

Polden Hill. Sharp wrote: 'I sat down by him and thoroughly enjoyed the performance, singing the chorus to each verse'. It is the same song as the Irish *The Bog down in the valley o* but it is in fact found right across Europe, so it is invidious to say from where it originates. The bird was in the egg in the nest on the branch on the limb, and the tree was in the wood etc. The song was sung in schools and folk clubs into the 1970s.

South & East: Sharp also explored to the south and east of Bridgwater, meeting John Trump and Martha Bodley in North Petherton (11 songs), then the brothers Alfred & George Emery in Othery (23 songs) and the Lockyer brothers (James & William) of Middlezoy (11 songs). None of these songs were published, although you can now find them online at the English Folk Dance & Song Society (EFDSS) website.

One song from North Petherton was published in the *Folk Song Journal – The Twelve Days of Christmas* as sung by Mr Noah Baker of nearby North Newton. Today we are used to singing the standardised version that was arranged and published in 1909 by Frederic Austin (a singer, music teacher and composer in London). But the song itself is much older than that – it first appeared in print (words only) in 1780 and seems to have had a life as a children's forfeit game (forget the correct order of gifts and 'pay' a forfeit). It was reprinted and hawked about the country with each singer tinkering with the tune. The first musical notation was not printed until 1882. Sharp had already published versions from Hambridge and Ilminster in *Folk Songs from Somerset*, vol 2 in 1905. Somerset singers made up a number of gifts more suitable to an agricultural context. Instead of Drummers drumming or Pipers piping, they sang of 12 cocks a-crowing, 11 bulls a-beating and 8 hares a-running. Otherwise the order was very similar.

But Frederic Austin did contrive one musical change that appears in none of the 'folk' versions, namely the two-bar pause of 'Five gold rings'. Sharp found 4 more versions of the song in the Bridgwater area and published Mr Baker's version in the *Folk Song Journal* of 1916. A final note is that Mr Baker ended his song not with 'a partridge in a

pear tree' (which is the original 1780 ending) but with 'a part of a juniper tree' - clearly a mis-hearing but as Mr Baker had learned the song from his father Ephraim Baker (farmer) in the 1830s, he was adamant he had the oldest version! Exactly the same process occurred with *The Holly and the Ivy*, which had numerous 'folk' tunes until Sharp collected the tune of Mrs Mary Clayton of Chipping Campden in 1909 for his *English Folk Carols* book (1911) – that's become the standard tune we sing each Christmas!

For both these songs, see:
www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com

See the companion leaflet by David Sutcliffe: *Bridgwater Town and Folksongs*. Published by the Blake Museum in 2018.

Cecil Sharp's original notebooks

These have now all been digitised online:
<https://www.vwml.org/vwml-about-us/vwml-projects/vwml-the-full-english>. So you can search any of the Bridgwater songs and singers with the click of a mouse!

David Sutcliffe is the author of the biography of Cecil Sharp's collaborator, the Rev Charles Marson; *The Keys of Heaven: The Life of Revd Charles Marson, Socialist Priest & Folk Song Collector*, 2010

Copies may be purchased from the Museum shop

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Bridgwater Town Council



Blake Museum

Folksong collecting in Bridgwater Rural District

by David Sutcliffe

THE
TWELVE DAYS
OF
CHRISTMAS.
Sung at King Pepin's Ball.



THE first day of Christmas,
My true love sent to me
A partridge in a pear-tree.

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Title page from the first known publication of "The 12 days of Christmas" in 1780. A Mirth and Mischief chapbook .

Introduction: Bridgwater Town and the surrounding district played a significant part in what was called the Edwardian Folk Revival, providing nearly a quarter of all the folksongs collected in Somerset by Cecil Sharp between 1903-14. Sharp was a London music teacher and an influential member of the newly formed Folk Song Society. Fellow musicians like Vaughan Williams,

Gustav Holst and Percy Grainger wanted to find and use English folk tunes from the countryside, hoping to start a renaissance of English musical identity. In Bridgwater town itself, Sharp found many songs including 43 sea songs from old sailors but out in the country districts the songs were more pastoral or 'traditional' (e.g. *All Jolly Fellows that follow the plough*, *John Barleycorn*, *Barbara Allen*).

Sharp toured this wider Bridgwater area by bicycle on 9 separate field trips and interviewed 50 singers, collecting a further 207 songs and publishing some in the 5 volume *Folk Songs from Somerset* series.

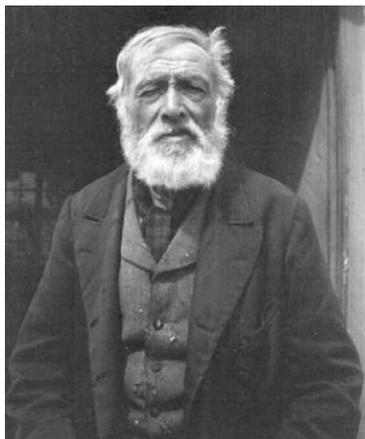
West: Just as Sharp stayed with the Revd Charles Marson at Hambridge to locate singers in the Langport area, so he visited the Revd Charles Tudor at Over Stowey and the Revd John Sorby at Enmore to meet singers there. John Sorby was a contemporary of Sharp at Clare College, Cambridge and was a musical inspiration in his village. In 1905 he set up the Enmore Choral Society while his sister Katherine (Kitty) not only collected folksongs and children's games to send to Sharp but also trained Enmore children to morris dance under Sharp's guidance. Later she took a troupe of dancers to perform at Minehead (*West Somerset Free Press* Aug 1909).



Licensed from the English Folk Dance and Song Society
William Bailey of Cannington

In April 1906 Sharp met William Bailey, an agricultural labourer in Cannington, to whom he returned on 6 occasions and from whom he collected 28 songs including *Bridgwater Fair*, a memorable song about St Matthew's Fair which was instituted in medieval times and is still held each September. A chance to let your hair down but the chorus warns: 'Oh Master John, do you beware, don't go kissing the girls at Bridgwater Fair'.

It may have been hard work for Sharp, an asthmatic, to pedal his bike around the Quantocks but he met good singers – Eliza Ware and Elizabeth Starkey at Over Stowey; Charles West and James Lovell at Broomfield. The oldest singer he found was William Wooley, blacksmith aged 84, who sang *O No John* (sometimes called *The Spanish Merchant's Daughter*). Sharp collected 6 versions of this song in the county and published Wooley's lively tune in *Folk Songs from Somerset*, vol 4. It is a tale of courtship but the girl pledged to her absent father that she would always say 'No'. Unfortunately Sharp bowdlerised the song terribly and published it in the *Novello School Song* series. Children sang it mercilessly through the 1950s.



Licensed from the English Folk Dance and Song Society
William Wooley of Bincombe Over Stowey

The Poldens: Sharp took his bicycle on the old Somerset & Dorset railway between Glastonbury and Highbridge to find singers on the Polden hills. He met

with some success in East Huntspill (3 singers, 7 songs), Puriton (5 singers, 7 songs) and Shapwick (2 singers, 4 songs) but in January 1907 he struck lucky when he met William Tucker, a fine singer in Berhill, Ashcott. He gave 16 songs to Sharp, 3 of which were published in vol 4 of *Folk Songs from Somerset*. The first *Gently, Johnny my Jingalo* is a song about sexual advances (I put my hand upon her toe/knee/thigh etc) – hopefully a consensual situation. Sharp confessed to not knowing the song and re-wrote some of the lines for publication. Tucker apparently learned the song back in High Ham from his father Samuel in the 1850s. The song survives in rugby clubs and elsewhere.

His second song was *The Cruel Ship's Carpenter*, a murder ballad dating from the 18th century and widely collected in Britain and in North America (where it is known as *Polly's Love* or *Pretty Polly* – listen to the version by Judy Collins 1968). A young man kills his pregnant girlfriend, buries her and escapes to sea but her ghost follows him. Although the text was published consistently during the C19, tunes varied considerably and Sharp collected 8 versions in Somerset but thought Tucker's tune the most noteworthy.



Licensed from the English Folk Dance and Song Society
William Tucker of Berhill, Ashcott

His third song was *The Tree in the Wood*. Tucker was listed as a quarryman in the 1901 census and actually sang the song to Sharp while cracking stones on