

Paul O'Reilly

# THINK BACK UPON THE DAYS

*Think Back Upon the Days*

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## THINK BACK UPON THE DAYS

As a kid, I used to travel with my mother and father to fleadh, concerts, weekend sessions of Irish traditional music, song and of course drink. Even today, I still have a vivid and cherished memory of my father buying a copy of Colm Sands' *Unapproved Road* at a fleadh in Listowel; I imagine the year to be 1982, the year Kerry lost *that* All-Ireland. I still have this vinyl in my collection; a tremendous album of original folk songs I've often measured myself against. My parents stopped travelling around 1990; it is my belief this was because of heart-breaking bereavements in the family. That year, I travelled the tarred road to Sligo with Tim Corrigan and my first All-Ireland Fleadh without my parents. I won the U-18 bodhrán competition, the fiddler providing the *Mason's Apron* for me that day being the legend Jimmy Kelly of Marshalstown.

Throughout the nineties, my singing and playing waned as I went to college to gain an honours degree, focused on a career in software engineering – a trade I still earn a crust in by day – but by the turn of the millennium I was married and had moved back from Dublin to Enniscorthy. Home again, I started going over lyrics I had written over the years; mostly folk-pop songs influenced by Christy Moore, Jimmy McCarthy and the more contemporary works of Paul Brady. There was a singer-songwriter boom on (Damien Rice, Glen Hansard and the like) and I loved the buzz around Wexford Arts Centre that time, when Denis Collins was Artistic Director, as us Wexford singer-songwriters shared our work and dreamed of the big time. The result for me was my debut album of ten original, contemporary songs called *Take a Wish* (2003).

I then turned to the work of my father as I had always been aware of *his* folder of songs. I had covert plans to get him to record them, himself being a beautiful tenor. However, in 2005, devastatingly, he passed away within a matter of months. Coincidentally, with me by then immersing myself in my father's songs and the singers that had influenced him, I had also started to travel to traditional singing sessions and festivals with people like Niall Wall, Helen Kirwan, John Ennis, Paddy, Phil and Ronan Berry, John O'Byrne, Seamus Brogan and many more (so please forgive me if I don't name you all). Many of these had sang and drank with my parents in the eighties, and so I found great comfort in being in their wise company after my father's passing.

This period led to the birth of the traditional singing group Whisht!, who released their debut album *The Cuckoo's Note* in 2007. Work on my father's folder resumed after a grieving period and was fully realised with the great help of Helen Kirwan and friendly musicians and singers on an epic double-album of his songs – the songs of the Cooper family of Monageer, as well as other Wexford songs I had come across – called *The Poet's Dream* (2009).

Over the next few years I began work on a follow-up album, exploring the words of balladeers like PJ McCall, Pádraig Kehoe, MJ Barry, Nick Fleming, Tom Williams, Jack McCutcheon, Babs Egan and Martin McCann. I studied styles of song writing and entered fleadh with some success as a singer, writer and lilter, following in my father's

footsteps who had also won a Senior All-Ireland in liling. I worked on the production of albums by John Ennis (2008, 2010), *The Wild Bees* (2010), *Reilly's Men* (2011) and Fergus Russell (2013-14), as well as the book *Songs and Poems by James Armstrong* (2010) and the film *Paddy Berry: The Singer, the Song and the Place* (2012-13).

But, on St Patrick's Day, 2012, my mother suffered an almost fatal stroke; another devastating and life-changing event. In hindsight I can see that my own singing and song writing began to take a backseat from then; in some ways mirroring the decision my parents had taken in 1990. I still managed to intermittently work on fiction, plays, two more isolated and therapeutic forms of writing, and a couple of productions, but with our two sons now becoming feisty young kids, I got more involved with things like school, organisations such as the GAA, immersed myself in work, and, bar collaborating with Aileen Lambert and Michael Fortune on a 1916 song included on this album, I have in no way been as prolific as I used to be with my own singing and song writing since 2012.

My mother passed away in 2019. This time I was helped through some of the grieving period with the great folks of Enniscorthy Drama Group who in 2020 produced my second play *Wild in the Country* in the Presentation Arts Centre, the last one performed there before the virus hit. Now I can't say *the* COVID had a major impact on my work routine; I was working from home long before that. But it did give me time to reflect; to remember; to grieve as an only-child, thoughts and dreams of both my mother and father constantly re-emerging; to weight up what is important against what was weighing me down; to identify and put to bed negative influences that had been hindering and interfering with artistic creativity.

It was actually through writing fiction during *the* COVID I rediscovered my love of song, as well as a renewed understanding of how music can influence our lives. This led to me opening up plastic boxes I had stored away over the years, many packed with folders, cassettes, burned CDs and hard disks. I found my father's writings, photographs from generations of fleadh, sessions, concerts, old set-lists, songs I had wanted to learn ten years ago, songs I had started to write. I was aware I had some decent recordings post *The Poet's Dream* (2009), but on the hard disks I was surprised to discover others I'd made of myself that had never seen the light of day. Some I still don't even remember making; others I probably made in preparation for some fleadh competition so I could analyse how well (or not) I was pitching, phrasing, breathing or ornamenting at the time.

It is from this patchwork of recordings I have brought together this compilation album that spans my efforts in traditional and folk singing and song writing between 2007 and 2016. There are no *new* recordings: the first track is *The Waterford Boys*, recorded with Whisht! back in 2007; the last is a private recording of my 1916 Song Project song, *The Rise of Wexford Volunteers*, made in 2016. Some of the tracks were in better shape than others, quite a few felt a bit ropey and I was unsure if they could be salvaged. However, once the terrific skills and understanding of Brendan Carthy at *The Orchard Recording Studio* was let loose on them, he did an amazing job editing, re-mixing and mastering the raw tracks I gave him. So thanks very much, Brendan. You made this a reality.

As for the songs themselves, they have their own notes. But I thought it worth mentioning the reasoning behind releasing this album. When I think of it now, in the way *The Poet's Dream* became a cathartic project for me after my father's passing, *Think Back Upon the Days* has turned out to be another. This time the memory of my mother very much to the fore. So take a bow Breda and MJ, after all these years I'm back travelling these highways of song and melody and – with your lasting influence – am learning to love it all over again.

Paul O'Reilly  
July, 2021

# THINK BACK UPON THE DAYS

## **THE WATERFORD BOYS**

*Original Words: Harry Clifton; Source: Tim Dennehy*

For fun and diversion, we have come together,  
I tell you from Waterford hither we came.  
We crossed the deep ocean in dark stormy weather,  
Our hearts they were light and our pockets the same.  
Sad at leaving old Ireland we're once more on dry land,  
When at the roadside a tavern I spied.  
And as I was melting, my pockets I felt,  
For the price of a drink I was mortally dry.

To the tavern I rolled and the landlord he strolled in,  
Good morrow said he and said I, if you please.  
Will you get me a bed and then bring me some bread  
And a bottle of porter and a small piece of cheese.  
My bread and cheese ended I then condescended  
To take my repose, so I bade him goodnight.  
When under the clothes I was trying to doze,  
I first dipped me toes and then blew out the light.

Now, I wasn't long sleeping when I heard something creeping  
And gnawing and chawing around the bed post.  
My breath I suspended, but the noise never ended,  
Says I, you have damnable claws for a ghost.  
For to make myself easy, and being very lazy,  
My head once more I stuck out from the clothes.  
Yerra japers, what's that, but a thundering jack-rat  
Took one leap from the floor, jumped right up to me nose.

Well, I reached for me hobnail and made me a bobtail  
And wrestled with rats till the clear light of day.  
Then the landlord came in and says he with a grin,  
For your supper and bed you've five shillings to pay.  
Five shillings for what? Now don't be disgracing yourself  
As a rogue, says I, if you please!  
While I can't get to sleep, you've the devil's own cheek,  
To charge me five shillings for dry bread and cheese.

Oh, the landlord went raring and leaping and tearing,  
He jumped out the window and kicked in the door.  
When he could get farther, he cried míle murder,  
These rats they are 'ating me up by the score.  
They sleep in me stable, they ate from me table,  
They wrestle me dogs and they kill all me cats.

Faith then, says I, oh, give me those five shillings  
And I'll tell you a way to get rid of the rats.

As he handed the silver, I will then, said he,  
For my life is a wreck and my nights are a curse.  
My wife has long left me, my children neglect me,  
My grassy green fields have all turned to furze.  
Ah, you miser, says I, just invite them to supper  
And dry bread and cheese lay before them for sure.  
Never mind if they're willing, but charge them five shillings,  
And never again will the rat cross your floor.

---

Learned in and around 2006 from the singing of Tim Dennehy (as *Wrestling with Rats* on his *The Blue Green Door* album). Original version composed by Harry Clifton. This recording was included on the Whisht! album *The Cuckoo's Note* (2007), made at Liam Clancy Studios, An Rinn. In 2016 I was thrilled to swap a couple of songs with Tim for the first time, in a Dublin hotel lobby in the early hours of the morning after a Góilín session celebrating the 1916 Song Project.

The sleeve-note on *The Cuckoo's Note* reads: *The Waterford Boys* was originally composed by Harry Clifton (1832-1872), a London music-hall writer and performer, and was published in broadsheet form. Recorded by Paddy Tunney on *A Wild Bees' Nest* (1965), it later appeared in *The Mercier Book of Old Irish Street Ballads* (1989). The lyrics have been altered over the years as often happens with traditional songs, perhaps to accommodate the singer or enhance the storyline. The bulk of this version comes from the singing of Tim Dennehy – though, in this rendition I too have made a couple of subtle changes.

## THE BLOOMING FLOWER OF GRANGE

*Words & Music: Traditional; Source: Paddy Berry*

It was in the blooming summertime  
When fields and meadows are in their prime,  
To take the air I was inclined  
And carelessly did range  
Where primrose pale and violets blue  
And daisies o'er the plains were grew,  
My onward course, I did pursue,  
Till I arrived in Grange.

It was there I spied a neat abode,  
A sunny cottage by the road,  
Wherein a damsel sat and sewed,  
Whose beauty would change  
Man's darkest sorrow into bliss  
Had he a moment to caress,  
And through life's journey to possess  
The blooming flower of Grange.

Her eyes they glittered like the stars  
That we call Mercury and Mars  
Or those bright comets from afar  
In their celestial reign.  
Heaven above was a glorious sight  
And the moon shone down its beaming light  
For to illumine this beauty bright,  
The blooming flower of Grange.

Her amber locks in ringlets thick  
Flowed freely 'round her snow-white neck.  
And the rose that bloomed upon her cheek  
No winter wind could change.  
In sudden raptures of delight,  
I then approached this beauty bright  
And my heart was stopped at the first sight  
Of the blooming flower of Grange.

I said, my blooming flower fair,  
If you affection with me share,  
I solemnly now do declare  
Your state I wish to change.  
While life shall animate thee breast,  
I'll love respect and I'll do my best

For to keep your gentle mind at rest,  
My blooming flower of Grange.

Kind sir, she said, your offer's good  
And I would embrace it, if I could,  
Although I feel my parents would  
Our union disarrange.  
Though eighteen summers I have seen,  
A lover yet I have not been,  
Therefore, I cannot be your queen,  
Said the blooming flower of Grange.

'Tis sad my love for to say farewell,  
And the pain I feel no tongue can tell,  
Those heavy thoughts I can't dispel  
That through my bosom reign.  
All for the want of free consent  
I'm doomed in exile to repent,  
And all through life, I will lament  
For the day I came to Grange.

Young man, she said, your worries subdued,  
For since I find you really true,  
Forever the same, I'll be to you,  
Through life I'll never change.  
And though I failed to get consent  
Still to be yours is my intent  
And you have no cause for to lament,  
Said the blooming flower of Grange.

A thousand thanks, my heart's delight,  
My sorrow you have put to flight.  
Forever I'll bless this glorious night  
That brought this happy change.  
So come prepare and be my bride  
Near Wexford town I do reside,  
Where the nuptial knot, it will be tied,  
To the blooming flower of Grange.

---

Recorded for *The Cuckoo's Note* in 2007. Learned from the singing of Paddy Berry on *Sing Again Paddy* (2005). Also collected by Paddy in *Wexford Ballads* (1982) where he states: "as sung by the late Jim Casey, Danescastle, Carrig-on-Bannow in 1977".

Since, I have also come across similar versions: in a schools' collection on [duchas.ie](http://duchas.ie) (collected from a Mrs M. O'Leary, age 76, of Tullow, Co. Carlow); and through the singing of Fran McPhail on a 1997 recording in the ITMA's *Luke Cheevers Collection*.

## **OLD WOMAN FROM WEXFORD**

*Words & Music: Traditional; Source: Tommy Makem*

There was an old woman from Wexford,  
From (*In*) Wexford, she did dwell.  
She loved her husband dearly but  
Another man twice as well.

Chorus:

With me right fol diddle fol dare oh,  
With me right fol du rel lay.

She went to the doctor  
Some medicine for to find,  
Saying, "Doctor give me something for  
To make me auld man blind."

"Oh, feed him eggs and marrowbones  
And make him sup them all.  
And it won't be very long after that  
He won't see you at all."

The old doctor wrote a note  
And he signed it with his hand.  
And he sent it to the auld man just  
So he might understand.

So she fed him eggs and marrowbones  
And made him sup them all.  
And it wasn't very long after that  
He couldn't see her at all.

He says, "I'd go and drown meself  
Only that might be a sin."  
Says she, "I'll go along with you  
And help to push you in."

The old woman she went back a bit  
To get a running go,  
But the auld man gently hopped aside  
And she went down below.

Oh, how loudly did she roar  
And how loudly did she bawl.  
"Arrah hould yer whisht, auld woman," says he,  
"Sure, I can't see you at all."

She swam and swam and swam until  
She came to the farther brim.  
But the auld man got a long black (*barge*) pole  
And pushed her right back in.

Oh, eggs and eggs and marrowbones  
Will make an auld man blind.  
But if you want to drown him  
You must creep up close behind.

---

I'm pretty sure I learned this from the singing of Tommy Makem, whose work I still greatly admire. I have since been in the company of Sean Mone (author of *The Transit Van* and *Lovers and Friends* amongst many other classics) and heard him speak of the times when he used to call over to the Makem house in Keady where he would sing and discover first-hand the many songs of Tommy and his mother, Sarah.

I believe this recording was made around 2007, probably as a demo for a potential Whisht! show song to lighten the mood between two *big* ones. A lilting version of the *Town of Ballybay* was also on a shortlist but I don't remember ever singing either live. *Johnny Jump Up* and the *Lowlands Low* became the lively show songs for my slots.

## **THE WILD GEESE OF KILLYLEAGH**

*Words: © Paul O'Reilly (IMRO); Music: Aisling Gheal*

Draw near young soldiers of high ambition  
And noble scholars of Rome and Nero's reign,  
And I'll offer a true reflection  
Of how a band escaped a cruel domain.  
So discontent by shame and morals,  
Our voyage began so we'd steal free.  
Neath wire, barbed, and muzzled mongrels  
We crept at night until we found a lea.

There a vision bright appeared o'er hill and valley  
And so we wandered from camp to southern shore.  
Passing the vanquished, we dared not dally,  
A band in fear of death by a racist war.  
The chimney ash had scattered widely,  
As far to the east as the sun can rise.  
But, as the days passed on blindly,  
We sought the waves to cleanse our weeping eyes.

Young William followed me, the one whose vision  
Had led him south away from fire and harm.  
Not taking paths worn by Panther traction,  
We trekked the hills and lived from farm to farm.  
When crossing streams, we cowered like foxes,  
Our tongues went quiet and tears were veiled.  
For we had seen the graves like trenches,  
In gas and gold cruel Hitler had regaled.

At night I watched the stars, gazing for courage,  
As William slept and dreamt of Killyleagh.  
And of Strangford Lough where wild geese forage  
For eel-grass and plankton tirelessly.  
The planted castle from height engages,  
Its turrets mark a change in history.  
As Luna's shrine, down through the ages,  
On Aventine shines on in memory.

We reached a city, then crossed the river,  
The Danube's blue turned grey by the ashen sky.  
The dead were buried without murmur,  
Then numb we rose and marched for Italy.  
The Alps we rounded, our numbers dwindled,  
Until the sea was my scent upon the wind.

Through final glens I almost faltered,  
But when I swam I fooled my rambling mind.

Oh weary soldier, when locked in battle  
And open skies are guarded by a foe,  
With concentration you can bear your mantle  
And flee from pain, starvation, grief and woe.  
So dream, brave William, of liberation,  
Then journey well to the shores of Italy.  
For there, we'll cure your poor condition  
So you may soar, once more, o'er Killyleagh.

---

Killyleagh is a small town in County Down, located on the beautiful shores of Strangford Lough, where thousands of Brent Geese migrate to every Autumn from the Arctic Circle. Many Allied soldiers spent some time exercising around Killyleagh during World War II before travelling onwards to the battlefields of France and Europe – a similar journey to that taken by the “Wild Geese” of Ireland over the centuries.

Written to the sean-nós air, *Aisling Gheal*, and adapted from the singing of Iarla Ó Lionáird, it came second in the Newly Composed English Song competition at the 2008 All-Ireland Fleadh in Tullamore. This was recorded as the end track to *The Poet's Dream* (2009). It was the first song I wrote (or put) to an existing (though not typically reused) traditional Irish air, a technique I've regularly employed since there are so, so many.

## MY SON TIM

*Words & Music: Traditional; Source: Frank Harte/Donal Lunny*

Oh my son Tim was a bosun's mate,  
He could blow the whistle but he never ran a rate,  
When the thoughts of his mother came into his head,  
You couldn't understand one word he said.

Chorus:

With your too-ri-ra, whack fol-the-da,  
Whack fol-the-doodle, fol-the-di-do.

"Ah, were you lame or were you blind  
When you left your two fine legs behind?  
Ochone, mavrone, but you're a silly youth  
That you didn't run away from the Frenchman's shoot."

"I was not drunk or neither blind  
When I left me two fine pins behind,  
When up came a bloody great cannonball,  
Shot away me sea-boots, oilskins and all."

"And now I'll cross the raging main  
To the King of France and the Queen of Spain,  
And I'll make them rue the time  
That they shot away the legs of a child of mine."

---

Learned from the singing of Franke Harte on his epic *My Name is Napoleon Bonaparte* album. Experimenting with two- and three-part harmonies at the time influenced by groups like *The Voice Squad*, this recording was made around 2009 where I took on the three roles of top, middle and bottom.

## SHAMROCK SHORE

*Words & Music: Traditional; Source: Paul Brady*

You brave young sons of Erin's Isle, I'll hope you will attend awhile,  
It's about the wrongs of Ireland I am going to relate.  
'Twas black and cursed was the day, that our parliament was taken away,  
And all our grief and suffering commences from that day.  
For our hardy sons and daughters fair to other countries must repair  
And to leave their native land behind in sorrow to deplore.  
For to seek employment they must roam far, far away from their native home,  
From that sore, oppressed island that they call the shamrock shore.

Now Ireland is with plenty blessed, but the people they are sore oppressed  
Oh (*All*) by those cursed tyrants we are forced for to obey.  
Some haughty landlords for to please, our houses and our lands they'll seize  
And (*To*) put fifty farms into one and drive us all away.  
Regardless of the widow's *cries*, the mother's tears and the orphan's *sighs*,  
In thousands we are driven from home and grieves our hearts full sore.  
We are fraught with (*by*) famine and disease, we emigrated across the seas  
From that sore, oppressed island that they called the shamrock shore.

Our sustenance is (*all*) taken away, our tithes and taxes for to pay,  
To support that law-protected church to which they do adhere.  
And our Irish gentry, well you know, to other countries they do go,  
And the money from old Ireland is squandered here and there.  
But if those squires would stay at home and not to other countries roam,  
But to build mills and factories here to employ the labouring core.  
For if we had trade and commerce fair, to me no country could compare,  
To that sore, oppressed island that they call the shamrock shore.

John Bull, he boasts and he laughs with scorn and he says that Irishman is born  
To be always discontented, for at home he cannot agree.  
But we'll banish discord from this land and in harmony like brothers stand  
To demand the rights of Ireland, let us all united be.  
And our parliament on College Green, for to assemble will be seen,  
And happy days on Erin's Isle we soon will have once more.  
And dear old Ireland soon will be a great and glorious country  
And peace and blessings soon will smile around the shamrock shore.

---

I lived alone in Cork city over 1994-95 where I saw Paul Brady for the first time in the Opera House. I went to see artists like Andy Irvine, Mick Hanly and John Spillane upstairs in the now legendary Lobby Bar. It was an eye (and ear) opening year. I discovered open tunings, learned how to play *The Lakes of Pontchartrain*, *Arthur McBride*, *Paddy's Green Shamrock Shore*, and about fifteen years later I was still learning from Paul Brady, this time how to sing *Shamrock Shore* from the *Molloy*, *Brady*, *Peoples* album. It's a song whose lyrics still resonant today.

## THE GREEN FIELDS OF CANADA

*Words & Music: Traditional; Source: Paddy Tunney*

Farewell to the groves of shillelagh and shamrock,  
Farewell to the girls of old Ireland all round.  
May their hearts be as merry as ever I would wish them  
When far away across the ocean I'm bound.  
My mother is old and my father's quite feeble,  
To leave their own country, it grieves their heart sore.  
Oh, the tears down their cheeks, in great drops are rolling,  
To think they must die upon some foreign shore.

But what matter to me where my bones may be buried  
If in peace and contentment I can spend my life.  
Oh, the green fields of Canada, a daily are blooming,  
And it's there I'll put an end to my misery and strife.

Chorus:

So it's pack up your sea stores, consider no longer,  
Ten dollars a week isn't very bad pay.  
With no taxes or tithes to devour up your wages  
When you're on the green fields of America.

The sheep run unshorn and the land's gone to rushes,  
The handyman's gone and the winders of creels.  
Away 'cross the ocean go journeymen tailors  
And fiddlers that flaked out the old mountain reels.  
But I mind a time when old Ireland was flourishing,  
When lots of her tradesmen did work for good pay.  
But since her manufactories have crossed the Atlantic  
It's now we must follow to America.

And so to conclude and to finish my ditty,  
If ever friendless Irishman chances my way,  
With the best in the house I will greet him and welcome  
At home on the green fields of America.

---

There have been many versions and arrangements of this song over the years but, for the untouched one, look up Paddy Tunney's book *The Stone Fiddle* (p. 156) where he speaks about extracting it in its entirety from his mother's failing memory. It's a tremendous song and I remember having ambitions of one day recording the full and long version. Perhaps someday I will. As part of the 1916 Song Project in 2016 I was thrilled to be able to share the stage with Paddy's son, John. This shortened version was recorded around 2009, probably in preparation for a fleadh competition.

## OLD ARBOE

*Words & Music: Traditional; Source: Geordie Hanna/Rita Gallagher*

Ye gods assist my poor recitation,  
Ye inspired muses lend me your hands.  
While I bravely do make a bold endeavour  
To sing the praises of these lovely lands.  
Well situated in the north of Ireland,  
Being in the county of old Tyrone,  
Near to Lough Neagh of the tranquil waters,  
That ancient fabric called old Arboe.

In summer season for recreation  
You can careless wander along those strands.  
Where Boreas' breezes are gently blowing  
Along the spot where the fabric stands.  
It was Saint Patrick who did ordain  
That great stone cross should be raised on high,  
As a reminder to sinful Christians  
That on a cross God's son did die.

Oh, stand awhile in that woody arbour  
Where purling streams, they run to and thro.  
Where the trout and salmon are always sporting  
To yield more bounty to old Arboe.  
No serpent lurks in those tranquil waters,  
No odours poisoned infest the breeze,  
But peace and plenty for sons and daughters  
Abound around you, oh sweet Lough Neagh.

I have travelled France and I've travelled Flanders  
And all the countries beyond the Rhine,  
But in all my raking and undertaking,  
Arboe, your equal I ne'er did find.  
My course I've taken by the Indian ocean,  
By the shores of Cana and Galilee,  
But in all my ranging and serenading,  
Arboe, your equal I ne'er did see.

---

A song that will always be associated with the singing of Geordie Hanna, I picked up this arrangement from Rita Gallagher at the many Geordie Hanna Weekends we used to travel to in Derrytresk. The melody just swept me away and, while I felt the song was probably a bit too *big* for me to take on, I had a go nonetheless. I did sing it once in Derrytresk, at a parting session one Sunday morning to a handful of people. Paddy Tunney writes at length in his book *Where Songs Do Thunder* about Geordie and *Ol' Arboe*. A [version](#) with additional words appears in Sam Henry's *Songs of the People*.

## **THE BLACKBIRD (SET DANCE INTO REEL)**

*Music: Traditional; Source: The Bothy Band*

In 2010 I won the Senior All-Ireland liltin' competition, the set dance *The Blackbird* was one of my tunes. A big fan of The Bothy Band growing up, for the album *Good Old Monageer* (produced by Pádraig and Brigid Sinnott in 2009) I recorded this set dance (with guitar and bodhrán) and followed that with The Bothy Band's reel version.

## **MY RAMBLES THROUGH ERIN**

*Words: © Billy Cooper; Music: inspired by The Stone Outside Dan Murphy's Door;*

*Source: History in Verse: Collected by Liam Cooper*

In my rambles through Erin in search of a loaf  
To feed the dear loved ones at home,  
Young Doyle and meself packed our toolkits one day  
For many's a long mile to roam.  
We handled the diston on Sliabh na mBan slopes,  
Used a trowel too at Ballyvadleigh,  
And in Green Street in Callan while slating a roof  
We shivered on a cold winter's day.

In the garden of Erin, on Vallymount strand,  
We worked hard to keep us alive.  
But the craic it was good as was also the food,  
Watergrass and your vat twenty-five.  
When our day's work was done, we retired with Jim Byrne  
To his neat cot down Balltyboy's lane,  
Where the boys and the girls gathered 'round every night  
To join in some innocent game.

We had very few words, made our way out to Swords  
Where industry often abounds,  
And we spent the next day negotiating our pay  
And having an auld look around.  
We found digs quite convenient and coy,  
Crossed the wire and were right on the job,  
And each night after tae we went back down that way  
Just to earn us a few extra bob.

So we worked each day building a factory fair,  
Slaving on till the end of the year,  
Then we packed our bags fast, made our journey at last  
Back home to auld Monageer.  
And things they had taken a turn for the good,  
There were jobs to be had by the score,  
And there were many within our own parish, alas,  
With some of them outside the door.

Ah but I'm retired, though redundant, inspired  
With a bob in my pocket to spend,  
So I take meself down to the auld Rambler's Inn  
On a Sunday to cap the weekend.  
Now I've come to the end of my story  
Concerning my trustworthy friend,

Good pals we have been now for many's a year  
And good pals we will be till the end.

---

Recorded for the album *Good Old Monageer* (produced by Pádraig and Brigid Sinnott in 2009), I had come across this song when compiling the set-list of *The Poet's Dream* (2009). For whatever reason it didn't make that album, I think I already had too much material, but I was delighted to be able to air it for the Monageer album where I played guitars, bodhrán and Irish bouzouki.

To suit the words for the arrangement I wanted, I had to adapt the air mentioned by Liam Cooper in his publication of the Cooper family songs, *History in Verse: Collected by Liam Cooper*. In this he states: "This song was written by Billy Cooper relating to his work and travels at the Building Industry during the early 1950s with his good pal and neighbour, Johnny Doyle. They worked in many counties and the bicycle was the common mode of transport. This song is sung to the air *The Stone Outside Dan Murphy's Door*". My father MJ bookended this collection by Liam with a poem in honour of Billy Cooper called *The Poet of Monageer*.

## FOREST WARRIOR'S LAMENT

Words: © Paul O'Reilly (IMRO); Music: *Táimse im' Chodladh is ná Dúistear Me*

Last eve as I roamed down through the green valley  
Where the dark Barrow flows with a swell and flair.  
There a cuckoo called to the stars of great Halley  
And blossoms took rest from the spying deer.  
Awaiting the moon to accompany me home,  
On came the cheer of soldiers and I into the river stole.  
Their tidings bright brought me great plight,  
A thousand years could not console.  
For the love of my heart they had bled that day.

By the guide of the stars, I ran for my lover  
Unearthing a blade from the wild hare's den.  
But on reaching the plain I was to discover  
A war of attrition against home and kin.  
The blaze of each flare breezed by my despair,  
And as I sought the maid I loved they torched my skin and hair.  
Until I found, upon the ground,  
The one who'd borne to me an heir.  
Oh, the love of my heart they had bled that day.

Through my arms she passed to the depths of the forest  
Where the proud deer frolic and young fawns appear.  
And cherish, I will, the jewel from her pale breast,  
While dear Rosaleen wanders that wide frontier.  
I made for her a shroud and with each thread I vowed  
All warriors I would engage and down into Hades toss.  
Though once I prayed to take my blade  
And bleed the scorn that bore this Cross,  
As the love from my heart they had bled that day.

She lies in the shade of the oak 'neath we courted  
And carved from the arrow that pierced my heart.  
But Cupid's gone now, her magic departed,  
And the Lord of great strife will his pain impart.  
As I wait by a snare for every deer and hare,  
United in all our grief we soon now set off to war.  
But before we stray, once more I pray  
Beneath the oak that knows no peer,  
For the love of my heart they had bled that day.

---

Inspired by a translation of the air's title, "I am asleep and don't waken me", the song evokes a peaceful man's journey into warrior-hood brought about by the unprovoked destruction of his home and kin. Written in 2009, it is a song I have very rarely performed.

## GRIFFINSTOWN HILL

*Words: Traditional; Music: An Droimeann Donn Dilis; Source: MJ O'Reilly*

The battle was over on Griffinstown Hill,  
A shout of great victory was heard loud and shrill.  
The rebels did route and the soldiers pursued  
As far as the green hills and the woods of *Carew*.

By a sycamore tree on that wood-covered hill,  
A young hero lay dying and is bleeding there still.  
The pale moon was shining brightly down from the sky  
And it's over the green hills our young heroes do lie.

It was gently he lifted his uncovered head  
And to all his brave comrades he mournfully said,  
My life is fast sinking, just a few moments more,  
When all earthly troubles with me shall be o'er.

Take this news to my father, who is sick on his bed,  
And tell him the son of his bosom is dead.  
Tell to Kathleen O'Donovan, my affectionate wife,  
That I'll love her in death as I've loved her in life.

Tell to Erin, my country, that patriotic isle,  
My life I have given her and for her I will die.  
There may be more brave men who will die for her still  
Like the rebels who were shot out on Griffinstown Hill.

---

A popular song amongst Wexford traditional singers and beyond, it was a regular of my father's and I think I learned it by osmosis from him. This is the version he sang though others have minor differences in the lyrics, which are widely available online, together with insights about where this Griffinstown Hill is and the place-name mentioned here as *Carew* (spelling from my father's notes). I sang this in an All-Ireland fleadh competition in 2010 and would have made this recording in preparation.

My father went on to reuse this beautiful Irish air for his own song *The Busker*.

## LITTLE JIMMY MURPHY

*Words: Traditional/Luke Cheevers; Music: Traditional; Source: Niall Wall*

'Twas down in Camolin where the great row was making  
And poor little Jimmy Murphy was the first to be taken.  
We are far from the last route, from the east to Downpatrick,  
Where lies poor little Jimmy Murphy on the sweet green mossy banks  
Killy ma ling killy ma joe whiskey friskey toorah loo,  
Rang a dourdle di doh ding dour a ly oh.

We gathered our pikes and flintlocks and green branches,  
And soon for old Wexford we all were advancing.  
We are far from the last route, from the east to Downpatrick,  
Where lies poor little Jimmy Murphy on the sweet green mossy banks  
Killy ma ling killy ma joe whiskey friskey toorah loo,  
Rang a dourdle di doh ding dour a ly oh.

We marched through New Ross, Vinegar Hill and through Gorey  
And the North Cork Militia couldn't deny us the glory.  
We are far from the last route, from the east to Downpatrick,  
Where lies poor little Jimmy Murphy on the sweet green mossy banks  
Killy ma ling killy ma joe whiskey friskey toorah loo,  
Rang a dourdle di doh ding dour a ly oh.

We marched through the towns and we marched through the city  
With our hands tied behind our backs and our ladies cried pity.  
We are far from the last route, from the east to Downpatrick,  
Where lies poor little Jimmy Murphy on the sweet green mossy banks  
Killy ma ling killy ma joe whiskey friskey toorah loo,  
Rang a dourdle di doh ding dour a ly oh.

Now, Jimmy Murphy was hanged not for sheep-stealing,  
But he courted a pretty girl and her name was Kate Whelan.  
We are far from the last route, from the east to Downpatrick,  
Where lies poor little Jimmy Murphy on the sweet green mossy banks  
Killy ma ling killy ma joe whiskey friskey toorah loo,  
Rang a dourdle di doh ding dour a ly oh.

---

I learned this version from the singing of Niall Wall as part of a Whisht! choral showpiece that would go down a storm. On *The Cuckoo's Note* (2007) sleeve notes, Niall credits Dublin singer Luke Cheevers (whom I later had the pleasure of getting to know through An Góilín and The Wild Bees) with writing verses 2 & 3 around the time of the bicentenary of the 1798 Irish rebellion.

## **PADDY FROM PLACENTIA**

*Words: © Paul O'Reilly (IMRO); Music: The Traveller All Over the World*

For St John's Harbour we set sail across the Atlantic's stormy wail,  
But like auld Cabot we'd not fail in our quest for to explore.  
So due south west we set our mast, and for fresh cod we often cast,  
And talked of tales and days long past on Erin's lovely shore.  
We passed by whales and sharks galore and even once we heard the roar  
Of an ocean ship, or a polar bear, we couldn't tell for sure.  
The dolphins tracked our path across and the seals ensured we'd not trespass  
Onto the Arctic's frozen mass where many did expire.

We dodged a fleet of whalers bold and a jiggin' trawler tryin' to load  
As many cod as it could hauld within its deck and bay.  
At night we drank a thumb of rum and then waited for the dawn to come  
So we could tack our way as one with the dolphins bright and gay.  
We battled rain and waves so high they seemed to come down from the sky  
And at times we thought we'd even die and be tucked in Neptune's bed.  
But we banished fear and doubts away to save them for a rainy day  
When we'd be stuck for somethin' to say in a bar when it was dead.

Then three days short of a three week trip we saw the lights of the ocean ship  
And tucked in neatly to its slip and rested for a while.  
Until St John's the boat did dock and the crew and captain got a shock  
When they saw the sailors that did lock beside them with a smile.  
Then for a bar we all made way and the captain was the first to pay  
Sayin' Paddy you're a long, long way from Erin's lovely shore.  
Well I says me man good heath to all, but sure I'm from Wexford and he's  
Donegal,  
And there's Leitrim over there by the wall with his arm around Rathnure.

There's Cavan winkin' at a girl from Navan who thinks she's died and gone to  
heaven,  
And who else but Tipperary's havin' his bald head shaved by Clare.  
There's Bree and Sligo in the corner chattin' up Tyrone's daughter  
And if he sees them there'll be a slaughter but they all seem not to care.  
There's Cork and Kerry by the bar and there's Westmeath kissin' Mullingar,  
And there's Dublin huggin' a Limerick star that landed yesterday.  
There's Galway by the old hat-stand, and the Waterford and Kilkenny band  
Will soon start up their music grand, ah sure, 'tis just like Kilmore Quay.

Well we drank all night and then next day I headed for Placentia Bay  
And there decided for to stay a little while and see  
The capes and coves and moose that roam that wilderness that is their home  
And then I went and got a loan for a boat fit for the sea.  
I learned the trade of jiggin' squid and on a house I made a bid

And to a lass I went and said, oh, will you marry me?  
With Maggie Power I settled down in a house not far from Placentia town  
And she's the brightest jewel in the crown that I wear 'most every day.

As I sail the banks of Newfoundland with my oil-skins on and lines at hand,  
Though I sometimes think on Ireland and its grassy emerald flair.  
Its rivers pure and fishing royal, its forestry and fertile soil,  
And the men who stayed both true and loyal to an isle so proud and fair.  
But now with three kids I can't afford to day-dream like a wealthy lord  
And with another babe bound soon to board I'll keep pullin' that jiggin' line.  
Where the icebergs float and humpbacks long off inspire me into song  
About the puffin and the pelican and dear old Avalon.

Where they set the sweetest partridge jam and you'll find the cow and ramblin' ram  
Who for the weather don't give a damn come frost, snow, rain or shine.  
Where every gannet on this planet seem to gather on it to make more gannet,  
And then in their nest they'll have a rest and wait for hatchin' time.  
Where schooners often run a ground and clippers plenty can be found,  
Where in a life you couldn't 'round the coastline's rugged snare.  
Where slate adorns a reddish brown and from trees you could build a town,  
Where the salmon make their way down in millions every year.

Where ponds outweigh most Irish lakes and the vastness of the land could make  
My big webbed feet in my boots quake if I got lost in Bay du Nord.  
But still Newfoundland is now my home and with Maggie Power I have become  
A local and a man renown as a poet and a bard.  
And every night we sing and play along the shores of Placentia Bay,  
From Branch, St Bride's to Barasway, they come to hear our band.  
So come raise your glass and with fond hearts say, success to all who make their way  
Across the broad Atlantic sea to Paddy in Newfoundland.

---

In 2009 a clatter of blackguards travelled to Newfoundland. Our first port of call was St John's and the following day we were to attend a song workshop in Branch, a good drive away. I had been to the country before in 2007 and so had a good idea of the place. In preparation for the workshop I began to pen this in the hotel in St John's. I sang what I had of it at the workshop, when it was titled *The Bard of Newfoundland*. Since, it has evolved with new lines, a new name, and the air was upgraded after I heard Séamus Mac Mathúna sing *The Traveller All Over the World* (aka *Beauty Spot Glanlea*, available in full in Fintan Vallely's book *Sing Up!*) at a session in Rosslare in 2012. I loved the melody and thought it a good fit given it had a change which transformed the verses from four to eight lines. An earlier version came second in the Newly Composed English Song competition at the 2010 All-Ireland Fleadh.

## **MCALPINE'S FUSILIERS**

*Words: Dominic Behan; Music: The Jackets Green; Source: The Dubliners*

As down the glen came McAlpine's men  
With their shovels slung behind them,  
'Twas in the pub they drank the sub  
And up in The Spike you'll find them,  
They sweated blood and they washed down mud  
With pints and quarts of beer,  
And now we're on the road again  
With McAlpine's fusiliers.

I stripped to the skin with Darky Flynn  
Way down upon the Isle of Grain,  
With the Horseface Toole I knew the rule  
No money if you stop for rain,  
McAlpine's God was a well filled hod,  
Your shoulders cut to bits and seared,  
And woe to he who looks for tea  
With McAlpine's fusiliers.

I remember the day that the Bear O'Shea  
Fell into a concrete stairs,  
What the Horseface said, when he saw him dead,  
Well, it wasn't what the rich call prayers,  
I'm a navy short was the one retort  
That reached unto my ears,  
When the going is rough, well you must be tough,  
With McAlpine's fusiliers.

I've worked till the sweat near had me beat  
With Russian, Czech and Pole,  
On shuddering jams, up in the hydro dams,  
Or underneath the Thames in a hole,  
I grafted hard, and now I've got me cards,  
And many a ganger's fist across me ears,  
If you pride your life, well don't join by Christ  
With McAlpine's fusiliers.

---

The route to this song is a little more downhearted. I was asked to sing it at the graveside of Peter (Bella) Coady, father of childhood friends of mine. I didn't know it by heart then but it's become a song I've often blasted out. This version however, recorded for the family shortly after his funeral, is a more solemn rendition, an arrangement you don't often come across. Over the years it's been an absolute honour to sing at funerals, especially for people I've admired, including two men of song we were often in the company of at Toss Kavanagh's bar: Liam Cooper and Tim Sinnott.

## **SCHOOL OF REDUNDANCY**

*Words & Music: © Paul O'Reilly (IMRO)*

At the age of sixteen, I left school to start work  
As a brickie with the old man, an uncle, a cousin.  
We laboured our way through the mortar and muck,  
In all kinds of weather we ploughed on and on.  
Come eighteen, I splashed out on a brand new red car  
When the boss made it plain he had plans to go far.  
We worked hard for wages and played hard in bars,  
We were told that the deal couldn't fold.  
And the boss said the plans were a sight to behold  
And the concrete would flow like a river of gold.

At twenty, I married a girl from the town,  
The daughter of a plumber, she was subbing as a teacher.  
Next year we managed our first payment down  
On a house with a lean-to to the rear.  
Kids they came fast, first a girl then a boy,  
We worked hard each day making sure they'd get by,  
But when costs of fuel, of interest and toys  
Soared higher than we could afford,  
Still we were told that this was our reward  
As down in the ground more concrete we poured.

But I noticed the work slowing down to a crawl  
Till one day the boss said that, "Times they are changing."  
Next thing we were lined up, each man for to scrawl,  
I remember 'twas the first day of spring.  
When I got home I cried out in the yard,  
And the old man and the cousin from the local were barred.  
The wife kept on teaching, even though she was scared,  
I could tell she was worried for me,  
For many's the night I sat down by the quay  
To watch the tide rise up and drift out to sea.

The debts kept on growing, the house price declining,  
The bossman was broke, the old man retired.  
The uncle was stopped by the sheriff one morning,  
His van to the auction was steered.  
Then one day the cousin said that he was leaving  
And off to a new land his trade he would bring,  
The morning he left home his mother was pining  
For the next time she'd not be afraid.  
But instead of relying on the old pick and spade  
I started to think about changing me trade.

I enrolled, with the help of the wife and the mother,  
To head back to school, never said to be easy.  
The son helped me learn the way 'round a computer,  
The daughter's a whizz on the keys.  
Now every night I sit by a table  
And plough through the work like a man in a spell,  
The wife she's the rock and keeps saying I'm able  
To rise from redundancy,  
And though I hear that this learning can set a mind free  
I'm wearier now than a man needs to be.

---

Written and recorded in 2010 for the Séan McCarthy Ballad Competition, I've rarely performed this song and it remained unreleased. I did get to travel to Kerry that year however, and sing it in the little cottage in Finuge for the judge, former Irish soccer manager, Eoin Hand. I wasn't placed but no harm. The actual highlight was to come later when I met Mick Curry, a writer I had come to know through his songs *Lawless* and *Murphy Can Never Go Home*; the former made famous by Christy Moore, the latter recorded by Frank Harte. I approached and befriended Mick and we retired to the Horseshoe Bar in Listowel where Mickey McConnell was playing a session. We joined in with guitars, I sang Mick's *Murphy* song for him and he approved. To cap it off Mickey closed out the night with his *Only Our Rivers Run Free* and I was in heaven.

## **OLD WEXFORD OF MEMORIES**

*Words: James Armstrong; Music: Laurel Hill; Source: Songs and Poems by James Armstrong*

On the brown slopes of Leinster, I carelessly rambled  
Away from the busy pursuits of the age.  
My thoughts wandered back as the landmarks unfolded,  
Mementos and scenes of our history's grim page.  
A sadness was mingled with prospect enchanting  
From lofty Blackstairs to Atlantic's broad shore,  
Each hillock and valley, a tale told of glory  
And hopes unrequited for Erin, a stór.

My gaze wandered seawards o'er Slaney's broad valley,  
Enniscorthy's blue haze like a halo surrounds.  
The town of the rebel, the patriot, the freeman,  
A name that has given our country renown.  
Adjacently stands the one place we're most proud of,  
The name above all that our bosom must thrill,  
Where valour unequalled and tragedy mingled,  
A pyramid of glory is Vinegar Hill.

Old Wexford of memories, grim, fearless and saddening,  
Your streets have been drenched with the blood of the brave.  
When Ireland lay broken and bound by the Saxon,  
Your all in heroic endeavour you gave.  
Though sad is your tale, such a sadness inspires,  
The will to be free can defy prison locks.  
And your sons blazed a trail towards honour and glory  
That time cannot dim on the far-famed Three Rocks.

In the distance I see Carrigbyrne's rocks a gleaming  
Where Hessian hordes met a trice deserved doom.  
And Wexford assembled 'ere taking the bold bid  
Of driving the Saxon from old Ros Mhic Thriúin.  
The records of Ross have been truly inspiring  
And kept freedom's banner afloat down the line.  
No fetters e'er wrought could such people hold captive,  
The spirit to conquer succeeds in due time.

Boolavogue and its heroes have gilded our history,  
The birthplace of Ireland's most honoured campaign.  
Its name will stand high in the annals of glory  
While Celtic blood pulse through an Irishman's vein.  
The deeds of Ballyellis, of Oulart, the Harrow,  
Are deeds that must fill us with well-founded pride.

We're rich in possession of memory's heirloom,  
All honour be theirs who for honour's sake died.

Bunclody and Gorey and famed Tubberneering  
Your records of glory have set a high plain.  
Of daring and valour, to those who come after,  
But freedom is won more by losses than gain.  
Oh, blest be the cause, and may Wexford's grim nightmare  
Abolish the cause of discord and hate.  
Let freedom be honoured and unity inspired  
By the sacrifice suffered in dark ninety-eight.

---

In 2009 shortly after the launch of *The Poet's Dream*, Helen Kirwan and myself were approached by Noel Armstrong of Killealy, Co. Wexford, on behalf of the Armstrong family, to help edit their father's writings and organise them into a book. We worked together over the following months to produce the manuscript and the result was a mighty launch in a packed Killealy hall of *Songs and Poems by James Armstrong* (2010) – a very valuable addition to the Wexford repertoire. At the request of the family some songs were put to airs by Helen and myself. This epic I put to *Laurel Hill*, itself an epic air, and I'm almost sure the first person I heard singing *Laurel Hill* was Frances Rodgers. I later researched it and found the Eddie Butcher recording to re-familiarise myself before putting it down. From James' book: "written 16th June, 1938."

Recorded for the Armstrong family in 2010 but never released.

## **PEGGING SKITTLES AT THE END OF THE LANE**

*Words: James Armstrong; Music: inspired by The Stone Outside Dan Murphy's Door;*

*Source: Songs and Poems by James Armstrong*

In these days of depression, of gloom and despair,  
When shadows are cast o'er the scene,  
And it seems that in life there is nothing worthwhile,  
All things point to, "what might have been".  
You can drive away care, get a fresh lease of hope,  
Chase the shadows from over the plain.  
You're infected with cheer and with never-say-die,  
Pegging skittles at t'end of the lane.

The times may be bad, ends are hard set to meet,  
The budget is balanced wrong way.  
Try hard as you will, in surmounting the hill,  
Misfortune is holding the sway.  
The toil may be crushing, the pay may be bad,  
Or the job may be looked for in vain.  
But in spite of it all you feel happy and gay  
Pegging skittles at t'end of the lane.

You know there are people who owe you a grudge,  
Who oftimes rub salt in the sore,  
Who, to feel that you wince, give you that secret pinch  
That's intended to rankle the core.  
Yet you feel that in spite of the world and its ways,  
And the mischief that oft' cause you pain,  
That hatred can vanish and love reign supreme,  
Pegging skittles at t'end of the lane.

When the day's work is over, though sore from the toil,  
And repose seems to offer relief,  
The call of companionship draws you away  
Like the call of the tribe to its chief.  
The hardships and toil of the day cast aside  
And the needed repose with disdain,  
The elixir of life is abundantly found  
Pegging skittles at t'end of the lane.

And the friends that we meet at the end of the lane,  
United and happy and gay,  
No political spleen mars the harmony there,  
No social distinction holds sway.  
The play is uproarious, the contest is keen,  
But in life as in sport play the game.

The lesson of love you can learn there by heart  
Pegging skittles at t'end of the lane.

---

Discovered in the writings of James Armstrong and later published in *Songs and Poems by James Armstrong* (2010), it's the fun in this song that attracted me to it. I reused the air to *My Rambles Through Erin* as I thought they both had a similar joy and structure to them. From James' book: "Pegging skittles was a very popular sport in the first half of the twentieth century. It was a social as well as a sporting occasion. The game would, as the poem suggests, help to bring the different strands of society together."

Recorded for the Armstrong family in 2010 but never released.

## AN EMIGRANT'S THOUGHTS

Words: James Armstrong; Music: Paul O'Reilly;

Source: *Songs and Poems by James Armstrong*

There's a cottage in the valley with a trout stream murmuring by,  
Neath Mount Leinster's serried arches, set against an Irish sky.  
There's the sunlit sheltered valley where in youth I loved to roam,  
Or to watch the speckled trout flirt in the darkness of Poulcaumb.

Maybe other scenes are fairer than where Urrin's waters flow.  
Maybe Blackstairs has its equals, I don't care or want to know.  
To my mind they spell perfection, sacred dreams sent from above.  
Hill and valley, stream and thicket, all combine to win my love.

How I treasure every friendship of the happy days gone by,  
Friendships sealed with deep emotion, maid or matron, man or boy.  
Ah, to just renew those friendships or to clasp these hands I pray,  
I could barter all the tinsel in this mighty USA.

May God bless you dear old Erin, land of love and joy and faith,  
May your children find a home at home 'midst fairest scenes on earth.  
And God bless the land that gave so much to those who have to roam,  
And may Mary guide their wandering steps towards the eternal throne.

---

Discovered in the writings of James Armstrong and later published in *Songs and Poems by James Armstrong* (2010), I guess it was my attraction to the theme of emigration that drew me to this one. That and the fact that, when we first moved home to Enniscorthy, we lived one field away from the river Urrin. From James' book: "Published in *Kiltealy Journal*, 3rd December 1999. James penned these verses for his nephew, John Flood, who emigrated to America in 1953. They express the longing and loneliness experienced by so many on leaving their native land."

Recorded for the Armstrong family in 2010 but never released.

## THE BATTLE OF BUNCLODY

*Words: James Armstrong; Music: Paul O'Reilly;*

*Source: Songs and Poems by James Armstrong*

On a hill o'er the town on that bright summer morning  
Five hundred brave pikemen lay waiting their fate.  
To glory or death, 'ere the sun reached Mount Leinster,  
For such was the story of dark ninety-eight.  
It counted for nought, they were trebly outnumbered,  
What mattered the odds when their trust was on High.  
The cause it was sacred, their saggart was leading,  
'Twas honour to fight and 'twas noble to die.

The brave Father Kearns, he thinks but of victory,  
He heeds not the hint to allow for retreat.  
Retreat or surrender is not contemplated,  
Whatever befall, death alone brings defeat.  
The hour is at hand, like a chieftain their leader,  
Ride forward, unarmed, "Arise follow me!"  
Not a sound breaks the silence, each stout heart is throbbing,  
As wildly they dash down the slopes of Driam-Chree.

The charge and the carnage, the grim tale of battle,  
So just repetition of deeds of renown.  
Though high was the price paid, Bunclody was taken,  
The flag of the rebel is hoist o'er the town.  
Ah! Sad is the tale of thy fortunes, my Erin,  
The tide is reversed 'ere the long shadows fell.  
Despair and disaster reward an achievement  
As grand as the pen of historians can tell.

On a hill o'er the town on that bright summer morning  
Five hundred brave pikemen lay waiting their fate.  
To glory or death, 'ere the sun reached Mount Leinster,  
For such was the story of dark ninety-eight.

---

Discovered in the writings of James Armstrong and later published in *Songs and Poems by James Armstrong* (2010), this was another ninety-eight song that caught my attention when it came to putting words to airs.

Recorded for the Armstrong family in 2010 but never released.

## MURPHY CAN NEVER GO HOME

*Words & Music: Mick Curry; Source: Frank Harte/Donal Lunny*

It's a hell of an age, puts a man ill-at-ease,  
Sets his mind in a rage, makes him weak at the knees  
When he sees things are changing while he's marking time  
His work-mates all twenty and he's past his prime.  
And he longs to go back home to Wexford  
For he's tired of the craic and the living is rough  
And the twenty-five years on the buildings have taught him  
When you ain't got nothing then you've had enough.

Chorus:

So he sits at the bar and smokes his cigar  
And he boasts how he's never alone.  
Ah, but I know he's lying, his big heart is broken,  
Murphy can never go home.

He reads all about the economic miracles  
Brought by the Yanks and the men from Japan,  
Building the blocks of the 21st century,  
But what use are they to a labouring man.  
Once hard men were heroes, but now they are fools,  
And all the old values uprooted and gone.  
When he woke up, he found they had changed all the rules,  
Now there's nothing to do but keep labouring on.

And it's a hard, rocky road that first took him to Birmingham  
Long in the making and there's no going back.  
Writing no letters or words of his whereabouts,  
Nothing at all for to help them keep track.  
He can stay here all night in no hurry at all  
For there's nobody waiting but old Father Time.  
And as the last rays of sun, they go down on the Brum,  
A song from his childhood he quietly rhymes.

---

Learned from the singing of Frank Harte on *There's Gangs of Them Digging*, I was to later meet the author Mick Curry in Listowel where we shared a few drinks. It's a song I've always loved singing, a song that always touches a nerve. In the Frank Harte version he sings that Murphy "longs to go back home to *Ireland*", which was how I first learned it, but on talking to Mick he informed me that he had actually written it as "longs to go back home to *Wexford*" and that Frank had changed it. As a Wexford man, I was happy to revert to the original. "Brum" refers to the city of Birmingham.

Recorded for the Reilly's Men album, *Long in the Making* (2011), which got its title from a line in the song. Whistle by Mick Folan; mandolin by Stephen O'Leary.

## ISLAND OF AUSTRALIA

Words: Micheál Marrinan; Music: *The Bogs of Shanaheever*; Source: Micheál Marrinan

All the ships that sail the waves look right pretty when they're steaming.  
And the jet planes in the sky are like larks when you are dreaming.  
But our friends, they take away, to where a new dawn it is breaking  
For a life and for a trade on the island of Australia.

Oh, good fortune I have known in this, my own dear nation.  
Now there is no work at home, for some no conciliation.  
And now they're forced to go from their friends and sad relations,  
For to find themselves new homes on the island of Australia.

Well, there's no one living now between the schoolhouse and the mountain.  
On the hill John Murphy ploughed, so many trees you could not count them.  
For the future to repay all those banks and speculators  
While our bones lie in the clay on the island of Australia.

There's a flag that's flying high, it's three colours winds are blowing,  
On the patriots that died, what great honour we're bestowing,  
With their aims not realised, all of our youth are relegated,  
For to find themselves new lives on the island of Australia.

Oh, what good is it to gaze on the ships that sail the ocean,  
And what good are big jet planes when they bring such sad emotion,  
And what good are larks that sing of our flag that flies so graceful,  
When our land has sent its flowers to the island of Australia.

---

I was first introduced to Micheál Marrinan by Phil Berry at a fleadh in Tullamore, just after Micheál had sung my father's song *The Queen's Bed*. He spoke of knowing of MJ and how he'd come upon his song and I've greatly enjoyed Micheál's company ever since. Later that day he sang his *Island of Australia* and I instantly fell in love with it.

From Micheál's note on the song: "While Australia is now known as a Continent, it vied with Greenland as the world's biggest island during my early schooldays. My late father on asking a returned emigrant if he had met another man of his acquaintance while living there, replied, 'No, Australia is a very big island'. For many of us involved in farming, the planting of forests on farms is the last straw. Emigration was a constant part of rural life and many of our friends went to Australia in the 1980s. The motivation for this song came from a regular observation 'there will be nothing but trees around here soon'. This song won the Newly Composed Ballad Competition at Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in 1988."

Recorded for the Reilly's Men album, *Long in the Making* (2011). Whistle by Mick Folan; mandolin by Stephen O'Leary.

## THE NEW AMERICAN

*Words: © Paul O'Reilly (IMRO); Music: An Buachaill Caol Dubh*

By the banks of the Bann as the wild geese o'er fluttered  
Across the evening sky bidding Ireland farewell,  
I turned the last green sod I would turn for my brother,  
Then his tractor and plough I drove home by the Still.  
With the western sun glistening I stopped there for to listen  
To the lark and to the linnet bid their long day adieu.  
Though I fear the old, wise swan knew well my intention  
And that our friendship again we would never renew.

At home, by the fire, our father was reading  
Of the banks of the rich, of the homes of the poor,  
Of villages left grieving a new generation leaving  
To seek their employment upon a stranger's shore.  
To Canada, Australia, South Africa they travelled,  
New Zealand, America, across the Great Divide.  
But, alas, the old man knew for his brother too had rambled  
And my time had come to follow his path across the tide.

In the kitchen, my mother had prepared for us a supper,  
The best I'd taste for years, we were well provided for.  
Cold ham, brown bread and mustard, red cheese and salty butter,  
And she was scalding out the taepot as I stepped in the door.  
We talked of land and weather, of hurling in the summer,  
Of how the young men leaving might cause it to decline.  
But the one thing I recall, most of all, was how my mother  
Looked when the old man spoke of his brother Tom Devine.

That night I dreamt of Boston, first landing there in Logan,  
And meeting Uncle Tom for the first time in my life.  
Of crossing the Charles River, then meeting Larry Coogan,  
A son of Massachusetts where his industry was rife.  
Next morning, by the birdsong, I was woken from my slumber  
And the first smell, I remember, was the heating of the pan.  
And although the Greenland geese would return that September  
I watched the games with Tom as a new American.

And now the years have passed, I've married well and settled  
With a girl from Massachusetts, she was Larry's pride and joy.  
Our Tom has long since gone, our father too departed,  
While my brother says my mother still prays for her youngest boy.  
And though there's work here plenty, and I'm not short of love or money,  
It's often I'll recall the smell of her greasing up the pan,

*Think Back Upon the Days*

And think back upon the days when we were training for the county,  
As I watch her grandson hurling like a new American.

---

Inspired by the many emigration songs I had learned over the years, many included on this album, I eventually came up with my own in 2011 when it reached the All-Ireland Newly Composed English Song competition. Recorded later that year for the Reilly's Men album, *Long in the Making* (2011).

## **THE LONG FAREWELL (SLIP JIGS)**

*Music: McSherry/McGoldrick*

These wonderfully rhythmic slip-jigs from the whistle of Mick Folan really used to get lads hopping at Reilly's Men gigs. Recorded for album *Long in the Making* (2011), I accompany with lils, a 6-string banjo, guitars and the rub of the skin of a bodhrán.

## THE SCHOONER MEXICO

*Words: John Codd; Music: Amhrán na Leabhar; Source: Songs of the Wexford Coast*

On the twentieth day of February in nineteen and fourteen  
The Norwegian schooner Mexico off the Wexford coast was seen.  
From Laguna to Liverpool with heavy timber for the docks,  
Now this gallant vessel lies a wreck off the savage Keeragh rocks.  
The Captain's name was Eriksen, as you may understand,  
The crew was made of strangers from many's a foreign land.  
Ten men in all their number and hard was their fate I trow  
To take refuge on the island and leave the Mexico.

She was sighted first off the Wexford coast and seemed to all in great distress;  
The rolling waves and swelling seas did sorely on her press.  
The Captain lost his bearings, it was the cause of bitter grief,  
While Boreas blew with vengeance and drove us on the reef.  
This lofty schooner was attired in double-reefed foresail,  
Likewise she flew her mizen but it was to no avail.  
He tried to bring our ship about and head her off out to the sea,  
But with the onslaught of the storm he her could not hold stay.

An anxious crew worked hard and brave, our precious lives for to save  
Contending with the blinding sleet and mountain high each wave.  
Two sailors in a small lifeboat then from our davits they let go;  
They landed safe but failed to take us from the Mexico.  
The Fethard men approached us then in their lifeboat strong and new  
To rescue us poor seamen who on the rocks were strewn.  
Fourteen all told, those hearts so bold, their courage is still renown,  
As their boat was smashed to pieces and nine of them were drowned.

Thanks to the great Redeemer, the other five they were saved,  
And by their gallant efforts we were to the rocks conveyed.  
We reached the Little Keeraghs along a halyard, as you know,  
And bid adieu forever to the ill-fated Mexico.  
Our case was still appalling as mountains rolled the seas;  
Bereft of earthly succour for three long nights and days;  
From the twentieth to the twenty-third in sadness and in gloom,  
We huddled on the island as in a living tomb.

The Wexford lifeboat hove in sight and also the Dunmore,  
But the Kilmore lifeboat and her crew were driven back to shore,  
Long life to coxwain Wickham and his heroic lifeboat crew;  
He saved ten men from the jaws of death and the Dunmore lifeboat two.  
There was deed of special daring, of courage brave and bold,  
Performed by two of the Wexford crew their names I will unfold:

Bill Duggan and Jim Wickham, in a rescue punt went to and thro,  
And saved the crew while the wild waves flew around the Mexico.

Here's a health to Captain Busher and to his crew of gallant men;  
To render their assistance with the Wexford Tug they came;  
Here's a health to every lifeboat crew who bravely watch o'er Erin's shore;  
May God them steer from all rocks clear, now and forever more.  
For these dangerous reefs, 'tis my belief, as I describe them best I can,  
In their hidden treachery they defy the eye of man,  
And cause sad lamentations and bitter tears in streams to flow,  
As they did on the occasion of the schooner Mexico.

---

As part of a Wexford Song Project facilitated by Aileen Lambert and Michael Fortune in 2012 I came across these lyrics (as *The Mexico*) in *Songs of the Wexford Coast*, collected by Fr Joseph Ranson, where he states: "By John Codd, Blessington, Tagoat. Words taken down from Margaret Mitten, Dec 5th, 1937. The air was taken by Kathleen Hammel from the singing of Miss Nan Dempsey (now Mrs Cadogan), a grand-niece of Margaret Mitten. Margaret's brother Jack was one of the Wexford life-boat crew at the time of the gallant rescue. John Codd made many fine ballads, usually of a humorous style, but all his manuscripts were burned by his wife during the Black and Tan regime; she was afraid of being discovered with 'seditious' documents in the house."

Deciding it needed a bigger melody I slightly adapted the words to fit the sean-nós air *Amhrán na Leabhar*. Recorded in 2012 for prosperity, it was never released.

## THE RISE OF WEXFORD VOLUNTEERS

Words: © Paul O'Reilly (IMRO); Music: Clare's Dragoons by Thomas Davis

On an April day<sup>1</sup> as Dublin flamed,  
At Fingal's Ashe<sup>2</sup>, the peelers aimed.  
When news rang out that the tide had changed<sup>3</sup>,  
In Wexford soon rose Volunteers.  
As rebels shook that island town,  
Their Slaney tide helped rise and drown,  
An empire's reign came tumbling down  
From that gallant march of Volunteers.

Chorus:

Arise and go, for Wexford's wrong!  
Arise and go, for Ireland's right!<sup>4</sup>  
Arise and go to battle throng,  
Neath an Irish flag we vow to fight<sup>5</sup>.

When Mellows camped on model hills<sup>6</sup>,  
To *fianna*<sup>7</sup> boys and girls taught skills,  
By sunburst<sup>8</sup> flags they ran their drills,  
For to trod the roads as Volunteers.  
"For God and Ireland"<sup>9</sup> was their cry,  
To strike a blow, they'd not deny,  
For far too long they had stood shy<sup>10</sup>,  
But soon would charge as Volunteers.

---

<sup>1</sup> Wednesday, April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1916.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Ashe, leader of the Ashbourne Rising in 1916 with the Fingal Brigade.

<sup>3</sup> A reference to the mixed communications prior to the Rising.

<sup>4</sup> Enniscorthy, translated from *Inis Córthaidh* (Island of Córthaidh).

<sup>5</sup> Chorus format – and some lyrics – inherited from "Clare's Dragoons". "Wexford's wrong" being 1798. "Ireland's right" being its right to freedom from British rule.

<sup>6</sup> While many Irish fought under the British flag on the Western Front in WW1, many Volunteers had taken the IRB oath to ultimately fight for the tri-colour.

<sup>7</sup> Liam Mellows camped on Vinegar Hill and with MJ Judge helped form *Na Fianna* in Enniscorthy in 1913.

<sup>8</sup> *Fianna* translates to soldier.

<sup>9</sup> A sunburst flag on a blue background was the flag of *Na Fianna* boys.

<sup>10</sup> "For God and Ireland" was a rousing march lyric composed by Enniscorthy native and Sinn Féin member Pádraig Kehoe prior to the Rising. It was sung by Liam Ruth at an Emmet commemoration concert on March 1st, 1916, at the Athenaeum, Enniscorthy, at which Pádraig Pearse gave an oration prophesising the Rising. It was published in "Songs of the Gael: Pádraig Breathnach" in which it was married to the fine air "The Boyne Water".

<sup>11</sup> 1916 was the largest rebellion since the 1798 massacre in Enniscorthy. 1798 proved a massive influence and recruiting tool for not just Wexford Volunteers but nationwide. It's influence is pronounced by the fact that Pearse inspected troops on the slopes of Vinegar Hill in 1915. Also, in his book, "On Another Man's Wound", Ernie O'Malley mentions hearing the song "The Memory of the Dead" being sung in the GPO (page 42, 2002 edition).

At dawn they rose and assembled to  
Pat Keegan's street<sup>12</sup> house known to accrue  
Munitions, pikes to fuel the coup,  
So forward marched the Volunteers.  
Up through the Market Square they came  
Until the Athenaeum<sup>13</sup> became  
The fortress from where they'd proclaim<sup>14</sup>  
And salute<sup>15</sup> the flag of the Volunteers.

As Rafter, Galligan, Brennan<sup>16</sup> steered,  
O'er Boro<sup>17</sup> train lines soon were cleared,  
The R.I.C. too disappeared<sup>18</sup>  
From the aim of Wexford Volunteers.  
The mighty strength of Antwerp's cause<sup>19</sup>  
Would guard<sup>20</sup> the town, uphold new laws,  
No looters, drunks or covert Yeos<sup>21</sup>  
Could provoke the Wexford Volunteers.

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<sup>12</sup> At dawn, April 27th, 150 Wexford Volunteers assembled at Pat Keegan's, 10 Irish Street, Enniscorthy. Behind the house was a guarded munitions dump of Lee Enfield rifles, .303 ammunition, some shotguns, revolvers and a large volume of pikes and buckshot, many forged by Jem Cleary.

<sup>13</sup> The Athenaeum, Enniscorthy, became the HQ of the Volunteers for the Rising.

<sup>14</sup> The Irish Proclamation was read by Brigade Adjutant Seamus Doyle.

<sup>15</sup> The tri-colour was raised over the Athenaeum by Una Brennan (wife of Robert), Greta Comerford and Marion Stokes.

<sup>16</sup> Three of the Wexford leaders were Seamus Rafter, Peter Paul Galligan and Robert Brennan.

<sup>17</sup> The train lines over the Boro river were cut to shut off British supplies from Rosslare to Dublin.

<sup>18</sup> The R.I.C. (aka *peelers*) in Enniscorthy remained under siege in their barracks. Barracks in Ferns, Clonroche, Galbally, Killealy, Bunclody were vacated as the Volunteers advanced north towards Dublin via Arklow and Borris.

<sup>19</sup> Antwerp was the name given to the Enniscorthy HQ prior to the Rising, located in Mary Street, near the banks of the Slaney. It's said to have got its name during a flood as WW1 raged in Belgium.

<sup>20</sup> The Wexford Rising was admirably controlled, and would later stand the Volunteers in good stead. A Republican Police Force was set up to patrol the district under the command of William Moran and Patrick Stokes, removing the threat of looting. Public houses were shut down.

<sup>21</sup> A Yeo, or Yeoman, is a member of a unit or sub-unit of the British Army. Also slang for a *loyalist* sympathiser.

As Doyle, White, Moran from the Cumann core<sup>22</sup>  
Prepared a commissariat<sup>23</sup> for war  
All arms were seized from door-to-door<sup>24</sup>  
As the ranks swelled<sup>25</sup> in the Volunteers.  
From Rathnure's hills, bold Ferns, Clondaw,  
From Oylegate, Ballindaggin they saw,  
The flag of freedom was their draw  
As they marched, those gallant Volunteers.

Alas, the Easter Rising reeled<sup>26</sup>,  
Though Enniscorthy would not yield,  
Until from Pearse<sup>27</sup>, a message sealed,  
Could convince the Wexford Volunteers<sup>28</sup>.  
As Rangers<sup>29</sup> tramped May morning dew,  
As rebels, leaders<sup>30</sup> bade adieu,  
Though Frongoch<sup>31</sup> bound, they'd soon renew  
The rise of Wexford Volunteers.

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<sup>22</sup> Three of the leading members of Cumann na mBan in Enniscorthy were Gretta Doyle (kitchens), Mary Moran (dispatches) and N. White (emergency hospital).

<sup>23</sup> A department for the supply of food and equipment.

<sup>24</sup> Arms (guns) owned by non-Volunteers were commandeered by the rebels. As was food and cars.

<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that while many of the core Volunteers were based in Enniscorthy, many also marched in from district parishes, Ferns – who at one point were camped in Ballinahallin Wood – and beyond, including Ballindaggin, Wexford, New Ross and Gorey.

<sup>26</sup> The Dublin leaders surrendered on Saturday, April 29th.

<sup>27</sup> Seamus Doyle and Seán Etchingham were granted permission by Colonel French of the British Army to be escorted to Arbour Hill to visit Pearse. On their arrival, Pearse wrote out the surrender order. It is said that as a “Tommy” read the order in the corridor outside the cell, Pearse whispered to the Wexford Volunteers to hide their arms as they would be needed again. Prior to the surrender in Enniscorthy, this they did. Many arms were moved out of the town into the countryside, with token guns and pikes left in the Athenaeum “rink” (large hall).

<sup>28</sup> It would be Monday, May 1st, before Enniscorthy would surrender. And, despite the interjection by a Peace Committee representing the town to Colonel French, it was only on a written and witnessed order from Pearse would they stand down. Many had wished to take to the hills as flying columns, as voiced by Pat Keegan.

<sup>29</sup> The Connaught Rangers were among the 2000 English troops to enter the town on May 1st, 1916.

<sup>30</sup> As it was initially thought that only the Enniscorthy surrender signees (Bob Brennan, Seamus Rafter, Seán Etchingham, Seamus Doyle, Michael de Lacey and R.F. King) would be taken prisoner, many of the rank and file Volunteers returned to their homes. However, in the following days, soldiers, peelers and National Volunteers then raided homes and took those who had gone ‘out’ prisoner also. In all, 375 were arrested in Co. Wexford.

<sup>31</sup> Many Volunteers eventually joined their comrades in the Frongoch camps, Wales, where they would meet, converse and socialise with rebels from other counties. Jem Cleary, blacksmith from Enniscorthy, has said that this, as well as the executions, contributed to the English downfall as “the fools organised us”, allowing Volunteers to re-group, re-plan, and even get to know many from other counties whom they had never met before.

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The 1916 Song Project was a research and performance project devised and produced by Michael Fortune and Aileen Lambert. It featured ten traditional singers from throughout the island of Ireland who composed, researched and presented a body of traditional songs based on the 1916 Rising and the events surrounding it. Concerts took place throughout Easter 2016 in Dublin City, Dun Laoghaire, Fingal, Meath, Galway and Wexford, places where there was significant activity during Easter week. For this project, I composed this song which was premiered during the Easter Monday State Commemorations in Enniscorthy on March 28th, 2016.

From *God Save Ireland* to *The Soldier's Song* to *Kelly, the Boy from Killanne*, many of the songs rendered by Volunteers in the run up to the 1916 Rising in Wexford were marching songs. Songs of chorus to rally and inspire, to drill to, to instil a sense of comradeship and pride in the county's long tradition of rebellion. Two songs made by Enniscorthy man Pádraig Kehoe were sung to a thronged Athenaeum on March 1st, 1916, in the presence of Commandant P.H. Pearse, as were songs by O'Higgins, Davis, McCall, Kearney, Mangan and Rooney, and it was in the spirit of these vibrant songs of revolution that this song was made. Put to the air of *Clare's Dragoon's*, *The Rise* too is a marching song. Composed of six verses, with a chorus derived from the air's original lyric, each line serves to paint a picture of the Rising-time in Enniscorthy, of when the town was proclaimed a Republic. And in the spirit of the orations and marching songs of old, it too is a song to be sung with gusto and volume as it attempts to rally the crowd by remembering the visionaries and heroes of a waking nation.

Many of the footnotes – compiled as part of the project – were extracted from the publication *Wexford has Risen* by Henry Goff.

Recorded in 2016 for prosperity, it was never officially released.

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