



sing yonder

traditional folk song
for beginners

vol. 2

simple contemporary settings for songs 11-20 in the Roud Index

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introduction

Writing the introduction to the first volume of this series seemed an indulgence, as I had very little reason to believe that anyone would be interested in reading it. Now I'm sitting at my desk next to an empty box, because volume one has just sold out. I was honestly a little worried that some factions involved with folk music, namely those who might - perfectly legitimately - favour authenticity and tradition over accessibility and modernity, might not appreciate it. Well, if they have any harsh words for me, I haven't heard from them yet, so here we are with volume two. Thank you so much to everyone who has given me such generous and encouraging feedback, and bought copies of the book (especially since I am making all the information freely available online). There must be something about the physical object that is appealing to people, and so I shall continue to produce them until it becomes financially non-viable, or the storage of 2500+* separate volumes becomes impractical.

The first ten songs (or more properly, groups of songs about the same story) in the Roud Index actually all work together quite coherently; they are all fairly dark instances of the English folk ballad genre - some of my non-folkie friends have commented on how miserable they all are**. However, for this volume, there are a couple of interesting diversions from the relentless slew of murder ballads. I saw a lecture from Steve Roud, the originator of this fine database, where he discusses how he started the list in a somewhat ramshackle way, taking songs from here and there with no great rhyme or reason. He said that if he were to start again he would just list the 305 Child ballads as the first 305 Roud numbers. I'm glad he didn't as it throws up some interesting juxtapositions for me in this project - for example the bleak and brutal Cruel Ship's Carpenter being followed by the Beatrix Potter-esque animal whimsy of The Frog and The Mouse. I have to admit to having had little enthusiasm for the latter beforehand, knowing it mainly as a cute kids' song... but then I started looking into it, and it's actually fascinating on a number of levels, there was plenty to write about, and I found a great version that I hadn't heard before. Just another small reminder for us to keep a close eye on our prejudices, whatever they may be.

Karl Sinfield, March 2022.

* I realise it's an ambitious aim to do all of the Roud index, as I might be suggesting here, but I'm determined to proceed in a fug of optimism, not just in the longevity of the idea, but the longevity of my physical form. Also, I reserve the right to skip any songs I don't want to sing, mostly for reasons of sensitivity, so there's no real question of me doing all of them, in reality.

** I make the point to my friends (and in Volume 3) that unlike the ballad singers of centuries ago, we do not have to be fully invested in the subject matter we sing about, but (up to a point) we can view the subject matter with the detachment of social historians. Folk music is a museum, it is a thought provoking journey through past ideas, hopefully we can learn from it, and progress.

a note on the settings

As with the first volume, my process to arrive at each arrangement was first to listen to every version I could find. This is much easier these days thanks to streaming platforms, and for most songs I found a plethora of versions of each song at my fingertips. There might be the basis of something in there I can use, or at least over the course of a few listens, something might work almost untouched, something might need a bit of tweaking to fit, or if nothing else, just the general feeling of the song will lead me to a new version of the melody and set of chords.

A huge help in my listening odyssey continues to be the tireless efforts of Reinhard Zierke* and his Mainly Norfolk site, which provides a great resource for finding tunes when the names vary (I have listed most of the alternative names underneath each song title to save you some time if you want to search for them yourself), and the site also includes plenty of illuminating sleeve notes.

I also suggest a few tracks for some further listening. These might be related to the setting in some way, or perhaps in contrast to it. But please do go out and find your own favourites, they are all good, even the bad ones.

Finally, this project has continued to increase my knowledge and appreciation of these old stories (which to be honest is the reason I started in the first place), and those singers that have carried them for us all for generations. I have included a list of some of the sources (in addition to those I referenced in volume 1) that have helped me on this journey of discovery at the end of the book.

recordings

This book is aimed at people with basic skills, so to help them out I have made some very basic homemade "guide recordings" to accompany this book, and these can be found, along with this in PDF format at the website singyonder.co.uk. DISCLAIMER: It should be apparent that I'm no great singer, and my guitar skills are conspicuously average. Thus, I am the perfect test bed for these simple tunes - if I can play them, anyone can. And if I can play them tolerably, I'm sure you will play them brilliantly.

I have tried to use simple open chords for each setting in this book, to make everything playable for people of all skill levels. Where I have used a capo in the recording to make the song work for my vocal range, or to give easier access to embellishments, that will be noted on the song page. I am also in the process, with a little help from some friends, of making some basic sheet music, to aid singers and instrumentalists who might rely on that sort of thing.

* I have tried contacting Reinhard to express my gratitude, but presume he is either unmoved by my plight or my emails are going into his spam folder; if anyone knows him, please check if it's the latter, and if so, tell him to get in touch, I would love to send him a book or two.

ROUD 11

The Baffled Knight

AKA: The Shepherd Lad, Blow the Winds, Clear Away the Morning Dew, Dew is on the Grass, The Shepherd's Son, The Brisk Young Gamekeeper, The Courteous Knight, The New Mown Hay

Summary:

A knight (or in later versions, a shepherd) comes across a woman skinny-dipping out in the countryside. He suggests a romantic liaison, she is understandably reticent, but invites him to take her to another venue, normally her father's house or an inn, where she promises him everything he wants, plus a large sum of money. Once they arrive, she nips inside, locks him out, and mocks him for his lustful foolishness.

Setting notes:

As it was originally written in 1609, the story was much more convoluted than the one shown here, and ended with a troublesome moral, suggesting the knight missed his opportunity by asking consent. I, along with many contemporary interpreters, make no apology for having none of that, preferring to allow the woman to gain the upper hand and leaving it there. There is a magical 1950s recording of Emily Bishop singing this truncated version for the BBC using almost the same tune. Many modern versions use this jolly setting, and as it is refreshingly upbeat, easy to sing and play, and has a rhythmic and highly catchy refrain, it would be remiss of us to ignore it here. For contrast, try one of the Scottish interpretations, like that employed by Mr MacColl*. Unusually for a song of this vintage the original 1609 text (namely "Deuteromelia" by composer Thomas Ravenscroft) includes a tune**. For an accurate rendering of this, check the version by City Waites, listed below.

Suggested further listening:

"The Shepherd Lad", Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, *The Wanton Muse*

"The Baffled Knight", City Waites, *Lusty Broadside Ballads & Playford Dances from c17th England*

"Blow the Windy Morning", Emily Bishop, *Good People Take Warning*

"The Baffled Knight", Lucy Ward, *Liberty To Choose*

"Dew is on the Grass", Lisa Knapp, *Wild & Undaunted*

* Warning: may contain high concentration of fol-de-riddle-di-does.

** It's a very medieval-sounding tune - I would attempt it but I simply don't look good in tights.

Alternate chords:

G			
C	Am	D	
G			
C	Am	D	G

ROUD 11: THE BAFFLED KNIGHT

D
 There was a shepherd and he did keep sheep upon the hill
 G Em A
 And he would go each May morning all for to drink his fill.
 D
 And it's blow the windy morning. Blow the winds high-o.
 G Em A D
 Clear away the morning dew, and sweet the winds shall blow.

So he walked out upon one day, and leant upon his crook
 And there he spied a pretty maid a washing at the brook.
 And it's blow the windy morning. Blow the winds high-o.
 Clear away the morning dew, and sweet the winds shall blow.

And then they went along the road 'til they came into the inn.
 And ready was the waiting maid to let the lady in.
 And it's blow the windy morning. Blow the winds high-o.
 Clear away the morning dew, and sweet the winds shall blow.

So she jumped off her milk white steed, and stepped into the inn,
 Crying you were just a rake without, and I'm a maid within
 And it's blow the windy morning. Blow the winds high-o.
 Clear away the morning dew, and sweet the winds shall blow.

You may pull off your shoes and hose and let your feet go bare.
 But if you meet a pretty girl, you touch her if you dare
 And it's blow the windy morning. Blow the winds high-o.
 Clear away the morning dew, and sweet the winds shall blow.

I won't pull off my shoes or hoes, or let my feet go bare
 and if I meet with you again, be hanged if I despair
 And it's blow the windy morning. Blow the winds high-o.
 Clear away the morning dew, and sweet the winds shall blow.
 Blow the windy morning. Blow the winds high-o.
 Clear away the morning dew, and sweet the winds shall blow.

ROUD 12

The Tri-coloured House

AKA: The Elfin Knight, Scarborough Fair, The Fairy Knight, Rosemary Lane, Rosemary and Thyme, The Cambric Shirt, Petticoat Lane, The Lover's Tasks, True Lover of mine, Love's Impossibilities, Strawberry Lane, The Lover's Tasks, Whittingham Fair, The Tasks, The Wind Hath Blown My Plaid Away, Every Rose Grows Merry in Time, Sweet Lover of Mine

Summary:

A suitor attempts to trick a woman into love by setting them a series of impossible tasks. The woman responds with various impossible tasks of her own. The full 17th century original text ends with the knight revealing himself as an already married malign spirit, and thus the woman's clever escape*. The story turns up all round the world, but all modern English language versions of the song omit the folkloric ending.

Setting notes:

Most of the world knows this as Scarborough Fair, thanks to Paul Simon "borrowing" an arrangement from Martin Carthy (who had learned it from Ewan MacColl's songbook, who in turn had recorded it sung by lead miner Mark Anderson in 1947) during the 1960s folk revival. I didn't feel the universe needed another herb-influenced** version, so here is a comparatively rare alternative, collected in Ireland in 1973 from traveller Mary Kate McDonagh, and recently rendered in glorious multi-part harmony by the excellent Dublin outfit Lankum. Having no Irish heritage myself I sometimes feel a bit of an imposter tackling Celtic arrangements, but this mournful waltz seems to work beautifully in any accent, and it certainly deserves to be sung more often.

Suggested further listening:

"The Elfin Knight", Martha Reid, *Songs and Ballads from Perthshire*

"Rosemary Lane", Elizabeth Jefferies, *As Me and My Love Sat Courting*

"The Cambric Shirt", Artus Moser, *North Carolina Mountain Folksongs and Ballads*

"Rosemary Lane", James Yorkston, *Someplace Simple*

"Whittingham Fair", Eliza Carthy and Nancy Kerr, *Eliza Carthy and Nancy Kerr*

"The Tri-Coloured House", Lankum, *Cold Old Fire*

"The Elfin Knight", Norma Waterson and Eliza Carthy feat. The Gift Band, *The Elfin Knight*

"The Elfin Knight", Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, *Classic Scots Ballads*

"Rosemary Lane", Bellowhead, *Revival*

* No, it doesn't make any practical sense. Dating was different back then, I imagine.

**The four herbs in question are either a) magical potions to ward off spirits b) genitalia symbolism or c) a recipe for a 16th century spiced ale, depending on, I suppose, each historian's specific penchants.

ROUD 12: THE TRI-COLOURED HOUSE

Dm F
Were you ever down at the tri-coloured house,
C

where every rose grows merry and fine

Dm
It's there you will meet with a neat bonnie lass,
F Am C Dm
will you tell her she'll be a true love of mine

Will you tell her to make me a fine new shirt, where every...
Without any seams nor needlework, and its then she will be...

Oh and tell her to wash it in yon spring well...
Where water never sprung nor never fell...

And tell her to hang it on yon whitethorn...
Where there ne'er grew a thorn since Adam was born...

Will you tell her to iron it all with a millstone...
And when she has it done for to send it right home...

Where you ever down at the tricoloured house...
It's there you will meet with a neat bonny lad,
Will you tell him he'll be a true love of mine

Will you tell him to farm an acre of land...
Between the salt water and the sea sand...

Oh and tell him to plough it all with a deer's horn...
And tell him to sew it with one grain of corn...

Will you tell him to thrash it on that castle wall...
And to let neither chaff nor corn fall...

Were you ever down at the tri-coloured house...
It's there you will meet with a neat bonnie lass...

Alternate chords:

Am C
G
Am
C Em G Am

ROUD 13

The Dowie Dens of Yarrow

AKA: Yarrow, The Green Banks of Yarrow, The Dewy Dells of Yarrow, The Derry Dens of Yarrow, The Braes of Yarrow

Summary:

A popular Scottish border ballad that is not, despite the first line, a song about a woman that has lost her vegetables. In fact, it's another example of inter-class passion gone wrong (see Rouds 1 and 18, for example). A woman falls for a poor ploughman, but nine noblemen decide this is not a good match, and vow to fight him. The ploughman sees them all off, but her brother kills him. She grieves for her lost love, but little sympathy is shown by her father.

Setting notes:

This is not frequently sung in England or indeed anywhere else outside of Scotland*. Historically it has been most popular in the border region for obvious reasons. Famed Scottish author and enthusiastic semi-amateur historian Sir Walter Scott wrote about it in his 1802 anthology "Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border", and tried very hard to claim the story was based on events that befell his antecedents in the 17th century; a claim that, despite the very specific location given, is viewed with scepticism today. This is by far the most prevalent tune for this song, and it's easy to see why as it is a strikingly beautiful and hauntingly sad example of the ballad style. The bracketed "fancy" chords shown are easier to play on a standard tuned guitar than they sound, but they are still optional. I hope that its inclusion here might inspire more people to have a go at it. It's a cracker.

Suggested further listening:

"Dowie Dens of Yarrow", Karine Polwart, *Fairest Floo'er*

"The Dowie Dens of Yarrow (live)", Joni Mitchell, *Archives Vol 1: The Early Years (1963-1967)*

"The Dowie Dens of Yarrow", Willie Scott, *The Shepherd's Song*

"The Dowie Dens o' Yarrow", Dick Gaughan, *Outlaws and Dreamers*

"Dowie Dens of Yarrow", Joshua Burness (feat. Ben Burnell), *Songs from the Seasons*

"The Dowie Dens o' Yarrow", Alasdair Roberts & Karine Polwart (w. Drew Wright), *Captain Wedderburns Courtship*

* It's seemingly most likely to be found in Canada, probably a result of the Scottish diaspora and their unfathomable predilection for cold, windy places.

ROUD 14

The Demon Lover

AKA: The House Carpenter, The Lover's Ghost, James Herries, The Shining Ship, The Carpenter's Wife, The Distressed Ship Carpenter, The Salt Sea, The Banks of Italy, The Old Salt Sea, The Sea Captain, The Ghost Ship, Well Met Well Met My Own True Love, A Warning for Married Women

Summary:

Another sinister tale of amorous demons trying to trick helpless damsels into falling in love with them, presumably as a cautionary tale against women having any sort of agency over their lives*. This time the malign spirit, posing as a past lover, tempts a woman onto his ship and away from her beloved family by promising great wealth and greener pastures overseas. After a number of weeks the woman feels regret for leaving her child, but it's too late, the ship sinks, and she is drowned and hastened to hell.

Setting notes:

A sprawling 32 verse epic in its originally transcribed 17th century broadside form, this more manageable version, presumably a result of the iterative simplification that's a helpful feature of the oral tradition, was seized upon during the 1960s folk revival on both sides of the Atlantic. Since then it has been especially popular under the House Carpenter title all across North America, though usually stripped of its supernatural elements, as is usually the case for exports in that direction. Earlier English versions of the melody are rare, but that eerie tune sung by Bert Lloyd in 1956 seems to be cropping up lately among expert practitioners such as the Furrow Collective. Sometimes though the directness and simplicity of the North American interpretations cannot be resisted, and this is still the most likely version you will hear anywhere in the world you find it.

Suggested further listening:

"Demon Lover", The Furrow Collective, *At Our Next Meeting*

"The House Carpenter", Lee Monroe Presnell, *Ballads and Songs of Tradition*

"Demon Lover", Nic Jones, *Game Set Match*

"House Carpenter", Pluviôse, *Solo Demos Winter 2019-20*

"Demon Lover", Annie Ford Band, *At Night*

* The original broadside title "A Warning for Married Women, being an example of Mrs Jane Reynolds (a West-country woman), born near Plymouth, who, having plighted her troth to a Seaman, was afterwards married to a Carpenter, and at last carried away by a Spirit, the manner how shall be presently recited" seems to support this presumption, in its own delightfully long-winded way.

ROUD 14: THE DEMON LOVER

Am C Am
Well met, well met, my own true love
Am C Am
Well met, well met, cried he
C G Am
I've just returned from the salt, salt sea
F G Am
And it's all for the love of thee

Alternate chords:

Em	G	Em
Em	G	Em
G	D	Em
C	D	Em

O I could have married the king's daughter dear, And she would have married me
But I have refused the crown of gold, And it's all for the sake of thee

If you could have married the king's daughter dear, I'm sure you are to blame
For I am married to the house carpenter, And he is a fine young man

If you'll forsake your house carpenter, And come away with me
I'll take you to where the grass grows green, On the banks of the sweet Willie

If I forsake my house carpenter, And come away with thee
What have you got to maintain me upon, And keep me from slavery

I've six ships sailing on the salt, salt sea, A-sailing from dry land
And a hundred and twenty jolly young men, Shall be at thy command

So she's lifted up her little young son, And kisses she's gave it three, saying,
Stay right here my darling little babe, And keep your papa company.

They had not been at sea two weeks, I'm sure it was not three
When this poor maid began to weep, And she wept most bitterly

O do you weep for your gold, he said, Your houses, your land, or your store?
Or do you weep for your house carpenter, That you never shall see anymore

I do not weep for my gold, she said, My houses, my land or my store
But I do weep for my poor wee babe, That I never shall see anymore

They had not been at sea three weeks, I'm sure it was not four
When in their ship there sprang a leak, And she sank to rise no more

What hills, what hills are those, my love, That are so bright and free
Those are the hill of Heaven, my love, But not for you and me

What hills, what hills, are those, my love, That are so dark and low
Those are the hills of Hell, my love, Where you and I must go



ROUD 15

The Cruel Ship's Carpenter

AKA: The Ghost Song, Polly's Love, Love and Murder, Polly's Love, The Distressed Ship's Carpenter, The Gosport Tragedy

Summary:

Another carpentry-influenced murder ballad, and a shockingly senseless murder at that. Handsome Willie, an apparently steadfast and well-adjusted ship's carpenter by all accounts, proves everyone wrong by luring his sweetheart Mary to the woods, where he murders and buries her. Later, while Willie is out at sea, Mary's ghost returns and exacts gruesome revenge.

Setting notes:

Early ballad writers of the mid 17th century spun this brutally simple murder ballad, then titled "The Gosport Tragedy", out to 36 verses, while these days it rarely exceeds ten, which is plenty. The specificity of location, in this instance a port town in Hampshire (home to the Royal Navy since 1527), might suggest it was based on a true story. Paul Slade's book "Murder Ballads" contains an extensive chapter on this subject, and I'd heartily recommend as very much a high water point on this type of folk song scholarship*. The ballad has evolved into two main versions - the "Pretty Polly" variants, and this one. These words are sung by Mike Waterson, including the verse that has the chilling notion that Willie had already dug the grave, telling us the murder was not just cold-hearted but cruelly pre-meditated. This idea is not in the original Gosport Tragedy broadside, but appears some time later**. The tune here is based on the singing of Paddy McCluskey of Co. Antrim, recorded in 1953, one which thanks largely to the Waterson/Carthy family, is now widespread in the English tradition.

Suggested further listening:

"The Ghost Ship", Sam Larner, *Now Is The Time For Fishing*

"Pretty Polly", Jean Ritchie & Doc Watson, *Jean Ritchie & Doc Watson at Folk City*

"The Cruel Ship's Carpenter", Mike Waterson, *Mike Waterson*

"The Cruel Ship's Carpenter", Steeleye Span, *Est'd 1969*

"Polly's Love", Waterson:Carthy, *Common Tongue*

"The Cruel Ship's Carpenter", Ratatosk, *The Cecil Sharp Songs*

* In summary, if it was related to a real murder, no record other than the ballad itself has yet been found. However, you don't need to be a social historian to presume that the likelihood of it being based on a sailor's account of a real murder seems considerable, given the times.

** Never underestimate the tabloid instincts of folk-song evolution.

ROUD 16

The Frog and the Mouse

AKA: Kitty Alone, Froggie Went A-Courtin', The Frog's Wedding, Mr Froggie, Cuddy Alone, King Kong Kitchie Ki-Mi-O, Frog's Courtship, Kemo Kimo

Summary:

A whimsical tale of a mouse agreeing to marry an amorous frog, and their ensuing convoluted wedding plans. In most versions the denouement involves the blissfully happy couple both being perfunctorily devoured by some larger predator native to the area in which the song is being performed.

Setting notes:

An example of a song that these days is rarely acknowledged in the English tradition, while flourishing in the US both as a children's song, and a country blues standard in its "Froggie Went a-Courting" form. It first appeared as a broadside in London in 1580*. We could speculate on the reasons it hasn't fully taken hold in England; it contains no great moral lesson or tragic injustice, and it generally has a wholesome "Wind in the Willows" bucolic charm, so it's easy to see why it didn't gel with the sometimes darkly serious intentions of the English folk revival. However, a Cheshire farmer called Leslie Haworth reclaimed it in the 1950s and made his own hyper-local version that tells the original animal story, but also helpfully extols the virtues of Cheshire farm produce in its rousing chorus. He taught it to Pete Seeger and thus gained a very specific kind of immortality, for both himself and for Cheshire cheese. The tune is close to the "King Kong Kitchie Kitchie Ki-Me-O" variant popular in the US, so it's a good example of an Americanised English folk song being re-anglicised, in this case for fairly blatant sales and marketing purposes.

Suggested further listening:

"King Kong Kitchie Ki-Mi-O", Ed Badaux, *American guitar*

"Frog Went a'Courting", Careful, *Because I Am Always Talking*

"Frog Went a'Courtin'", Eef Barzelay, *Fan Chosen Covers 3*

"The Frog and the Mouse (Live)", Pete Seeger, *Pete Seeger in England*

* There's a passing reference to an earlier frog/mouse Scottish song in Robert Wedderburn's important piece of Scottish propaganda "The Complaynt of Scotlande", 1549. The song, "The Frog cam to the Myl dur" (no lyrics recorded, sadly) has been suggested to be a political satire regarding the proposed marriage of Princess Mary (later Mary Queen of Scots) - "Mrs. Mouse" - to the son of King Henry II of France, the "frog". Interesting idea - we know this kind of toxic nationalism is not a new phenomenon, but despite the keen back-projection of some historians, in fact the xenophobic use of the word "frog" did not occur until the mid 17th century.

ROUD 16: THE FROG AND THE MOUSE

D G A
Oh, there was a little frog who lived in a well
D A
Ding dang dong go the wedding bells.
D G A
And a pretty little mouse lived under a mill
D A D
Ding dang dong go the wedding bells.

[CHORUS]

D
Well here's to Cheshire, here's to cheese.
G A
Here's to the pears and the apple trees,
D G A
And here's to the lovely strawberries.
D A D
Ding dang dong go the wedding bells.

Alternate chords:

G C D
G D
G C D
G D G

[CHORUS]

G
C D
G C D
G D G

Well froggy went a courting and he did ride / Now Miss Mouse, you must decide.

I'll have to ask my Uncle Rat / And see what he does say to that.

Uncle Rat says, "I'm much afraid / If you don't marry froggy you'll die an old maid."

Well the knot was tied secure and fast / She's off her uncle's hands at last.

Open the oysters, spill the champagne / Never will there be such a feast again.

As they were going it hot and strong / The good grey cat came prowling along.

Uncle Rat like a hero stood / Puss wet her whiskers in his blood.

Miss Mousie made a dive for a crack / Puss made a pounce and broke her back.

Where was the valiant frog the while / He just about broke the four-minute mile.

Well this is the end of him and her / There won't be no tadpoles covered in fur.



ROUD 17

The Three Butchers

AKA: The Three Sportsmen, Three Jolly Butchers, Two Butchers, Three Huntsmen

Summary:

Honourable butcher Johnson, either with or without up to two companions, returning from a lucrative day of business, stops his horse at the sound of a damsel in distress. He finds a woman naked and tied up in the woods, apparently a victim of a robbery, so rescues her, only to be betrayed and killed himself.

Setting notes:

Often these songs are imbued with a moral lesson, and this one seems to be: don't be kind to naked women tied up in the woods, probably as an extension of the misogynistic patriarchal contention that women are not to be trusted, under any circumstances. Either way, the betrayal of the good Samaritan narrative is a fairly popular one in traditional song. The story comes from a 1678 broadside, originally titled "Three Worthy Butchers of the North". The number of butchers (or sportsmen, or hunters) sometimes varies, but you only really need one to object to Johnson rescuing the stricken woman, any more and you are just adding verses for the sake of it*. That said, I have stuck with the three men here, presuming one either remains silent, or scarpers before the action commences. These are mostly the words sung by Bob Scarce (though I have changed his sportsmen back to the original butchers), and it's from the remarkably in-your-face recording of Bob singing in the Ship Inn in 1953 that I took my initial inspiration, and in terms of melody it's quite similar to that found in Walter Pardon's more circumspect 1975 version, also recorded in Norfolk.

Suggested further listening:

"Three Huntsmen", Andy Irvine, *Abocurragh*

"Two Jolly Butchers", Walter Pardon, *A World Without Horses*

"The Three Huntsmen", The Foxglove Trio, *These Gathered Branches*

"Two Butchers", Martin Carthy, *Second Album*

"Three Jolly Sportsmen", Bob Scarce, *Singing at the Ship Inn*

"Three Huntsmen", Andy Irvine, *Abocurragh*

"Three Old Jolly Sportsmen", Patty Doran, *The Flax in Bloom*

* A favourite pastime of erstwhile ballad writers. Thankfully as time goes on, the oral tradition tends towards concision, partly due to the failing memories of the singers, and partly I'm sure due to the decreasing attention span of the audience.

Alternate chords:

G		
D		G
C		D
C	D	G

ROUD 17: THE THREE BUTCHERS

D
 It's of three jolly butchers
 A D
 As I have heard people say,
 G A
 They took five hundred guineas
 G A D
 All on one market day.

As they were riding along the road / As fast as they could ride,
 Saying, "Stop your horse," cried Johnson, / "For I hear a woman cry."

"But I shall not stop," said Lipston, / "I shall not stop," said he.
 "I shall not stop," said Lipston, / "A robb'ed we shall be."

Now Johnson he got off his horse / To search the groves all round.
 He found a woman stark naked / With her hair pinned to the ground.

Now Johnson being a valiant man, / A courage man so bold.
 He took his coat from off his back / For to keep her from the cold.

Then Johnson he got on his horse / And the woman on behind,
 She clasped her fingers to her ears / And she give three warning cries.

Now up stepped three young swaggering men / With swords all in their hands,
 They bid him for to stop and stand, / And they bid him for to stand.

"I'll stop. I'll stand," cried Johnson, / "I'll stop. I'll stand," cried he.
 "But I never was in all my life / Afraid of any three."

Now Johnson drew his glittering sword / And two of them he's slain.
 Whilst he was killing the other one / The woman stabbed him behind.

"I must fall, I must fall," cried Johnson, / "I must fall upon the ground.
 It's because of this wicked woman / She has caused my deathly wound."

Oh she shall be hung in chains of gold / For the murder she has done,
 She has killed the finest butcher boy / That ever the sun shined on.

ROUD 18

In Bruton Town

AKA: The Bramble Briar, The Brakes o' Briar, Strawberry Town, A Famous Farmer, A Murdered Servant Man

Summary:

Two brothers plot to kill their sister's lover, a servant boy. During a hunt, they murder him and throw his body into a ditch among some thorny bushes. Returning home, they deny any knowledge of his whereabouts. That night, the sister's murdered sweetheart appears to her in a dream, divulging the crime. She finds his mutilated corpse, and distraught with grief, finally ends her own life.

Setting notes:

Aside from the title, there isn't a huge variation in the scope of this ballad from its earliest broadside printings, probably a result of it being quite efficiently told from the start. This could be a consequence of the fact that it apparently derives from a 14th century Italian folk tale, although a detail about the sister storing the head of the murdered lover in a pot of herbs doesn't make it into English versions*. In 1820 John Keats wrote "Isabella; or the Pot of Basil" - a poem based on the same story, from which the broadsheet ballads were probably derived, or at least inspired. There are two main tunes to which this is sung, one based on the singing of a Mrs Overd of Somerset in 1904, and another by Mrs Joiner of Hertfordshire ten years later. Despite the early interest of Ewan MacColl in the former, a number of varieties of the latter seems to have taken greater hold on the folk consciousness**, probably thanks to Martin Carthy's beautifully delicate 1966 version, so I have followed that orthodoxy here. These, with a few small alterations, are the words sung (in an unusual 5/4 time signature) by Tony Rose in 1976; there's something particularly poetic about the way he delicately interlaces the savagery and tenderness of the story that won me over.

Suggested further listening:

"The Bramble Briar", Louis Killen, *English & Scottish Folk Ballads*

"Bramble Briar", Burd Ellen, *Sweet Lemany*

"The Bramble Briar", Jim Moray, *The Outlander*

"Bruton Town", Bellowhead, *Matachin*

"Bruton Town (Live)", Sandy Denny, *The North Star Grassman and the Ravens (Deluxe Ed.)*

* Having an emaciated rosemary bush in a pot on the patio wouldn't become popular in England for at least another 600 years.

** The irony being that Bruton is a town in Somerset. Sorry, Somerset.

ROUD 18: IN BRUTON TOWN

Am G D Am
In Bruton town there lived a farmer,
 C G Am
Who had two sons and a daughter dear.
 C G D
By day and night they were contriving
Am F G Am
To fill their parents' heart with fear.

Alternate chords:

Em	D	A	Em
	G	D	Em
	G	D	A
Em	C	D	Em

Then said one brother to no other / But then unto his brother this he said:
I think our servant courts our sister / I think they have a mind to wed.

If he our servant courts our sister / That's made from such a shame I'll say.
I'll put an end to all their courtship / And I'll send him silent to his grave."

A day of hunting was prepared / In Thornywoods where the briars grow,
And there they did that young man murder / And in a brook his body they threw.

"Oh welcome home, my dear young brother / Our serving man is he behind?"
"We left him where we've been a-hunting / We left him where no man can find."

She went to bed crying and lamenting / Lamenting for her heart's delight.
She slept, she dreamed she saw him by her / All bloody red in gory plight.

His lovely curls were wet with water / His body all agape with blows.
Oh love for thee I'm savage murdered / And I'm lying now where no man knows.

So she rose early the very next morning / Unto by yonder wood she spared.
And there she found her own dear jewel / In the gory plight so bloody red.

She took her kerchief from her pocket / She took his head upon her knee.
Then she wiped those dear eyes softly / She wiped those eyes that could not see.

"And since my brothers have been so cruel / To take your tender sweet life away
One grave shall hold us both together / And along with you in death I'll stay."

ROUD 19

The Nobleman and the Thresher

AKA: The Thresherman, The Jolly Thresher, The Honest Labourer, The Rich Man and his Labourer, Generous Gift, Squire and Thrasher

Summary:

A nobleman meets a thresher, and is given a touching account of the carefree life of a rural labourer.

Setting notes:

Call me a cynic, but I'm going out on a limb to suggest that this was not a personal account of the heartfelt gratitude of a farm labourer, but more likely a wealthy nobleman attempting to glamourise the digging of ditches in British weather to maintain the status quo of the brutal class inequality of the time. And the idea of a wealthy land-owner handing over fifty acres because the farmer said nice things about his wife was not generally how the balance of power worked in the 18th century. It seems more likely that the landed gentry were looking to spread a bit of helpful propaganda among the working classes, some of whom were starting to voice resentment at their lack of access to democracy. Whatever the intention at the time, and in the context of this list, it's a breath of fresh air after all the murder. And for many of us lying prone in our garrets, chained to a glowing screen 24/7, there's a lot to be said for stepping away from it all and getting your hands dirty in the soil, so maybe it's ripe for a new revival. Anyway, one of the earliest versions of the song was collected by Robert Burns in 1792 in his "Scots Musical Museum" anthology, and it was apparently an old song even then. It became a popular broadside in the 19th century, but like Roud 16, probably lacked the serious morbid drama required to break fully through the threshold of the English folk revival, so not a great number of recorded versions exist today. It must have survived in some capacity though, probably more in rural communities (where singers would be well within their rights to adopt it as an unironic eulogy to the simple things in life), as in 1976, Sheffield farmer Frank Hinchcliffe recorded a splendid version (with its very recognisable but simple vocal filigree on the end of the fourth line) upon which I have hung this arrangement.

Suggested further listening:

"The Thresherman", Dr Faustus, *The First Cut*

"The Nobleman and the Thresherman", Matt Quinn, *Broom Abundance*

"The Honest Labourer", Bob Copper and Ron Copper, *English Shepherd and Farming Songs*

"The Jolly Thresher", Mrs Sarah Makem, *Ulster Ballad Singer*

ROUD 19: THE NOBLEMAN AND THE THRESHER

C F C
 A nobleman met with a thresherman one day,
 Am F G
 He kindly did accost him and unto him did say,
 C F C
 You've a wife and seven childeren, I know it to be true,
 C F G C G
 Yet how does thou maintain them all so well as thou do?
 C F G C
 Yet how does thou maintain them all so well as thou do?"

"Sometimes I do reap and sometimes I do mow,
 And other times a hedgin' or a ditchin' I do go;
 There's nothin' comes amiss to me to the harrows nor the plough,
 But still I get my livin' by the sweat of my brow,
 But still I get my livin' by the sweat of my brow."

"When my day's work is over I go home at night,
 My wife and my childeren they are of my delight;
 My children are a prattlin' and playin' with their toys,
 And that is all the pleasure that a poor man enjoys,
 And that is all the pleasure that a poor man enjoys."

"My wife she is willin' to join in the yoke,
 We live just like two turtle doves and seldom do provoke;
 Sometimes we are hard up, sometimes we are very poor,
 But still we keep those raging wolves away from our door,
 But still we keep those raging wolves away from our door."

"So well has thou spoken of thy wife,
 I'll make thee to live happy all the rest of thy life;
 I've fifty acres of good land I'll freely give to thee,
 To maintain thy wife and thy loved family,
 To maintain thy wife and thy loved family."

End of fourth line riff:

....doo-oo-oo-oo-oo...
 E |-----
 B |-----
 G |-----
 D |----2--0-----
 A |--3-----3----
 E |-----3--

Alternate chords:

G	C	G	
	Em	C	D
G	C	G	
G	C	D	G D
G	C	D	G

ROUD 20

The False Knight on the Road

AKA: The Fause Knicht Upon The Road, The Fause Knicht An The Wee Boy, The Child on the Road, The Nightman

Summary:

A mysterious knight encounters a devout child travelling late at night. The knight asks a number of questions, but the child gives him some sassy replies, ultimately banishing the knight (whom we now realise is the Devil in disguise) back to hell.

Setting notes:

Ballad historian Francis Child working at the start of the 20th century only records two versions of this simple and strange riddle-ballad, the main one taken from Motherwell's *Minstrelsy*, a Scottish collection of ballads compiled in the mid nineteenth century. Little is known of its origins, but it is clearly the work of a devout Christian who wanted to make it quite clear that education, faith, and standing still* are the main things you need to avoid a one-way trip to the fiery netherworld. Its lack of popularity in Child's time has been compensated for more recently, as many versions are popping up in the last twenty years or so. US indie-folk crossover act Fleet Foxes released an admirably faithful version in 2008, to pop mainstream accolades possibly not seen since Scarborough Fair's popular renaissance in the 1960s. The tune used by Fleet Foxes is the main one in circulation today, superceding the upbeat 1968 interpretation from Archie Fisher that used the Scottish air *The Rose Tree* as the tune (also sung by Norman Kennedy in the same year and, later, Martin Carthy). The prevalent variant is an almost exact rendering of an early recording from Frank Quinn in 1958 in County Tyrone in Northern Ireland, who learned the tune from his Scottish father, who in turn learned it from his father. Its sweet simplicity and clarity, as well as its now obvious popular appeal, make it perfect for inclusion here.

Suggested further listening:

"The Child on the Road", Archie Fisher, *Archie Fisher*

"False Knight on the Road", *Fiddlers Dram, To See The Play*

"The False Knight", *The Owl Service, His Pride. No Spear. No Friend.*

"False Knight on the Road", Maddy Prior and Tim Hart, *Summer Solstice*

"The Fause Knicht on the Road", Jock Tamson's Bairns, *Jock Tamson's Bairns*

* This folkloric assertion almost certainly derives from the Bible, namely Exodus 14:13-14 - "Stand firm. You only need to be still" - these are Moses' words to the children of Israel, on encountering a clearly furious Satan.

Alternate chords:

G	Em	G	Em
G	Em	C	D
	C	G	Em C
G	Em	G	C

ROUD 20: THE FALSE KNIGHT ON THE ROAD

C Am C Am
 Where you go so late said the knight on the road
 C Am F G
 I'm going to meet my god said the child as he stood
 F C Am F
 And he stood and he stood and it was well that he stood
 C Am C F
 I'm going to meet my god said the child as he stood

How will you go by land said the knight on the road
 With a strong staff in my hand said the child as he stood
 And he stood and he stood and it was well that he stood
 With a strong staff in my hand said the child as he stood

How will you go by sea said the knight on the road
 With a good boat underneath said the child as he stood
 And he stood and he stood and it was well that he stood
 With a good boat underneath said the child as he stood

I think I hear a bell said the knight on the road
 It's ringing you to hell said the child as he stood
 And he stood and he stood and it was well that he stood
 It's ringing you to hell said the child as he stood

Where you go so late said the knight on the road
 I'm going to meet my god said the child as he stood
 And he stood and he stood and it was well that he stood
 I'm going to meet my god said the child as he stood

More info and the audio files that accompany this book can be found at

singyonder.co.uk*

Some more useful resources, in addition to those listed in Volume 1:

Books:

"The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads", Bertrand Harris Bronson

"The Fellowship of Song", Ginette Dunn

"Travellers Songs from England and Scotland", Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger

Websites:

Child Ballad Database - childballadrecordings.com

The Yorkshire Garland Group - yorkshirefolksong.net

Better Know A Child Ballad - betterknowachildballad.wordpress.com

Audio, Podcasts, etc:**

Thank Goodness it's Folk online radio show

The Mike Harding Folk Show podcast

Ian Anderson's Podwireless podcast

Tobar an Dualchais/Kist o Riches - www.tobarandualchais.co.uk

Reynard The Fox (source recordings) - on youtube.com

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* If you are from the future and have found a rare hard copy version at the back of a dusty loft, and none of the links or email addresses work, it's possible I have either died, or otherwise departed from the internet to live in a log cabin somewhere. Either way, don't try and find me, go and learn some folk songs instead.

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Jon Wilks

“a beautiful thing”

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