

Old Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all

Since its foundation in 1987, Veteran has produced over 40 albums of traditional music from England, Ireland and Scotland. Most of these were originally released as audio cassettes but are now being re-issued on CD, either as entire albums or as compilations such as this one.

This anthology celebrates some of the finest 'field' recordings from the Veteran catalogue, focusing on the songs of the English West Country. It is a slice of the region's traditional life, with songs from a singer who lived all his life near to the barren slopes of Dartmoor in Devon who followed a long family tradition of making music, and a farmer who enjoyed the pastoral pleasures of rural Somerset and entertained the community with his local ditties for many years. Then there are two singers who carried on the strong pub singing tradition on the rugged north Cornwall coast, one a landsman who had a way with a comic song and the other, one of the last old style fishermen working out of the Camel estuary.

Bob Cann

Bob Cann was born in 1916 and spent his early years on a farm mid-way between Whiddon Down and Drewsteignton on Dartmoor. His final home was in South Tawton, a small village four miles east of Okehampton, where his widow Joyce still lives.

He came from a large family: eleven on his father's side and twelve on his mother's, and there was music played and songs sung whenever there was a family gathering, particularly at Christmas. They also made up informal bands with melodons, concertina, mouthorgan and Jews harp, to play for harvest suppers and barn dances. Music was also required for step-dancing and in particular, the step-dance competition.

Bob started playing melodeon at a very early age, and by the time he was three he could play *Now the Day is Over* with one finger. Many of his tunes came from his uncles, who had learned them from Bob's grandfather, who was also the source of many local songs: it was from him that Bob's versions of *Widdecombe Fair* and *Tavistock Goosey Fair* came. Other songs came from old men Bob heard singing at these fairs like *Nobody Noticed Me* which he learned from a travelling drover.

Bob became known nationally when he visited folk clubs and festivals all around the country in the 1970s, including an appearance at the Albert Hall in London in 1975 along with Cornwall's Charlie Bate. Bob became one of the inspirations of the 'English Country Music' revival. Although this was predominantly for his fine melodeon playing, he always included a song or two where ever he performed and these would invariably have a Dartmoor connection, as in his own composition *The Craftsmen on the Moor*.

Bob Cann died in 1990 after a lifetime's love of not just traditional music, but also of his native Dartmoor. He was part of a continuing tradition which he fought hard to keep alive and his Dartmoor Folk Festival is a testimony to everything he believed in.

Over the years he had many honours bestowed upon him including the 'Charlie Bate Award' at the Cornwall Folk Festival, the 'Bill Rutter Award' at Sidmouth Folk Festival and the gold badge of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. In 1989 he was included in the Queen's New Years honours list and was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM).



Bob Cann entertains with his dancing doll

Tommy Morrissey and Charlie Pitman

Tommy and Charlie were both in their seventies when these recordings were made, and their repertoire of songs had been gleaned from a lifetime of singing in an area where the pubs rang out with singing most Saturday nights.

Charlie was born in 1914 in St Ives and his father was a lighthouse keeper and so he spent some years away from Cornwall at Fairlight, on the South Downs. After returning to Cornwall, Charlie worked on the land and in later years became the green keeper at the local golf course in St Merryn. He enjoyed fishing from the rocks on his native North Cornwall coast, sometimes with Tommy and he entered many competitions. His other great interest was bell ringing and he regularly rang the bells at St Merryn church, but it was singing in the pub on a Saturday night which he really loved, especially comic songs, which he performed with a wry twinkle in his eye. Charlie died in 2003.

Tommy was born in Padstow in 1915 and left school at 14, although he had been awarded a scholarship to art college. His father had become ill and Tommy had to take over his fishing boat the 'Kingfisher'. Tommy did continue painting and many a house in Padstow has one of his painting in the hallway. The 'Kingfisher' was commissioned during the war and Tommy went into the Navy, the only time he lived away from Padstow in his life. He then acquired the 'Girl Maureen' and worked this boat for most of his working life. He was the last of the old-style fishermen who fished in just about every way possible: pots for lobsters, hand-lines for mackerel and a trawl off the side for plaice, skate and the like. Tommy died in 1996.

It would have been highly inappropriate to record Tommy and Charlie in a studio, as they were only heard at their best in the bar-room of a pub. The last track on this CD was recorded in the bustling 'London Inn', Padstow, while the rest are extracts from one night's sing in 'The Ship' at Wadebridge in the company of friends and family, including Tommy's daughter and son-in-law Maureen and Robbie Tatlow, and Bodmin's own Vic Legg.

Several years ago storyteller Taffy Thomas spent a season fishing with Tommy and he still has fond memories of the evening song sessions: "Visitors to the tiny North Cornwall port of Padstow any weekend may well find one of the pubs packed with locals raising their voices in song for the sheer joy of harmonising together. At the heart of the session in all probability, would have been two men; one a fisherman ruddied by the sea winds singing as though his life depended on it whilst egging on the other, Charlie Pitman, a sharp-featured landsman enacting the songs in gestures whilst singing like a linnet. Both are renowned local characters. The crack is fierce as they josh each other along. 'Come on Pitman, give us the one that made you famous, *Cocktail Joe!*' Then where appropriate, sources are acknowledged: 'That's one from good old Charlie Bate, (*Maggy May*)' or 'That's one from the Callie,' (a long closed harbour-side pub called the 'Caledonian', always the place for the singing).

"But Tommy's singing should by rights be accompanied by the throb of a marine diesel engine, as he could frequently be heard singing whilst heading down the Camel estuary towards the Atlantic waves."

So enjoy the session, and wherever possible raise up your own voices 'For it's he who will not merry merry be, shall never taste of joy



Tommy and Charlie take to the microphones in the Ship Inn, Padstow

George Withers

The Withers family originally came from near Wells, Somerset, where they farmed the same land for some 400 years. George was born in 1924 when the family moved to Barton St. David.

That was the same year that Cecil Sharp, the most renowned collector of Somerset folk songs died. It is interesting to note, therefore, that Sharp's influence is still evident in these recordings. *The Seeds of Love*, the first song collected by Sharp, has become a touchstone for Somerset singers; *Brimbledown Fair* was one of George's father's songs - the family lived next door to James Bishop, whose version Sharp published.

George was the fifth child and only son of six children. Both his parents were musical and his father sang regularly in choirs and village concerts. George learnt *Peter the Miller* and *I Love Someone in Somerset* from them.

He recalls (in Bob and Jacqueline Patten's book 'Somerset Scrapbook' (1987):

"Father was a dairy farmer and there were six of us children and no milking machines in those days. We used to milk a few cows in the morning before we went to school and again in the afternoon when we came home. I've been milking cows, off and on, since I was about four years old ... well, we'd be there in the cow stall, milking, and Father'd be ... singing out of one side of his mouth, so as not to get the cow hairs in there, and always sang while he was milking. And I always sang while I was milking, even when I had a milking machine ... He sang the songs that he enjoyed singing, that lasted a good long time, about twenty five verses ... that would last out three cows, sort of thing. And I suppose I had a memory ... for things like that and they just stuck. That's all there is to it, that's how I came to sing these older songs."

In 1927 the family moved to Donyatt where George lived and farmed for the next 35 years. George followed in his father's footsteps and sang at school and village concerts and pantomimes. Then in the late 1960s George and his family moved to Isle Abbots where he met Harry Adams, a prolific singer and storyteller. Harry revived George's interest in traditional songs: *Forty-Five Miles* and *Joe Muggins* are from Harry's repertoire.

In recent years George moved up the road to Horton where he now lives in retirement. He is a prolific wood turner and regularly travels to singing sessions and festivals in his area and further afield, where he invariably he has a pint in one of his own turned wooden tankards.

George has commented that, "The more I sing those old songs, the more I enjoy them." And it shows!



George at work on the farm

The Songs

Widdecombe Fair (Roud 137)
The Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould published Widdecombe Fair in 'Songs of the West' (1895) stating that the original Tom Cobleigh lived in Spreyton in a house near Yeoford Junction and suggesting that the names in the chorus all belonged to Sticklepath. These two villages on the edge of Dartmoor are only a few miles from where Bob Cann was brought up and the version he sings here came from his grandfather. The song was included in many song collections including 'Ballads Ancient and Modern' by Robert MacIntyre (1929) and was sometimes adapted to other locations. Sussex singer George (Pop) Maynard sang a version which he called Lansdowne Fair which listed different participants who were led by Uncle Tom Cockerel.

Richard of Taunton Deane (Roud 382)
Cecil Sharp collected this song from Mrs Eliza Hutchings and published it in 'Folk Songs from Somerset'. The BBC recorded the song in the 1950s from George Bunston of Hambridge and it became somewhat of a local anthem in that area. Bob and Jacqueline Patten recorded several versions in the 1970s from Charlie Showers and Harry Adams as well as George Withers. In their book 'Somerset Scrapbook' (1987) they include a copy of a broadside for Richard of Taunton Dean which states that it was printed and sold by T. Batchelor, opposite the Refuge for the Destitute, Hackney Road (London). Alongside this is a written version entitled Dumble Dum Deary. In fact the song was widespread and was published by several broadside printers around the country where various other three-syllable place names were used.

Maggy May (Roud 5383)
Little Maggy May was written in America in 1869 by G.W. Moore with music by Charles W. Blamphin. It was published in 'Songs of the Sunny South' (1929) which included folk songs, spirituals, minstrel and Stephen Foster songs. In more recent years this song has become popular in Padstow through the singing of Charlie Bate, to who Tommy credited the song.

I'm an old Donkey Driver (Roud 1147)
This song was published as Jerusalem Cuckoo on a broadside in Manchester by Pearson and is in the G. R. Axon collection in Manchester. It has not often been recorded from traditional singers. Peter Kennedy recorded Derek Cripps singing in 1957. He was the landlord of the Farmer's Arms in St Merryn, which is probably where Charlie got the song and the mention of Harlyn (the nearest beach to St Merryn) shows the song has been localised. The only other recordings are from Sussex singers George Belton and Harry Upton who both have Brighton as the beach location. Harry Upton's version can be heard on TSCD664 'Troubles they are but few'.

Peter the Miller
Bob and Jacqueline Patten first recorded George Withers singing this song at Isle Abbots in 1983. They commented that they had not seen or heard the song before or since and it certainly does not seem to appear in any other published collections. George got it from his mother and he thinks that she might have learnt it at school. Whenever he sings it George appeals to the audience to see if anybody has heard it before. Nobody has yet!

The Watercress Girl (Roud 1541)
The song dates back to the late 19th century and is one of two songs with watercress themes that were popular with traditional singers. It was published on broadsides by Such of London and Sanderson of Edinburgh. Roy Palmer collected a version from the Staffordshire singer George Dunn, Norfolk's Harry Cox sang it, and his version can be heard on TSCD512D 'The Bonny Labouring Boy,' as did Sussex's Johnny Doughty who can be heard on VTC1CD 'Stepping it Out!'

Brimbledown Fair (Roud 171)
Often called Young Ramble Away this popular song was published by many broadside printers and was collected extensively in the West Country. H.E.D. Hammond noted down the song from William Barrett in Piddletown, Dorset in 1905 and Cecil Sharp collected three versions including one sung to him in 1904 by Jim Woodland at Stocklinch, Somerset. Sharp published a composite text in 'Folk Songs from Somerset' (Series 3 - 1906). George learned the song from his father, who had lived next door to another of Sharp's informants, James Bishop. In other parts of the country different names have appeared including Burlington Fair (Suffolk) and Brocklesby Fair (Lincolnshire).

Nobody Noticed me
This comic piece has all the hallmarks of a music hall song. Bob learned it when he was a youngster, from a travelling drover who used to visit the markets and fairs in his locality. The only other recording that seems to exist is of Bob Arnold of Gloucestershire, made by Gwilym Davies.

The Fly be on the Turnit (Roud 1376)
The song pre-dates 1881 when its tune was adopted as the official march of the 1st Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment. It was one of the first songs Cecil Sharp noted down in Somerset, from Louie Hooper and Charles Parsons and Captain Lewis in 1906. The BBC recorded it in Gloucestershire in 1938, in Wiltshire in 1954 and in Dorset in 1954. What seems to be a quintessential west country song actually turns up all over the country. Turmut Hozing is included in Lucy Broadwood's 'English County Songs' collected in Oxfordshire and Shropshire's Fred Jordan also sang it. The song gained widespread popularity in the 1920s through its release on a 78 rpm recording by the comedy comedian Albert Richardson. Keith Summers recorded it from Norfolk singer Ted Laurence, which can be heard on TSCD670 'There is a Man Upon the Farm'.

As I was a-Walking (Roud 140)
Often known as The Grenadier and the Lady this a popular song in the West Country. H.E.D. Hammond collected five variants in Somerset and Dorset between 1905-7 including one from W. Barlett at Wimborne and in 1950 Peter Kennedy recorded Walter Haynes singing it in the bar of the Ilchester Arms at Abbotsbury. The song was also popular in other parts of the country and frequently turns up in America. It is a favourite with the Holme Valley Beagles in South Yorkshire where it's called The Watter Rattles and George Dunn sang it in the Midlands under the title The Nightingale Sings.

Someone in Somerset (Roud 5702)
George was taught this comic song by his mother, and it doesn't seem to turn up anywhere else.

The Robber's Retreat (Roud 3314)
The Cadgwith Anthem, as it has become known, originates from the small fishing village on the south Cornwall coast. For years the bar of the 'Cadgwith Hotel' has resounded to the local fishermen's rendition of this unique song. Peter Kennedy recorded there in 1956 when the singers described the song as "just given to us by the old friends gone by" and John Henry Jane was said to be the first man who sang in the bar. The song is now popular with choirs all over Cornwall.

My Meatless Day (Roud 2413)
This song originates around the time of the First World War and it was performed on the stage by Ernie Mayne in 1917 and he may have written it. Dave Bland also came across the song in the West Country from Charlie Showers at Drayton, Somerset in 1973.

Joe Muggins (Roud 847)
This is a widespread song and was published by the 'Poet's Box' in Glasgow in 1869 when it was described as being sung to its original tune and priced at one penny. It appeared as a broadside in London published by Such and it has also turned up in Ireland. Robin Morton recorded it from John Maguire from Co. Fermanagh as Joe Higgins and it was published in Walton's 'Treasury of Irish Songs and Ballads - part 1' (1968) as 'I Don't Mind if I Do. George learned it from a neighbour of his in Isle Abbots, Harry Adams, who had been recorded by Bob and Jacqueline Patten They also recorded the song from Mrs Amy Ford of Low Ham, Somerset. Other versions turn up in the Kidson manuscripts (Yorkshire) and Peter Kennedy recorded for the BBC in 1956 from Bill Cameron, St Mary's in the Scilly Isles.

The Craftsmen on the Moor
Bob Cann loved life on Dartmoor and he wrote this song to celebrate the declining trades and craftsmen who had worked in the area for decades.

Golden Kippers (Roud 5381)
This is a comic parody of the popular minstrel song Golden Slippers and is another of Charlie's obscure songs which doesn't seem to turn up anywhere else. Its origins might in fact be local and a version with slightly different words is currently popular with the Boscastle and Delabole choirs.

Forty Five Miles (Roud 608)
This song appears in the Hammond and Gardiner manuscripts as Forty Long Miles, collected from Mrs Gulliver, Combe Florey, Somerset in 1905 and both Sabine Baring-Gould and Cecil Sharp collected versions in the West Country. Peter Kennedy recorded a version in Cornish from Joe Thomas of Constantine entitled Glaw, Kerer, Ergh OwCul Yma. The song was popular all around the country often under the name Cottage by the Wood or Cold, Haily Rainy Night, and there are comparable stories in other countries. Brahams produced a setting of the German version Ver Gebliches Standchen and it was utilised by Burns in Oh! Open the Door. George learned his version from Harry Adams.

I be Terrible Shy (Roud 5703)
George learned this in his late teens when he used to go to the local farmers' clubs. It has the hallmarks of A. J. Coles (of Jan Stewer fame) and it is certainly written in his style.

Goodbye Beer (Roud 5382)
Yet again Charlie Pitman comes up with a song that doesn't seem to be found anywhere else!

Pleasant and Delightful (Roud 660)
The theme of the sailor returning from sea with a ring or other token to enable him to be recognised on his return is a popular one. This song dates back to the early part of the 17th century when it was issued as The Sailor and his True Love by Jennings of Water Lane, off Fleet Street, London. In the Hammond and Gardiner Manuscripts it appears under the same name and was collected from Mrs Barlett, Halstock, Leigh, Dorset in 1906. Although it has been a popular song in the West Country the song was also well known in East Anglia where it became an anthem in both the East Suffolk singing pubs, the Blaxhall Ship and the Eell's Foot at Eastbridge. Cyril Poacher can be heard singing it on TSCD652 'My Ship Shall Sail the Ocean' and Geoff Ling on VTC2CD 'Songs Sung in Suffolk', whilst further up the coast in Norfolk Sam Lerner (TSCD511 'Now is The Time For Fishing') and Harry Cox (RCD1839 'What Will Become of England') both sang it.

Jack the Jolly Tar (Roud 511)
This is a humorous version of Jack on the Shore which was a popular song in both Britain and America although it wasn't published by many broadside printers, the earliest publication being 1830. Cecil Sharp collected a version of the song from William Nott at Meshaw, Devon in 1904. Bob Copper of Rottingdean sang the song and he knew it as Pull on the String.

Cocktail Joe (Roud 5380)
The first line of this song indicates its origins as a minstrel song. In Padstow around Christmas there are what are known as 'Darkie' days when locals dress in fancy clothes, play whatever instruments or percussion they can and sing songs like this. They visit homes and pubs in the town to entertain collect money for charity.

Tavistock Goosey Fair (Roud 10683)
This fair at Tavistock in Devon has been held on the second Wednesday in October since 1105. The song was composed by C. J. Tryhall and it has been suggested that it was written for a play in Plymouth. Although it is such a well known song there are surprisingly few field recordings of it. Bob learned the song from his grandfather.

The Seeds of Love (Roud 3)
This was the first song that Cecil Sharp noted down in 1903 from John England of Hambridge, Somerset and he subsequently collected 31 versions of the song. It is also known as Garners Gay and there are 228 versions on the Roud Folk Song Database. Roy Palmer writes in 'English Country Songs' (1979) "The earliest printed version I have seen is an eighteenth century slip song, The Red Rose Bud, though the song may date back to the previous century. There is a Lancashire tradition, almost certainly unfounded, that it was written by Mrs Fleetwood Habbergham". This song was popular all around Britain. Other recordings can be heard on EFDSSCD02 'A Century of Song' sung by Billy Bartel of Bedfordshire and VTD148CD 'A Shropshire Lad' sung by Fred Jordan. George first learned the song at school.

Pass Around the Grog (Roud 5384)
Often called the Padstow Drinking Song this seems to be unique to this part of Cornwall, although George B.Gardiner did note down a version entitled Here's a Health to Queen Victoria. It was a favourite song in the long closed Caledonian pub which used to be on the harbourside in Padstow, and it was there that Tommy and Charlie learnt it.

The Roud numbers given with the songs refer to Steve Roud's ongoing Folk Song Database.

The notes in this booklet were written by John Howson with the help of: Bob & Jaqueline Patten, Maureen Tatlow, Taffy Thomas, Vic Legg, George Withers and Malcolm Taylor. Text editing, proof reading and encouragement: Katie Howson

The words of the songs on this CD are available on our website
www.veteran.co.uk