introduction to “The Wind, the Wind,” he said:

This is not folklore in action, overheard by the tape recorder. All performances are mediated by selection, and most are in some sense rehearsed. They include solo and small group performances physically placed for optimum recording quality, a professional adult presentation, a group that had already been selected and recorded for a film, and a tightly rehearsed choir. Although singing and the sounds of the movements associated with game activities can be heard, the singers are not the players. The presence of children in action in an outdoor setting changes performance style, as can be seen from the example of Peggy MacGillivray, who in the context of an interview gives melodic performances but who also participates in vigorous and at times joyous outdoor group performances.

IN MEMORY

The listener’s response to this album will in part be guided by individual memories of childhood and child lore — a lore that we’ve all had a share in. Childhood memories were also important in identifying the original performers on this CD, which led to much media interest and to reunions of participants in Aberdeen and Edinburgh.
The songs and rhymes on tracks 1–7 provide an introduction to the range of material that Lomax recorded. The remaining tracks are grouped according to function, as described by the informants or by James T. Ritchie (although, as the notes indicate, a song used for a game by one informant might be used to swing ropes by another informant and as an amusement rhyme by a third). Tracks 8–22 are game songs, virtually all of which are widely known and have been documented in wonderful detail in The Singing Game by Peter and Iona Opie and in Brown Girl in the Ring. Tracks 23–26 are songs and rhymes for ball bouncing; Tracks 27–33 are songs for skipping; and tracks 34–38 are rhymes used for choosing which was on which “side” or was “it.” Tracks 39–43 are narrative songs and ballads with a story and more than one verse that were often used for “guising” — going from door to door at Halloween in costume (or disguise) and performing for cash, sweets, or fruit. The final tracks, 44–56, are amusement songs, utilizing word play, fun, surreal humor, parody, and naming, shaming, and proclaiming individuals.

INFORMANTS

The informants include urban children in Edinburgh, suburban children in Aberdeen, island speakers of Gaelic, a major collector of Scottish children’s song, and adult reconstructions from two pillars of the British folk song revival.

Cedar Place Children, Aberdeen

When Alan Lomax visited Cedar Place, a mile north of Aberdeen City center, to record the well-known sweet-voiced bothy ballad singers John Mearns and his wife, Alice, he also recorded their son Jackie Mearns (age 10 at the time) and a group of his young friends who lived and played together in the street — Pat and Jennifer Cusack; Jim and Willie Hunter; and Katharine Mearns, who was in Tom Watt; and Arthur, Christopher, and Gwen Ronald, who “lived round the corner.” Jack Mearns has vivid memories of the day:

Alan was unaccompanied on his visit to my parents’ flat in Cedar Place, a quiet cul-de-sac in Aberdeen. The children were recorded in the street outside my home and my parents were recorded within our home. . . . When Alan was trying to record us singing and skipping, someone always tripped on the rope. Alan then arranged for two children to “Caw the Ropey” [turn the rope] while the remainder sang. . . . I saw that he had a guitar in his campaigner. After all the recording was over, and in response to my constant pleading, my father eventually asked Alan if he would be willing to play for us. Alan immediately agreed and retrieved his guitar. He sat down on the piano stool and started singing an up-tempo American country song. While he was singing he stamped loudly on the floor with his foot. My brother and I were mortified because we were stuck in an upstairs flat, we were never allowed to make a noise with our feet. My father always reminded us that “It was Mrs Brown’s roof.” Our horror quickly changed to sheer delight to see that Alan was being allowed to do what we children were forbidden to do.

Garrynamonie schoolchildren, South Uist

Garrynamonie, now spelled Gearraidh Na Monadh, is a mile from the south coast of the Outer Hebridean island of South Uist, birthplace of the Jacobite heroine Flora Macdonald. The school was demolished in the late 1990s, but the schoolhouse is still in use. The confident “choir” singing of the children, and their strong Gaelic accents, lead to an initial suspicion that their four songs in standard English were taught to them in school, but closer listening identifies the unclear and illogical textual variations that are a hallmark of oral learning from child to child. One of the singers, Annie McNees MacLEllan, explained that the songs were “action songs that must have been brought into the islands during the war, when a lot of young people came in. We were Gaelic speakers, and we probably didn’t know what we were singing.” Kate MacPhee taught the choir and was an inspirational teacher, “A lovely person; she wrote plays in Gaelic.”

Three 1951 pupils at the school have been contacted, and none has a recollection of Lomax’s visit. The school might seem isolated and distant to city dwellers, but Lomax would have been one among many visitors brought by Calum MacLean, whose brother was the poet Sorley MacLean.

Hamish Henderson (1919–2002)

The Perthshire-born, Edinburgh-based Hamish Henderson, who was a collector of song and story, a discoverer of many key tradition bearers, a poet, songwriter, and towering figure in the Scottish folk revival, was Alan Lomax’s guide and companion in Edinburgh and on his collecting trips in Northeast Scotland. Lomax wrote to Henderson that: “I’ve been traveling the roads of the world, hitting the high places and low places, the rough and the smooth, for about twenty years, recording folk songs and ballads from all sorts of people, but I have never had such kind and warm-hearted treatment from anywhere as from the people of Scotland.”

Ewan MacColl (1915–1989)

Arguably the most influential figure of the British folk revival, Ewan MacColl (born Jimmie Miller in Salford, near Manchester) was a singer, songwriter, playwright, co-creator of the BBC Radio Ballads, and a collector. Alan Lomax recorded MacColl singing Scots ballads, Gaelic songs learned phonetically, and much else. MacColl recounted his experiences recording for Lomax in his autobiography, Journeyman.

According to MacColl, it was the girls who “taught us [younger children] to sing . . . scores of the kind of rhymes and songs used in skipping games.” There are contradictory accounts as to whether or not MacColl introduced Alan Lomax to Hamish Henderson.

Peggie MacGillivray, pupil at Norton Park School, Edinburgh

Edinburgh-born Margaret Hunter MacGillivray, now Margaret Currie, was 15 years old on July 12, 1951, when Alan Lomax recorded her. A wonderful informant and performer, she is melodic and confident in performance and articulate and clear in her accounts of how the songs were used.

Norton Park schoolchildren, Edinburgh

Included on this disc are some of the songs (with the same texts and tunes) heard in the film The Singing Street, in all probability sung by substantially the same group of girls. James T. Ritchie noted that the female singers for the film were Peggie MacGillivray, Audrey Fraser, Harriet Sandison, Joan Grant, Hazel Agnew, Marjorie Lock, and Laura Gardner. (Boys
called Williamson, Smith, Peffers, and Stewart also sang for the film but were not recorded by Lomax.) However, the names of Christine Halloway, Mary Gray, and Emma Thomson are employed in the songs and perhaps they participated. All the singers on this disc are female aged 12–15 years and were recorded on an unknown date in 1951.

The Norton Park School lay on the border between the city of Edinburgh and its port of Leith, next to the Easter Road football ground, home of the Hibernian Football Club. The building is considered of “architectural worth,” and has been converted for use by community groups. These songs would not have been learned at Norton Park, but at nearby primary schools, such as Ferrier St., which the informants attended between the ages of 5–11.

Dr James T. R. Ritchie (1908–98)
The major collector of the songs, games, and stories of Edinburgh schoolchildren, Dr. James “Docky” Ritchie was a much-loved and respected teacher and gifted communicator. His film, The Singing Street, with its astonishingly evocative 1951 scenes of Edinburgh children at play, was made with a group of colleagues, the Norton Park Group, a few months before Lomax interviewed him. The famous documentary filmmaker John Grierson called it “the best amateur film I ever saw.”

Ritchie also produced several highly acclaimed radio programs and two books, which have been republished recently by Mercat Press.

Unidentified English child
Two short items (tracks 36 and 58) were recorded in the midst of a number of songs from Ewan MacColl. The child is not his eldest son, Hamish, who was a few months old in 1951. Is this the son of a colleague in Theatre Workshop?

NOTE: In the following song notes, the initials OSG indicate the Opies’ reference number in The Singing Game and BGITR refers to games also found in the Eastern Caribbean and documented in Brown Girl in the Ring.

1. **LONDON BRIDGE**
*Song by Garrynamonie schoolchildren.*

The monotone sequence after the internationally known lines of this game song may be distinctively Scottish. A clue to what game actions were called “nupper” and “dupper” is contained in a 1951 version from Forfar, where after “supper” comes “nip her, grip her, carry her away.” As noted above, the tune is derived from an ancient Scottish bagpipe march. OSG 8, BGITR.

London Bridge is falling down,
Falling down, falling down,
London Bridge is falling down,
My fair lady.
Tea time, dinner time,
Supper time, nupper time,
Dupper time, catch.

2. **MY GIRL’S A CORKER**
*Song by Cedar Place children.*

This lengthy performance song in a polka-style rhythm was taught within uniformed groups — Guides and Scouts. James T. Ritchie says it was used
for skipping and dancing. It is based on an American popular song from the 1890s. 15 OSG 123.

My girl’s a corker, she’s a New Yorker, I do must anything to keep her in store. She’s got a head of hair, just like a grizzly bear. That’s where all my money goes.

Roompa roompa roompa pa, Roompa pa, roompa pa. Roompa roompa roompa pa, Roompa pa, roompa roompa pa.

My girl’s a corker, she’s a New Yorker, I do must anything to keep her in store. She’s got a pair of eyes, just like two custard pies. That’s where all my money goes.

My girl’s a corker, she’s a New Yorker, I do must anything to keep her in store. She’s got a great big nose, just like a farmer’s hose. That’s where all my money goes.

My girl’s a corker, she’s a New Yorker, I do must anything to keep her in store. She’s got a pair of hips, just like two battleships. That’s where all my money goes.

3. I’VE A SWEETHEART IN AMERICA
Sung by Norton Park schoolchildren.

This widely known song is used here for skipping. James T. Ritchie points out that the tune is derived from “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.”

I’ve a sweetheart in America, I’ve another in Australia, And that’s the one that’s going to marry me — eye-ee, eye-ee.

I’ve another in America, And that’s the one that’s going to marry me — eye-ee, eye-ee.

First, he took me to America.

Second, he took me to Dundee — eye-ee, eye-ee.

Third, he ran away and left me.

With three babies sittin on my knee — eye-ee, eye-ee.

One was sittin on the table,
The other was sittin on my knee — eye-ee, eye-ee.

The other was standin by the door side, Sotgin, “Daddy, will ye no come back tae me — eye-ee, eye-ee?”

4. THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF THESE
(Interview)
Spoken by Peggy MacGillivray and James T. Ritchie.

James T. Ritchie: Well, I got started because — eh, one day I had a class. I’m supposed to be a science teacher, you see, and if you teach certain girls science, you find it’s very difficult, and they’re not interested in scientific explanations of why a blanket keeps you warm. They know it keeps you warm. They don’t want to know anything about the conductivity of the air. So I say to them, “Well, tell me, what are you interested in?” Because I couldn’t get their interest aroused. And — eh, of course, no answer. Then I says, “What do you do?” No answer. “What do you do during the holidays?” “We play.” “Where?” “In the street.” “What at?” And then they began to tell me about their games, you see.

You see, there’s so many of — of — there’s these rhymes, they — they skip, you see, or they have a, a ball — they play with a ball or — or, there’s — there’s hundreds of counting out rhymes, you know, like (Recites)

Eetle ootle, eetle ootle black bottle, Eetle ootle out. [you know]
Shining on the mantelpiece, Like a silver threepenny piece,
Eetle ootle black bottle, Eetle ootle out.

You see. There are hundreds of these. Isn’t there, Peggy? Do you know any one?

Peggy MacGillivray: Well, eh, the one that’s most popular in Ferrier Street [the primary school she attended] is the one about Mabel the Horse.

Ritchie: Right — oh, that’s a good one.

Peggy MacGillivray: Three white horses in a stable, Pick one out and call it Mabel.
If it’s Mabel, set the table.

Three white horses in a stable.

5. THE NIGHT WAS DARK
Sung by Norton Park schoolchildren.

There is no obvious source for this ballad, which here is used for skipping but which was also useful for Halloween guising (and probably sung lugubriously then) — the vigor of this version clashes with the depressing text. The tune is derived from the first part of a brass band march. Should “shed” not be “red”? Davison has “Holding up the Union Jack.”

The night was dark, the war was over.
The battlefield was shed with blood.
And there I spied a wounded soldier, Lying dying as he said:
“God bless my home in dear old Scotland,
God bless my wife and only child.
And tell the people that I’m dying,
For I’ve won the Union Jack. That’s that!”

6. HARRY LAUDER AND MUSSOLINI ARE DEAD
Sung by Jennifer and Pat Cushnie.

There is a plethora of such single verse songs as these. The first one commemorates Harry Lauder (the celebrated Scots comedian and singer; 1870–1950). The tune is the Scots pipe tune, “The Barren Rocks of Aden.” Lomax commented about the Mussolini song, “The kids have a rare gift for summing up the essentials of history, as in this caustic epitaph to a man who caused so much grief.” In a later version Mussolini became Vaseline (a patent medicine rub), and the last line became the remarkable “There’s only room for Elvis and his wee banjo.”

Harry Lauder shaved his father, Wi a rusty razor.
The razor broke and cut his throat, And that was Harry Lauder.

Now the war is over, Mussolini’s dead.
He wants to go to Heaven with a crown upon his head.
The Lord says, “No. He’s got to stay below.
All dressed up and nowhere to go.”
7. AS I WENT DOWN TO WINDSOR
Song by Ewan MacColl.

The misfortunes or misdeeds of royalty feature often in British children's song, as do rude words in disguise. This tune is very widely used and, as "My Old Man's a Dustman," was a popular hit for the skiffle king Lonnie Donegan.

Spoken: And the — uh, people in high places were not exempt from — uh, the mockery of our songs. (Sings:)
As I went down to Windsor, on a visit to the king,
The soldier there on sentry said 'e couldn't be seen.
And out comes Jeannie with the big black eye.

8. CHINESE GOVERNMENT (Interview)
Song by Peggy MacGillivray. Interview with Peggy MacGillivray, James T. Ritchie, and Alan Lomax.

A lyric likely to cause vague unease in modern, more racially cautious breasts. OSG 93.

Peggy MacGillivray:
Chinese government, Black man's daughter, She's so tired. It's very tiring isn't it, Peggy?

Alan Lomax: And what's the name of that?

Peggy MacGillivray: "Chinese government."

Lomax: How do you play it?

MacGillivray: Well, everybody stands in a line and one person is "out." And she runs back and forward singing the words. And when she says — whoever it is — whatever name — that person comes out and runs round her as she's going backward and forward. And it goes on like that, until everybody is "out" in the circle running back right round this girl. And then she starts singing — she keeps on doing it and sings somebody's name and they drop out and form the line again. And then it just goes on and on, and she chooses one and that person takes her place.

Lomax: And — eh, what's your interpretation of this game, ub, Professor?

James Ritchie: Eh, I don't know what interpretation I would have. Eh, certain people whom you might call — eh, psychoquacks would say that it is probably — eh, Scotland's subconscious feeling of guilt towards colonial peoples. (Laughter, Sing:)

Tra la la la la la la.

Spoken: The lastie pops out and goes round. And then they sing — they both sing it — another girl comes round, and this one's always going up and down like that — without the trail. And then, of course, they — it unwinds itself and they all go back. And I don't mind telling you, some of the lasties, I've heard them say, "My belly's sore." [My stomach's sore.] Isn't that right? They're so tired. It's very tiring isn't it, Peggy? (Laughs)

9. THE WIND, THE WIND (four versions)
a. Sung by Peggy MacGillivray.
b. Sung by Norton Park Schoolchildren.
c. Sung by the Cedar Place children.
d. Sung by the Cedar Place children.

A version performed by the Irish folk group The Dubliners under the title "I'll Tell My Maw" became commercially popular in Britain in the 1960s, but this courting game song was popular with children in Britain and the USA over 100 years ago. The Norton Park school children's version (b.) includes a second game part, with instructions on actions to the tune "The Merry Matanzas." James T. Ritchie derived the title of his second book, Golden City, from this song. The name is a biblical reference. In more than one Scottish town, an area where Roman Catholic residents predominated was termed the Golden City. OSG 22.

a. Peggy MacGillivray:
The wind, the wind, the wind blows high.
The snow comes falling from the sky.
The wind, the wind, the wind blows high,
She is handsome, one two three,
Come and tell me who shall be.

Spoken: One. Two. Three.

Alan Hartley:

Sung:
A is his first name, his first name, his first name,
a. Peggy MacGillivray:
[Suzy and] Norma, she must die
For her lover's in the golden sky.
She is handsome, she is pretty,
She is the girl of the golden city.
She has lovers, one, two, three.
Pray and tell [me / now] who they be.

b. Norton Park schoolchildren:
The wind, the wind, the wind blows high.
The snow comes falling from the sky.
Margaret Thomson says she'll die
For the want of the Golden City.

She is handsone, she is pretty,
She is the girl of the Golden City.
She is handsone, one two three.
Come and tell me who shall be.

c. Cedar Place children:
The wind, the wind, the wind blows high.
The rain comes dashing from the sky.
[Suzy and] Norma, she must die
For her lover's in the golden sky.
She is handsome, she is pretty,
She is the girl of the golden city.
She has lovers, one, two, three.
Pray and tell [me / now] who they be.

 d. Cedar Place children:
The wind, the wind, the wind blows high.
The rain comes dashing from the sky.
[Suzy and] Norma, she must die
For her lover's in the golden sky.
She is handsome, she is pretty,
She is the girl of the golden city.
She has lovers, one, two, three.
Pray and tell [me / now] who they be.
10. **POOR MARY SAT A-weeping**  
(two versions)  
a. Sung by Ewan MacColl.  
b. Sung by Garrynamonie schoolchildren.

This is a friendship game. Sometimes the circle cheers up the sad lover, sometimes there is a tragic series of deaths — husband, baby, and Mary herself. In the second version, sung by the Garrynamonie schoolchildren, two popular game songs are sandwiched together, as signaled by the change in tune and meter. The first tune is very close to Ewan MacColl’s from 400 miles and 30 years away. “Poor Mary” is a friendship game (OSG 80). “On the Carpet” is a mating game (OSG 19, BGITR).

a. Ewan MacColl (spoken): And the little girls had numerous songs for accompanying their games, songs like “Poor Mary Sat a-Weeping.”  
(Sings:)

Poor Mary sat a-weepin, a-weepin, a-weepin.  
Poor Mary sat a-weepin  
On a bright summer’s day.

Oh, Mary, what you weepin for,  
On a bright summer’s day?  
I’m weepin for me lover,  
On a bright summer’s day.

b. Garrynamonie schoolchildren:  
Mary lies a-weepin, a-weepin, a-weepin.  
Mary lies a-weepin on [sighs] summer day.

On the [grass go] she shall be,  
Till the grass grows on the field,  
Stand up stand up, [polly veelly veep]  
And show me the girl and the [next two asleep].

How do you marry? I’d marry for joy.  
First [to / two] a girl, and the next [to / two] a boy.

11. **HERE’S A POOR WIDOW**  
Sung by Norton Park schoolchildren.

James T. Ritchie explains that first “the girls dance round the ‘widow’ in the centre, who picks her ‘sweetheart.’ The two kiss, and the sweetheart becomes the new widow. The tune is “The Merry Matamizie.” OSG 40.

Here’s a poor widow, she’s left alone,  
She has no one to marry upon.  
Come choose to the east,  
Come choose to the west.  
Come choose to the one that you love best.

Now they are married we wish them joy,  
Every year a girl and boy.  
Loving each other like sister and brother,  
And playing the game of kiss-together.

12. **LITTLE SALLY WALKER**  
Sung by Cedar Place children.

Jack Mearns describes this as “a game where we sat in a circle and ‘Sally Walker’ walked round the outside of the circle ‘crying’ into a hankie which she dropped behind someone who then had to chase her round the circle. If she reached the chaser’s place first, the chaser then became ‘Sally Walker.’” OSG 34, BGITR.
Little Sally Walker, sitting in the sun,
Crying and weeping for a young man.

Sad Sally Walker, wipe away your tears,
Choose to the east, and choose to the west,
And choose to the very one that you love best.

13. ON THE MOUNTAIN
Sung by Norton Park schoolchildren.

A game and skipping song. The first stanza is very widely sung and quoted. OSG 36.

On the mountain stands a lady,
Who she is I cannot tell.
All she wants is gold and silver,
All she wants is a nice young man.

So call in my Andrew dear,
Andrew dear, Andrew dear,
So call in my Andrew dear,
Andrew dear.

14. ALL THE BOYS IN LONDON
Sung by Cedar Place children.

Usually a courting song, here used as a song for skipping that suddenly transmutes into the play song “The Big Ship Sails.” OSG 21 and 6.

All the boys in London lead a happy life,
Except for Ann, she hasn't got a lad.
Oh, a lad she will have and a-hunting we will go,
Along with [Fran / Francie], ee-ay oh.

Oh, he kisses her, he cuddles her, sits her on his knee,
And says, “Dear Ann, do you love me?”

Etc., as above: Stand and face your lover // Kneel down beside her // Follow her to London. // Shaking hands in London. // I’ll tell the bobby. [policeman]

17. UP AGAINST THE WALL
Sung by Norton Park schoolchildren.

A courtship line game. In British ballads about Napoleon, “bonny bunch of roses” is a poetic term for Great Britain. OSG 91.

Up against the wall for the London Ball,
The London Ball, the London Ball.
Up against the wall for the London Ball,
For the bonny bunch of roses.

Mother, mother may I go,
May I go, may I go,
Mother, mother may I go,
To the bonny bunch of roses.

Etc., as above: Yes, my darling, you may go. // She buckled up her skirt and away she went. // She met her lover on the way.

18. I PAULA TAY, PAULA TASKA
(two versions) / Interview
a. Sung by Norton Park schoolchildren.
b. Sung by Peggy MacGillivray. Interview with James T. Ritchie and Peggy MacGillivray.

The Opies identify a pre-World War I chant ancestor of “I Paula Tay” but say that, as a song, it has “only been noticed at Norton Park School . . . first as a skipping rhyme . . . and then as a rhumba,” and shows “the persistence of scraps of rhythmic utterance.” Lomax commented, “Even in staid old Edinburgh, where the children play on cobbled streets between walls of red brick and grey stone, the old dances live on, very often influenced by things heard on the radio and in the movies.” OSG 126.

I paula tay, paula taka,
Paula tay, paula toe.
I paula tay, paula taka,
Paula tay, paula toe.

O alla tinka, to do the rhumba,
O alla tinka, do the Rhumba — umba umba umba-ay.

James T. Ritchie: What kind of game is this, Peggy?
Peggy MacGillivray: It’s a circle game with one girl in the middle and everybody dances round singing.
And when it comes to “O alla tinka,” she must do the rhumba to that bit.

Ritchie: Ay, um uh, well, will you […] it then?
MacGillivray: Or a copy of the rhumba. (Sings:)

I paula tay, paula taka,
Paula tay, paula toe.
I paula tay, paula taka,
Paula tay, paula toe.

O alla tinka, to do the rhumba,
O alla tinka, do the —
Rhumba — umba, umba, umba, ay.
19. **HERE COMES A BLUEBIRD**  
*Sung by Norton Park schoolchildren.*

James T. Ritchie describes this circle game in which the “bluebird” weaves in and out of raised linked hands, selects a partner, and dances with her. The varying speeds of the two parts neatly indicate the two-part action of the game. OSG 97, BGITR.

Here comes a bluebird through my window,  
Here comes a bluebird through my door.  
Here comes a bluebird through my window.  
Hi diddle i um dum dee.  

Take a little hop and dance with your partner,  
Take a little hop and dance with me.  
Take a little hop and dance with your partner.  
Hi diddle i um dum dee. (Song repeats.)

20. **MY FATHER BOUGHT THE LITTLE COAT**  
*Sung by Peggy MacGillivray.*

Although here this is a self-contained song, in Monymusk in 1906 these verses were used to introduce the “Bonny Bunch of Roses” song. OSG 91.

My faither bought the little coat,  
The little coat, the little coat,  
My faither bought the little coat,  
And Alice stole the linin.  

Ha ha ha, ye neednae rin,  
Ye neednae rin, ye neednae rin,  
Ha ha ha, ye neednae rin,  
Y’ll get yer licht the mornin.

21. **A TISKET A TASKET**  
*Sung by Ewan MacColl.*

This children’s game song became a pop — or, rather, swing band — hit when recorded by Ella Fitzgerald with the Chick Webb Orchestra in the late 1930s. An astonishing number of U.S. children’s game songs got the swing treatment around this time.

**Spoken:** And the little girls used this song for almost any counting game. (Sings:)  
A tisket, a tasket, a little yellow basket,  
I wrote a letter to my love and on the way I dropped it.  
A tisket, a tasket, a little yellow basket,  
One of you ‘as picked it up and put it in your pocket.  

**Spoken:** It wasn’t you, it wasn’t you, an it wasn’t you. It was YOU!

22. **IN AND OUT THE DUSTY BLUEBELLS**  
*Sung by Norton Park schoolchildren.*

This is a vigorous ring game. In the film *The Singing Street* “dusting bluebells” is sung. OSG 98.

As I rose up one mornin, just before two,  
There ah saw a navvy, tying up his shoe.  
He’s a navvy, ha ha ha,  
He’s a navvy, hee hee hee.  
He’s a navvy, I can see.  

As I rose up one mornin, just before three,  
There ah saw a navvy, drinkin of my tea.  
A pint of beer is far too strong,  
Then we’ll buy a treacle scone.  
A treacle scone is far too tough,  
Then we’ll buy a box of snuff.

As I rose up one morning, just before four,  
There ah saw a navvy, knockin on my door.  
A box of snuff will make you sneeze,  
Then we’ll buy a pound of cheese.  

As I rose up one morning, just before five,  
There ah saw a navvy, take a runnin dive.  
A pound of cheese will make you sick,  
Send for the doctor — quick, quick, quick.

As I rose up one morning, just before six,  
There I saw a navvy, burnin up my sticks.  
A melodic number song which, as always, demonstrates the shortage of available rhymes for seven. Surely there was an initial verse for one o’clock? A navvy is a construction worker, originally a navigator, working in a squad to make the new canals across Britain 200 years ago. The canal navies were often a source of fear, as they were seen as rough gangs suddenly invading rural communities.

**Spoken:** And sometimes the boys would use this song for a ball game. (Sings:)  
As I rose up one mornin, just before two,  
There ah saw a navvy, tying up his shoe.  
He’s a navvy, ha ha ha,  
He’s a navvy, hee hee hee.  
He’s a navvy, I can see.  

As I rose up one mornin, just before three,  
There ah saw a navvy, drinkin of my tea.  
A pint of beer is far too strong,  
Then we’ll buy a treacle scone.  
A treacle scone is far too tough,  
Then we’ll buy a box of snuff.

As I rose up one morning, just before four,  
There ah saw a navvy, knockin on my door.  
A box of snuff will make you sneeze,  
Then we’ll buy a pound of cheese.  

As I rose up one morning, just before five,  
There ah saw a navvy, take a runnin dive.  
A pound of cheese will make you sick,  
Send for the doctor — quick, quick, quick.

25. **PK PENNY PACKET / MRS MOPP / CHICKA TONY**  
*Chanted by Cedar Place children.*

These are three ball-bouncing songs. Jack Mearns recalls that “P K” was performed with a ball on a string or inside a nylon stocking, the ball being bounced over and under the body and against the
wall. PK was a popular brand of chewing gum. Mrs. Mopp was a character in a 1940s BBC comedy radio show. “Chicka Tony” is derived from “Yankee Doodle,” whose tune is much utilized by children. According to James J. Fuld, its complex history is such that “a book is waiting to be written” about it.

PK PENNY PACKET
PK penny packet.
First you chew it, then you crack it,
Then you stick it on your jacket.
PK penny packet.

MRS. MOPP
Mrs. Mopp had a shop,
All she sold was candy and rock.
Candy and rock, canny and [...],
Let it drop.

CHICKA TONY
Chicka Tony went to London,
Just to ride a pony.
He stuck a feather in its hat
And called it macaroni.

26. ONE, TWO, THREE, ALAIRY (two versions)
a. Sung by Ewan MacColl.
b. Sung by Cedar Place children.

This song has a remarkable pedigree. The Scottish ball-bouncing version is often “one, two, three, a-leerie,” crooked, so they will appear to be disabled. A favorite “entertainment” verse has a concealed rude word: “Sitting on her bumbaleerie.” Although John Mearns had told his fellow Cedar Park children to sing the polite “basket chairie” version, some sang “bumbaleerie” on the recording. “Chocolate babies” was a popular candy. Other versions interpolate contemporary characters, for example, “One, two, three, a-leerie / I saw Wallace Beery / Sitting on his bumbaleerie / Kissing Shirley Temple.”

a. Ewan MacColl (spoken): And the little girls would play a a game which consisted of bouncing a ball and cocking one’s leg over it, to this tune (sings):

One, two, three, a-leerie.
Four, five, six, a-leerie.
Seven, eight, nine, a-leairy.
Ten — a-leerie, catch the ball.

b. Cedar Place children:
One, two, three, a-leerie,
I spy Bella Peerie,
Sitting on her basket chairie / bumbaleerie
Eating chocolate babies.

27. EEEVY IVY OVER / Interview
Sung by Peggy MacGillivray.
Interview with James T. Ritchie and Peggy MacGillivray.

“Charlie Chaplin went to France” was a widespread ball-bouncing and skipping chant. The two preceding lines are less usual. “Dummy, dummy shells” is puzzling — children in Fife in 1981 sang about two
flowers, “Bluebells, cockle shells”. In the final lines, “do big burley-o,” “birl” means to whirl around.


Peggy MacGillivray: Well, it starts with the swing of the rope we call “waves.” And — um, then half-way through, it goes properly right round and you skip to that.

Ritchie: Skip to that.

MacGillivray: Uh-huh.

Ritchie: Eh, well, can — w — will you sing it, then?

Peggy MacGillivray: Uh-huh.

Ritchie: MacGillivray: (sings):

Bluebells, dummy-dummy shells.
Erev, iver, ever.
Charlie Chaplin went to France,
To teach the ladies how to dance.

Heel toe, heel toe,
Leg swing, leg swing,
All the way to Je-rich-o.

Eh? How do you do that again?

James T. Ritchie: To that.

Peggy MacGillivray: Well, it starts with the swing of the rope we call “waves.” And — um, then half-way through, it goes properly right round and you skip to that.

Ritchie: Skip to that.

MacGillivray: Uh-huh.

Ritchie: Eh, well, can — w — will you sing it, then?

Peggy MacGillivray: Uh-huh.

Ritchie: MacGillivray: (sings):

Bluebells, dummy-dummy shells.
Erev, iver, ever.
Charlie Chaplin went to France,
To teach the ladies how to dance.

Heel toe, heel toe,
Leg swing, leg swing,
All the way to Je-rich-o.

Ritchie (spoken): You see, at the end of every line, it’s a bunches, and of course, at “fer-ich-o” there’s a bumps.

Alan Lomax: “Je-ric-ho-o-o-o.”

Ritchie: “Porridgy.” If you skip awfully — they have the rope going awfully fast and you must keep skipping in the rope — see how long you can keep it.

They usually do — um, a game to that — eh. What is it, now? Well, you can do ever so many things and — like, there’s — eh, “open shut, open shut.” That’s for your eyes. That’s if you come to “open” — well, you can skip with your eyes open. If you stop at “shut”— well, you skip with your eyes shut. Slow, for that. And then there’s — “high, low, medium.” That’s for waves. They have the rope just going up half-way. That’s for waves.

You must jump high waves. And then there’s — eh. Oh, well, there’s all sorts of things you do for that one.

Lomax: But “porridgy” means — has to do with it being hot? Isn’t it difficult, or something like that?

Peggy MacGillivray: Well, I think it should be hot. It goes awfully fast.

29. QUEEN ELIZABETH LOST HER SHOE

Chanted by Norton Park schoolchildren.

This rhyme is for skipping. The date of the twentieth of June may be the skipper’s birthday. Which Queen Elizabeth is this? Not the current British queen; the singers performed the song before her accession.

Queen Elizabeth lost her shoe,
Down at the battle of Waterloo.

And [she found it] in the month of January, February, March, April, May, June.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten,
Eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty.

30. IT HAS TO COME OUT QUITE UNCONSCIOUSLY

( Interview)

Spoken by James T. Ritchie, Peggy MacGillivray, and Alan Lomax.

James T. Ritchie: And if you ask, if you ask a child — eh, “Do you know this or that?” they, they don’t remember. It has to come out quite unconsciously. And that, that’s how we — we found the girls were, were skipping that “bumpi skipping.” Now “bumps” means this — that the rope passes twice and the girl’s feet are up in the air. And when we made this film, you know, she actually is in the air. You know, you talk about — eh, what’s the name of that great ballet dancer?

[Unidentified voice: Nijinsky.] Nijinsky’s walking in the air. Well, we actually — she’s in the air. Eh, what is that one, Peggy?

Alan Lomax: Well, you go up to four times if you’re good, don’t you, Peggy?

Ritchie: Ay, but Peggy can —

Peggy MacGillivray: You can do more than four.

Ritchie: Can you?

MacGillivray: Well, they can’t keep up very long, but I’ve seen them up to about seven or eight.

Ritchie: Eh?

31. DOWN IN THE VALLEY

a. Sung by Peggy MacGillivray.
b. Sung by the Norton Park schoolchildren.

A courting game or for skipping with French Ropes.

Here there are iced cakes for afternoon tea, and an urban taxicab for transport. In older versions the bride makes a dumpling, cuts it into slices, and offers them to the company to taste.

Peggy MacGillivray: Down in the valley where the green grass grows, Where Mary Gray, she grows like a rose, She grows, she grows, the grass so sweet, That she calls for her lover at the end of the street.

Sweetheart, sweetheart, will you marry me? Yes, love, yes, love, half past three. Ice cakes, spice cakes, all for tea, And we’ll have a wedding at half past three.

Pump, pump, here comes the taxicab,
Pump, pump, here comes the taxi-cab,
Pump, pump, here comes the taxi-cab, Ready for the wedding at halfpast three.

Peggy MacGillivray: "Porridgy." If you skip awfully — they have the rope going awfully fast and you must keep skipping in the rope — see how long you can keep it.

They usually do — um, a game to that — eh. What is it, now? Well, you can do ever so many things and — like, there’s — eh, “open shut, open shut.” That’s for your eyes. That’s if you come to “open” — well, you can skip with your eyes open. If you stop at “shut”— well, you skip with your eyes shut. Slow, for that. And then there’s — “high, low, medium.” That’s for waves. They have the rope just going up half-way. That’s for waves.

You must jump high waves. And then there’s — eh. Oh, well, there’s all sorts of things you do for that one.

Lomax: But “porridgy” means — has to do with it being hot? Isn’t it difficult, or something like that?

Peggy MacGillivray: Well, I think it should be hot. It goes awfully fast.
Norton Park schoolchildren:
Down in the valley where the green grass grows,
Where [Emma Thomson], she grows like a rose.
She grows, she grows, she grows so sweet,
That she calls for her lover at the end of the street.
Sweetheart, sweetheart, will you marry me?
Yes, love, yes, love, half past three.
Ice cakes, spice cakes, all for tea,
And we’ll have a wedding at half past three.

32. THERE’S USUALLY AN ARGUMENT WHICH ONE’S WHICH
( Interview)
Spoken by Peggy MacGillivray and Alan Lomax.
Peggy is describing different rope-skipping games.

Peggy MacGillivray: French. The German. And the Dutch. And oh, there’s lots and lots of them. They do — they — some people give different names for ones. There’s usually an argument which one’s which.

Alan Lomax: Well, now, what do you — how would you describe this French game? Give me all the details.

MacGillivray: Well, it’s two ropes — you hold one in each hand. There’s two people, one each end. You hold these two ropes, and then one turns round. When the one’s coming down, the other’s coming up over the top. It’s rather hard to describe, but um, that’s it.

Lomax: And what about the Dutch?

MacGillivray: Oh, that’s the opposite: it’s out the way instead of in.

Lomax: And the German?

MacGillivray: One rope along the ground and the other rope come in over it. And the person mustn’t jump on the rope on the ground, they must keep going over, back and forward over the rope and still jump through this rope that’s coming over.

Lomax: And then there are all sorts of different ways of doing each one of those, I guess.

MacGillivray: Uh-huh.

Lomax: Well, how do you learn the game? Do you — when you’re a little girl, do you stand by and watch and watch and beg to get taken in, is that what happens?

MacGillivray: That’s it.

Lomax: And then you get pushed around pretty hard if you miss, don’t you? Do you remember what the — when you began to play these games yourself?

MacGillivray: Yes.

Lomax: And then you get pushed around pretty hard if you miss, don’t you? Do you remember what the — when you began to play these games yourself?

MacGillivray: Uh-huh.

Lomax: And then you get pushed around pretty hard if you miss, don’t you? Do you remember what the — when you began to play these games yourself?

MacGillivray: No.

33. JELLY ON THE PLATE
Chanted by Cedar Place children.

John Mearns described this game as “skipping with actions — wiggling, kicking, turning 180 degrees round, etc.” Lomax introduced this chant on radio by saying, “I set up my mike in the streets of Aberdeen, and found the children were singing about their favorite dessert.”

COWBOY JOE

Kathleen Mearns: Cowboy Joe from Mexico.
[She stands] them up, sticks them up, Cowboy Joe.

IPPITTY SIPITTY

Jack Mearns: Ippitty sipitty, Ippitty sipitty,
Ippitty sipitty, Ippitty sipitty,
Canella canapp.
Canellou up, canellou down.

35. MY MOTHER / MY LITTLE HOUSE
Chanted by Cedar Place children.

“My Mother” was an elimination rhyme. “My Little House” possibly included illustrative finger manipulations.

MY MOTHER
My mother and your mother
Were hanging out some clo’es.
My mother gave your mother
A dunt [blow] on the nose.
What colour was her blood?
Red.
R – E – D stands for RED
And O – U – T spells OUT.

MY LITTLE HOUSE
My little house, my little house,
Has an upstairs, a downstairs,
My little house.
36. EETLE OTTLE, BLACK BOTTLE
(two versions)
a. Chanted by Cedar Place child.
b. Chanted by Norton Park schoolchild.

Versions of an elimination rhyme widely used in Scotland.32

a. Cedar Place child:
Eetle ottle, black bottle,
Eetle ottle out.
Take our black dishcloth
And wipe it all out.

b. Norton Park schoolchild:
Eetle ottle, black bottle,
Eetle ottle out.
Shining on the mantelpiece,
Like a silver threepenny piece.33
Eetle ottle, black bottle,
Eetle ottle out.

37. FLIP FLOP
Chanted by Ewan MacColl.

Spoken: And when the boys were choosing sides for any

game, they would — uh, all swing their arms to a kind

of rhythmic chant. And those who finished with their

palms upwards would be counted out, until finally, uh

the numbers were reduced to one person whose palms

were facing down.34 And this is how they did it (chants):

Flip, flap, flow bang.
Flip, flap, flow bang.
Flip, flap, flow bang.

38. ONE TWO THREE FOUR FIVE
Sung by an unidentified English child.

Widely known. See the Oxford Dictionary of Nursery
Rhymes, No. 388. Despite the singer’s exclamation at
the end, the verse seems to be complete.

Uh — One two three four five,
Once I caught a fish alive,
Six seven eight nine ten,
Then I let it go again.

Why did you let it go?
Cause it bit my finger so.
Which finger did it bite?
This little finger on my right.

Spoken: Oh, I’d missed out a verse, daddy.

39. MY NAME IS SWEET JENNY (two versions)
a. Sung by Norton Park schoolchildren.
b. Sung by Peggy MacGillivray.

A sweet song indeed, two surviving verses of the
original fifteen, composed by Thomas Scot of Falkirk
at the end of the eighteenth century, and still widely
popular with a first line “Queen Mary, Queen Mary,
my age is sixteen.”

a. Norton Park schoolchildren:
My name is sweet Jenny, my age is sixteen,
My father’s a farmer in yonder green.
He’s plenty o money to dress me in silk,
And nae bonnie laddie’ll tak me awa.

I rose in the morning, I looked in the glas,
I said to myself, “What a handsome young lass.”
My hands by my side, and I gave a haw-haw,  
And nae bonnie laddie'll tak me awa.

Peggy MacGillivray:  
My name is sweet [Jemmy], my age is sixteen,  
My father's a farmer in yonder green.  
He's plenty o' money to dress me in silk,  
And nae bonnie laddie'll tak me a walk.

I rose in the morning, I looked in the glass  
I said to myself, "What a handsome young lass."  
My hands by my side, and I gave a haw-haw,  
For nae bonnie laddie'll tak me awa.

I'M A LITTLE ORPHAN GIRL  
(two versions)

a. Sung by Peggy MacGillivray.  
b. Sung by Norton Park schoolchildren.

Used as a lyric ballad and for German Ropes. A tear-jerker, sure to catch "guising" pennies. In his BBC radio program in November 1957, Lomax commented that this song reflected "a child's view of the tragedies which shape the ballads of their parents. . . A modern version of a medieval custom — the new springing out of the old — new songs are forever spilling out of this ever-flowing fountain of children's fantasy." Lomax had some difficulty transcribing this lyric. In his notes for the Scotland volume of the World Library series [Rounder CD 1743], he renders the line about Bread as, "And goes right in my bed"!

Peggy MacGillivray:  
I'm a little orphan girl,  
My mother she is dead.  
My father is a drunkard  
And won't buy me my bread.  
I sit upon the window sill  
To hear the organ play,  
And think of my dear mother,  
Whos' dead and far away.

I sit upon the window sill  
To hear the organ play,  
And think of my dear mother,  
Whos' dead and far away.

My coffin shall be white,  
Six little angels by my side,  
Two to sing and two to play  
And two to carry my soul away.

Broken hearted, I wander  
At the loss of my lover.  
He's a jolly, jolly soldier  
And to battle he must go.

He wrote me a letter  
In the month of November,  
And he told me not to worry,  
As he was coming home.

Chanted: Sweet home, marrow bone, / Treacle scone, / ice-cream cone, / Uncle John.

b. Norton Park schoolchildren:  
Broken hearted, I wander  
At the loss of my beloved,  
He's a jolly, jolly soldier  
And to battle he must go.

He wrote me a letter  
In the month of November,  
And he told me not to worry,  
As he was coming home.

Chanted: Sweet home, marrow bone, / Treacle scone, / ice-cream cone, / Uncle John.

THE BONNY SAILOR BOY  
(two versions)  
Interview

a. Sung by Norton Park schoolchildren.  
b. Sung and spoken by Peggy MacGillivray.

The first part of this tune is based on that employed for the children's song "Three Craws Sat Upon a Wa." The second part feels more "popular" or "music hall" than traditional Scots. Although in this version the lyric is trite, Greig-Duncan gives four versions that are richer in tune and text. Peggy MacGillivray uses more syncopated phrasing in her solo version.

The last line has a fine example of avoiding the obvious and sensible rhyme, in this case "Man."

Peggy MacGillivray:  
I once had a boy, a bonny sailor boy,  
A boy you could call your own.  
He ran away and left me, I dinnie ken where, [don't know]  
But he left me to wander all alone.

One day, as I walked by the river side,  
Somebody caught my eye.  
It was that boy, the bonny sailor boy,  
Wi another young girl by his side.

He gave me a look of his bonny blue eyes,  
And a wave of his lily-white hand.  
Pleased right by, and I never cast an eye,  
For I hate to be jilted by a boy, by a boy.

b. Norton Park Schoolchildren:  
I once had a boy, a bonny sailor boy,  
A boy you could call your own.  
He ran away and left me, I dinnie ken where, [don't know]  
But he left me to wander all alone.

One day, as I walked by the river side,  
Somebody caught my eye.  
It was that boy, the bonny sailor boy,  
Wi another young girl by his side.

He gave me a look of his bonny blue eyes,  
And a wave of his lily-white hand.  
Pleased right by, and I never cast an eye,  
For I hate to be jilted by a boy, by a boy.
One shouts, “Mammy, give me a piece and jam.”
The other shouts, “Daddy, put me in the pram.”
Oh, it’s a life, a weary, weary life,
It’s better to be single than to be a merriet wife.

One shouts, “Mammy, put me to bed.”
The other shouts, “Daddy, scratch ma wooden leg.”
Oh, it’s a life, a weary, weary life,
It’s better to be single than to be a merriet wife.

**WHEN I WAS SINGLE**
(2 versions)
a. Sung by Peggy MacGillivray.
b. Sung by Norton Park schoolchildren.

This song became popular among adult Scottish folksingers. This version omits a first verse given by Ritchie in a version not gleaned from James T. Ritchie’s work, another neat and amusing “guising ballad” which, in a version not gleaned from James T. Ritchie’s work, became popular among Scots adult folksingers. This version omits a first verse given by Ritchie in The Singing Street: “I merried me a wife, / And she’s the plague o my life.” The verse links this ballad with a group of complaining husband songs.

### 43. WHEN I WAS SINGLE (two versions)

**a. Peggy MacGillivray:**

When I was single, I used a powder puff.
Now that I’m married, ah cannie get the stuff.
When I was single, I used to comb my hair,
Now that I’m married, ah cannie get the chance.

**b. Norton Park Schoolchildren:**

When I was single, I used a powder puff.
Now that I’m married, ah cannie get the stuff.

### 44. AN ANGEL SAID TO ME
Sung by Pat Gushnie and Cedar Place children.

Not a parody, but a comic verse to accompany skipping, sung to the tune of a then-popular sickly sweet ballad, “Down in the Glen.” Lomax commented, “These Aberdeen types had [a] rhyme about food — drink, rather — that got to an American, still unaccustomed to drinking tea . . . Down in the front row there you can hear the five-year-olds quavering along just on the edge of the tune. Actually, children up to seven have quite a different way of singing the games from the older kids — much more sense of the dramatic.”

An angel said to me,
“Would you like a cup of tea?”
I said, “No, no, I like cocoa.
Better than tea.”

### 45. ALL THAT SHIVERS / CANAAN’S SHORE / THE BURNING DECK

Sung by Ewan MacColl.

The first item is based on the proverb “All that glistens is not gold,” the third on Mrs. Heman’s much parodied dramatic poem, “Casabianca.”

**Sung by Pat Gushnie.**

We're off for Canaan's shore,
We're off for a trip on the allelujah ship,
And we're never coming back any more.

**Spoken:**

And of course there were numerous rhymes.

**Parodies like:**

The boy stood on the burning deck,
Selling peas a penny a peck.
Did he wash his dirty neck?
Did he heck.

### 46. THE WORLD MUST BE COMING TO AN END

Sung by Peggy MacGillivray.

Another neat and amusing “guising ballad” which, in a version not gleaned from James T. Ritchie’s work, became popular among Scots adult folksingers. This version omits a first verse given by Ritchie in The Singing Street: “I merried me a wife, / And she’s the plague o my life.” The verse links this ballad with a group of complaining husband songs.

**Spoken:**

And a fat boy would be greeted with (sings):

All the shivers is not jelly,
Take for instance Freddy's belly,
For it shivers like a fish, in the middle of a dish,
All that shivers is not gold.

**Sung by Ewan MacColl.**

Oh, the world must be comin to an end, oh, aye.

I sent her for bread, oh, aye, oh, aye,
I sent her for cheese, oh, aye, oh, aye,
I sent her for butter, oh, aye, oh, aye,
I sent her for cheese, oh, aye, oh, aye,
And she fell and skint her knees,
Oh, the world must be comin to an end, oh, aye.

**Spoken:**

And she fell and skint her knees,
Oh, the world must be comin to an end, oh, aye.

I sent her for butter, oh, aye, oh, aye,
I sent her for cheese, oh, aye, oh, aye,
I sent her for cheese, oh, aye, oh, aye,
I bought her a coffin, oh, aye, oh, aye,
I bought her a coffin, oh, aye, oh, aye,
I bought her a coffin,
And she fell through the bottom,
Oh, the world must be comin to an end, oh, aye.

I buried her in dirt, oh, aye, oh, aye,
I buried her in dirt, oh, aye, oh, aye,
I buried her in dirt,
And she jumped oot her shirt,
Oh, the world must be comin to an end, oh, aye.

47. ROBERT BURNS
Song by Cedar Place children.

“Possibly a ball game” — Jack Mearns. The tune is The Merry Matanzie. The last line is sometimes, “Hop on the bus and dodge the fare.”

Robert Burns was born in Ayr,
Now he stands in Union Square.
If you want to see him there,
Just hop in the bus and pay your fare.

48. PUT HIM IN THE BATHTUB
Song by Cedar Place children.

“A skipping song” — Jack Mearns. Another conflation of different song elements: “I know a teddy bear,” “Lulu had a baby,” and the mysterious “Lady with the alligator purse,” who here has a more prosaic “big fat purse.”

I know a teddy bear, his name is Jim.
I put him in a bathtub to see if he could swim.
He drank all the water, he ate all the soap,
I had to get the doctor before he would choke.

In came the doctor, in came the nurse,
In came the lady with the big fat purse.
Out went the doctor, out went the nurse,
Out went the lady with the big fat purse.

49. I’M GOIN AWA IN THE TRAIN
Song by Jennifer Cushnie.

The tune is “Orange and Blue.” The hero is usually “Kiltie Johnny,” which indicates he is a soldier in a kilted Scottish regiment.

I’m goin awa in the train,
And you’re nae comin wi me.
Ah’ve got a lad o my ain
His name is Kilter Johnnie.
He wears a tartan kilt,
He wears it in a fashion.
And every time he turns roond,
I canna stop fae [from] laughin.

50. PADDY KNIGHT
Song by Ewan MacColl.

More boyhood fascination with violence.

Once knew a man, his name was Paddy Knight,
E challenged a navvy out fer ti fight,
E ’it ’im on the jaw and ’e nearly broke it.
Didn’t know the navvy had a hammer in ’is pocket.
And ’e ’it Paddy Knight and ’e fell,
And now ah’m sad to tell,
He’s either in Heaven or — Patrick Croft,
And ah don’t give a bugger which it is.40

51. WHEN I WAS YOUNG
Song by Ewan MacColl.

This song gained popularity in the 1960s folk song revival in an Irish version sung by Dominic Behan, brother of playwright Brendan.

Spoken: And we also had a number of songs about soldiers. One of them was a song about joining the British Army (sings):

When I was young, ah used to be
As fine a man as ever you’d see.
The Prince of Wales, he said to me,
Come and join the British Army.
Toora loora loora loo,
Me curses on the Labour Broo,
That took me darling boy from you
To join the British Army.
Toora loora loora loo,
They’re looking for monkeys up in the zoo,
But if ah had a face like you,
I’d join the British Army.

52. CHAIRLIE / THE COTTON SPINNERS / THE FORTY-SECOND
Song by Hamish Henderson.

Much of this account of relationships between songs is drawn directly from Robert Ford’s 1903 book.41 However, Ford says the “42nd” verses are much older and were sung “at an earlier period” than the Crimean War. Many variants of this song have since been collected. Other accounts of the 1848 “Rising” say the city was held for only one night, and it is more likely that the “Cotton Spinners” song originated from the 1837 Glasgow cotton spinners strike, after which five union officials were sentenced to transportation and sent to the prison hulk ships at Woolwich.

Wha wouldnae fecht for Chairlie?
Wha wouldnae drute the sword?
Wha wouldnae up and rally
At the royal prince’s word?

Spoken: That’s the earlier song, the Jacobite song. But of course when the people began to organize, in the — in the first part of the nineteenth century, they took — uh, the older tunes and they began to compose new words to them. And in 1848, the movement of the People’s Charter was very strong in Scotlad, and it was chiefly strong around Glasgow, and in Paisley, and — uh, a lot of the industrial areas around there, and also among the miners in Lanarkshire. And the version that’s most familiar to the working class in Scotland is “Saw’d Ye the Cotton Spinners,” which describes the march of the cotton spinners into Glasgow to take part in the rising — a rising incidentally which kept the city in the hands of the people for three days (sings):

Saw’d ye the cotton spinners,
Saw’d ye the cotton spinners,
Saw’d ye the cotton spinners,
Marchon down the Broomielaw.42

Some o them had shoes and stockins,
Some o’ them had nane ava.
Some o’ them had shoes and stockins,
Marchin doon the Broomielaw.
(Song repeats.)

Spoken: A little later in the nineteenth century, at the time of the Boer War — uh, new words were put on this same tune, when the Forty-Second Regiment, which is the Black Watch, the Royal Highland Regiment, was being sent out to South Africa to take part in the war, and out of that period come these words (sings):

Wha saw the Forty-Second,
Wha saw them gaun awa?
Wha saw the Forty-Second
Sailin doon the Broomielaw.

Some o’ them had tartan trousers,
Some o’ them had nane ava.
Some of them had tartan trousers,
Sailin doon the Broomielaw.

53. GEESE, DUCKS, STONES, FIRES AND RAIN
Sung by Ewan MacColl.
The first is very well known, from when a goose was the preferred Christmas dish. The tune for “Awky Duck” is “Cuckoo,” which was used to introduce many Laurel and Hardy movies.

Spoken: And after November the kids would go from door to door collect — uh, collecting for some kind of Christmas treat with (sings):

Christmas is coming, the goose is getting fat,
Please put a penny in the old man’s ‘at.
If you haven’t got a penny, a ha’penny will do,
If you haven’t got a ha’penny, God bless you.

Spoken: And, there were rounds, endless songs which went on like this. (sings):

The higher up the mountain, the greener grows the grass,
The more the donkey wags its tail, the more it shows its —
Higher up the mountain, the greener grows the grass,
The more the donkey wags its tail, the more it shows its — (Etc.)

Spoken: And if a policeman was passing, and he was far enough away to make it possible to sing the song with safety, we’d sing (sings):

An oh, the bonny wee barra’s mine,
It disnae belong tae wee O’Hara.
The fly [shy] wey bloeke, he stuck [kept] tae my rock,
Sae abin for stickin tae his barra. (Repeats)
If you want to know the time, ask a policeman.
He will tell you very sharp, with a smack across your —
ask a policeman.

56. OH DEAR, WHAT CAN THE MATTER BE?
Sung by an unidentified English child.
A bawdy song with many verses, bel lows by rugby football teams after a match.
Oh, dear, what can the matter be?
football teams after a match.
A bawdy song with many verses, bel lows by rugby

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Longstaff, Margaret. Reflections from the Golden City. Article in Scottish Book Collector during 2000.
Rymour Club, Miscellanea of the Edinburgh, 1906–11.

UNPUBLISHED
Ian Davison’s card index is now in the possession of Ewan McVicar.

RADIO SCRIPTS
BBC Home Service
A programme of Scots ballads and folk songs collected in Scotland. Recorded on August 13, 1951.

RECORDINGS

FILM
Films from the Golden City. Four short films made by The Norton Park Group [Ritchie, McIaa, Townend, and Geissler], including The Singing Street. Available from The Museum of Childhood, High Street, Edinburgh.

THANKS TO: Margaret Longstaff, niece of James T. Ritchie, for access to his papers and other material; Linda McVicar; Jack Mearns; various former pupils of Norton Park and Garrynamonie Schools; Rogier Kappers for copies of radio scripts; Iona and Peter Opie; School of Scottish Studies.

FOOTNOTES
1 Ballads identified and codified by scholar Francis J. Child in his five-volume The English and Scottish Popular Ballads (1882–1898).
2 Lore and Language of Schoolchildren, pp. 26, 28.
3 Published in Volume 8 of the Greig-Duncan Folk Song Collection, 2002.
4 Unpublished, held as a card index.
5 BBC Radio broadcast, recorded August 13, 1951.
6 Bothy ballads are about the work and life of farmers and farmers in Northeast Scotland.
7 Names, description of the visit, and notes about the use of the songs all come from letters from Jack Mearns to Ewan McVicar in 2002.
8 “I slipped away home (after a South Uist ceilidh) through morning mists which reached out of the lochs like soft white hands past the loch where the swans were like stars on the dark water . . . . In daylight, South Uist is somewhat bleak; green mountains along the eastern shore — but along the Atlantic beach a narrow machair with scattered crofts — the thatched cottages of rough hewn stone indistinguishable in the distance from the stones of the plain. The people are poor but there’s no nicer folk on earth. They remind you how to live, how to be human.” —Alan Lomax, BBC Radio broadcast, recorded on August 13, 1951.
9 E. G. Rea A School in South Uist, a vivid account of this school 100 years ago, has recently been republished.
11 Journeyman, p. 50. Pages 60–65 give a fine detailed account of street games and activities in Salford.
12 Quoted by John Heyes in the introduction to the 1999 edition of Golden City.
13 See also the Rounder CD CD 1716, Brown Girl in the Ring.
15 The Opies say “My Girl’s a Corker” was written by Jerome and Queen in 1895. Other sources state that “My Best Girl’s a Corker” was composed in the 1890s by John “Honey” Stromberg. There is a pause or tape edit here.
16 There seem to be proportionately more references to dead lovers in the songs on this CD than in other collections. Does
this relate to the date of collection, just six years after the end of World War II?

18 Usually “On the carpet she shall kneel.”

19 Often “Stand up, stand up, on your feet, / And show me the girl you love, so sweet.”

20 In rural Argyllshire in 1900, a Glasgow city song was remade so that the puzzling instruction to “take a tramcar to the cross” became “take a trumpet to the cross.”

21 Usually “sails through the Illy Alley oh” and “the nineteenth.”

22 “I’ll tell the bobby” seems an inessential addition, and has a separate life in Dundee — “Eh’ll tell the boabby if ye lay a hand on me.”

23 In The Singing Street, the verse “He gave her a kiss and a one-two-three” is sung next.

24 The Singing Game, p. 428.

25 A Ballad-Hunter Looks at Britain, program 5.

26 “My Father Bought Me a New Topcoat” (No. 1614), Greig-Duncan, vol. 8.

27 You need not try to escape, you’ll get your punishment tomorrow.

28 Lomax has paused the recording, or removed a section for use in a broadcast or recording. He now queries a term Peggy has used. He returns to this later.

29 Perhaps less “unconsciously” than associated so strongly with an activity outside the classroom that it is difficult to recall in the class setting, although it can be recalled spontaneously.

30 BBC Radio broadcast, recorded on August 13, 1951.

31 Young Christopher Ronald brings the game to an unexpected impasse.


33 The smallest silver coin.

34 For a related activity, see The Love and Language of Schoolchildren, p. 195.

35 Perhaps this should be “Farewell to my brother” and “Beside my dearest mother.”

CREDITS

Recorded between 1951 and 1957 by Alan Lomax, Hamish Henderson, and the MacLeans of Raasay

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52 Elliot Hoffman, Rogier Kappers, Linda McVicar, Dr Margaret Longstaff, niece of James Ritchie, for access to his papers and other material; Linda McVicar; Jack Mauro; various ex-pupils of Norton Park and Garrynamonie Schools; and Hunter College of the City University of New York.

Every effort has been made to make these historic recordings sound as good as they did when they were made in the field. All transfers were made from the original source materials using the Prism 24-bit A to D converters and the Prism 24-bit Noise Shaping System.

SPECIAL THANKS:

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