

George Fradley and his wife Hannah lived together in retirement in the Derbyshire village of Sudbury until George's death on St. Valentine's Day 1985.

George was born in Staffordshire, at Woodstock Farm in the village of Goldenhill near Kidsgrove, on 5th August 1910. Following two moves to other farms in Staffordshire the family finally settled, when George was seventeen years old, at Cubley Carr Farm, just to the south of Great and Little Cubley on the main Ashbourne to Sudbury road (now the A515) in south-west Derbyshire. Cubley Carr Farm was owned by George's grandfather, Charles Fradley, who had previously been a cowman and wagoner at Home Farm, Sudbury, but it was not until the family moved to Cubley to take over the farm that George discovered that his grandfather played the concertina for dances and also sang. One of his grandfather's songs, 'Feyther Stole the Parson's Sheep' is included here.

George's mother, Arabella (nee Goodhall) was one of five children who grew up at Park Hall Farm in Cubley. Her father died just before the youngest child was born, and George's grandmother managed all the farm-work and brought up five children on her own. The farm passed to Arabella's two sisters, Bessie Goodhall, who never married, and Polly Smith, whose husband was killed in the First World War.

Both Aunt Bessie and Aunt Polly were musical, and three of the songs here were learned from Aunt Bessie: 'The Squire of Tamworth', 'Fifty Years Ago' (verses of which were added by Aunt Bessie) and 'The Two Sisters'. "Aunt Bessie sang 'The Two Sisters' till I knew it", recalled George, "We sang it while we were milking. The cow didn't mind, it eased the monotony."

It was from his father, however, that George learned many of his songs. A wellknown wit and entertainer locally, Albert Fradley was often called upon to sing and recite his monologues at local farmers' dinners and on other special occasions. Many of these items would include verses of topical interest about local personalities and events. Albert would make up the words and tunes and, as George later remembered, they always knew when he was 'composing', for while the rest of the family were working on the farm, his father "was in the house making up monologues".

Albert Fradley was fond of writing new verses for the song 'Nowt to Do Wi' Me' featuring local people who might happen to be present, and this practice was continued from time to time by George. Soon after the Fradley family moved to Cubley Carr in 1927 or 1928, George attended a concert of local amateur singers at Alkington. He happened to mention to the parson that his family could give a concert some time and the offer was quickly taken up. The concert party featured two of George's four sisters, Bella (Arabella) and Molly (Mary), and one of his brothers, Albert, as well as his father, a friend, Ernie Glover and of course George himself. Bella and Molly played piano to accompany the singing, whilst Albert junior played the drums.

Albert Fradley sang 'Mrs Sargeant's Ball', Bill Sargeant being the butcher in Kingstone near Uttoxeter. George renamed the song in honour of Mrs Nell Merry, wife of Edgar Merry (nicknamed 'Hotch') the former butcher in Sudbury. George referred to Edgar and Nell as "more like brother and sister to me".

From the late 1920s until the war, the family concert party appeared in villages within a ten to fifteen mile radius of Cubley. The shows generally lasted a couple of hours, and each of the items was announced by the chairman who was usually a local man. The proceeds of the concerts were donated to charity, and to the war effort during the war, and the performers received no payment. From time to time George and his family would also help out with other local concert parties, one of which featured George's uncle, Bob Goodhall.

All these songs (with the exception of 'Lankin') were performed at the concerts, so that the 'repertoire' would include traditional songs and ballads, music-hall songs, parlour ballads and popular songs of the day. Songs were added to the repertoire from old books of songs ('We'll All Go Hunting Today for example), from old sheet music ('Mary Ann' and 'Rhubbub'), or from currently available sheet music, which was usually bought by Molly from Shaw's music shop in Uttoxeter on her weekly visits to the market.

The other principal occasion on which the Fradley family sang was at Sunday evening get-togethers at Cubley Carr Farm. Friends and neighbours from several miles around would gather round the piano and new songs from books and sheet music would be tried out, as well as 'old favourites'. On some occasions there were as many as forty people in the house and most of Sunday would be spent baking for the guests.

In 1937, George married his childhood sweetheart, Hannah, and they moved into Coton Wood Farm, about one mile from Cubley Carr. George and Hannah only went to Coton Wood temporarily, but didn't leave until 1980. In later years George worked at Sudbury Prison and in the building industry, but in 1980 he retired and moved into a new bungalow on the site of the rectory gardens in Sudbury. George Fradley first came to the attention of the folk song revival through Roger Watson and John Tams and their group Muckram Wakes who, in 1972, sang at Sudbury Hall. When they enquired about local singers, Roger and John were put in touch with George. Later in the year, Muckram Wakes again appeared in Sudbury, at a Midsummer Fair held to mark the opening of the bypass, and on this occasion George also sang. 'The Squire of Tamworth' was one of the songs which George performed without a fault; although later he was to admit that it had been thirty years since he had last sung the song. On that occasion also, the name of 'Merry' was introduced into the song 'Mrs Merry's Ball'. Muckram Wakes recorded several of George's songs on their first LPs for the Trailer label in 1973 and 1976.

'For Me, For Me' (sung here by George and Tufty). 'Where there's a Will, there's a Way' and 'Last New Year's Eve' were all learned by George from his father, as was the unusual version of 'Jone's Ale' although George admitted that he had "put patches on it".

In 1978 Vicky Swift invited George to sing at the English Country Music Weekend in Winstar, Derbyshire, where George first met Vicky's husband, Tufty, who had previously heard George sing on several occasions. George had always been accustomed to singing to musical accompaniment in public, and shortly afterwards he invited Tufty to accompany him on the melodeon. The successful partnership continued, and the two men appeared at a number of folk song clubs, as well as festivals in Nantwich, Sutton Bonnington and Sidmouth. It was at the National Folk Festival in Sutton Bonnington in April 1984, that plans were made to make an LP of George's singing, and the recordings were made in George's home over the summer of 1984. Alas George did not live to see the release of these recordings, and grateful thanks to Hannah Fradley for her permission to release them.

George Fradley sang to entertain his audiences, and his dry humour, sometimes almost hidden beneath his rich Derbyshire accent, and his cheerful and kindly nature are sadly missed by his family and friends alike.

Here at least we can enjoy the singing of George Fradley.

Derek Schofield

Recorded in Sudbury, Derbyshire, April /June 1984