

The Words

My Foolish Songs Book



Peter de Courcy

The Kennet Morris Men

26th July 2018

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I'll Never Forget What's 'is Name

They say "Things improve with age."
And sometimes it may be true,
But lately I've been finding
I can't remember who is who.

When I go out dancing
With all these new lads in our side,
Not only do I forget the steps,
But names too, however hard I tried.

I know one of them's called Richard,
But then I was told there are two.
It's really so confusing,
I just have to say "Hey you."

And to make it even harder
Half the team's names are clones.
Which Chris, which Clive, which Dave or John?
And don't get me started 'bout them Jones.

My old Kennet mate's are easy,
It seems I've known them all my life.
But when talking about their better halves
I'm now asking "How's errr ... the wife?"

You shout out "Matron's coming".
But is that someone new?
Did she come out last week as well?
Do you mean the one in blue?

I never could remember words of songs
And my odd odes get odder too.
When I look up at pub ceilings with me hand to me head,
It always seems like Déja Vu.

And can we stop changing over Squires.
Perhaps they'd be best left the same.
You know, the one called ... thingy.
I'll never forget ... what's 'is name?

Kennet Lads

(after Cornish Lads by Roger Bryant as sung by Mike Nicholson)

*Chorus: The Kennet lads are Morris Men
And some of them are dancers too
But when the knees and brain have gone
What are the Kennet boys to do?*

In Reading town we would perform
Through rain and mist and lashing storm.
Now damp and cold get to old fellas
And we'll not dance without umbrellas.

We've tried Seven Seas cod oil compound
And no sign of relief we've found.
'Til a Loddon light ale is quickly downed
And we soon find cure in a few more rounds.

The whingeing injured could play or sing,
Then pass around the collecting tin.
But if the crowds don't hear bells ring
They'll not even give a farthing.

Now alcohol's reclaimed our minds
And knees creak loudly –sometimes in time.
Our younger men forsake Cotswold
For the Border style – with girls I'm told.

Drumming and the tambourine
Is the only sound we soon will hear,
With painted face and ragged line...
I think I'll have another beer.

But now we've new men to fill our shoes,
Not yet affected by the booze
And wherever Kennetshire is found
The Kennet Men will fill with sound.

July 2012

Lillibulero (Foolish Version)

From The Devil and The Plougman collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams from H Burstow

A morris side in Reading did dwell

Lillibulero bullen a lar

They had an old Fool as many knew well

Lillibulero bullen a lar

So the devil he came as they danced at The Plough,

Lillibulero bullen a lar

"I want your prize Fool and I want him now."

Lillibulero bullen a lar

Chorus: *Lero, lero, Lillibulero, lero, lero bullen a lar.*

Lero, lero, Lillibulero, lero, lero bullen a lar.

The devil he hoisted him upon on his hump,

And down to hell with the Fool he did jump.

Two little devils were playin' with chains

The Fool played his bodhrán and addled their brains.

Two more devils looked over the wall,

They said, "Take him back or he'll deafen us all."

So the devil he put him back on his hump,

And back up to earth with the Fool he did jump.

"Now I've been a demon and know how to be cruel,

But there is nothing worse than a bodhrán playing Fool."

It shows that a Fool beats all morris men.

He goes to hell and gets sent back again.



August 2015

With apologies to A L Lloyd,
Barry Dransfield, Bellowhead,
and especially, my inspiration, Charlotte Robinson

Letter B

Songwriters: John Lennon / Paul McCartney/Peter de Courcy

When I find my folk song's line's in trouble
Kennet's Matron came to me
Suggesting it begins with letter B.
And in my hour of foolishness
She is standing right in front of me,
Speaking words all starting, letter B.
Oh, letter B, letter B, letter B, letter B,
Trying to remember rhymes with letter B.

Could it be The Bell and Bottle?
Not in many songs you will agree
There will be an answer, first letter B.
For though the words may be forgotten
There is still a chance they begin with C
There will be an answer – is it C or letter B?
Oh, letter B, letter B, letter B, letter B.
And there will be an answer, letter B

And even though my mind is cloudy
There is still a hope that grows in me
I'll remember by closing time this letter B.
It seems this B word's happened before
Ah, then the answer comes to me. Déjà Vu – A Rhyme.
Well it almost starts with letter B.
Not, letter B, letter B, letter B, letter B
Now I have the answer – it's not letter B.

Oh, letter D, letter D, letter D, not letter B.
Déjà Vu - the answer's Letter D.

June 2017

Old String Vest

To the tune of Cuckoo's Nest

As a fair maid was a walking one morning in May
She met a certain Morris Man and unto him did say
I'll tell you me mind, it's for dancers I'm inclined
And me inclination lies in your old string vest.

*Chorus: Some like a dancer who is bearded in the face,
And some even like a dancer whose figure's gone to waste.
But give me a dancer, who does warm-ups and still shaves,
And covers up his belly with an old string vest.*

Fair maid, says he, I'm a Kennet Morris Man
And dancing with young girls is very much frowned upon.
I must avert my eyes from a prancing maiden's thighs
Or I might have an inclination in me old string vest.

Dearest dancer, says she, if you cannot let me dance
There must be something else to further this romance.
For I love your fashion sense, and your prowess is immense
And would be bigger with my hand in your old string vest.

Fair maid, says he, I can do no such thing.
For me foreman often told me it was committing sin
Me baldrics to lose and me sticks to be abused
So you'll have no more to do with me old string vest.

Me dancer, says she, it's not committing sin
The new Ring rules allow me to be a musician.
For we were brought into this world to dance and play our best
And I can have a fiddle with your old string vest.

Fair Maid, says he, though I cannot you deny,
Most lads would do a double jig in the blinking of an eye.
But your cat-gut you can pluck and I wouldn't give a look,
Even if you ran your hands down me old string vest.

But the fair maid joined the Kennet much to the Wags' disgust,
For she fiddled with the morris men with her forty two inch
bust.
But it was Hoppy to the rescue. The fair maid now has left.
At the bottom of their dustbin lies the old string vest.

Dedicated to Chris Tunncliffe
Post Saddleworth, August 2014

On and On

Les Barker mainly

In Wrotham and in Reading,
We gather, you and me,
In Saddleworth and Sidmouth
And sing about the sea;
Then like some last leviathan
Some endless marathon,
And we go on and on
And on and on and on.
On and on and on and on and on and on and on
And on and on and on and on.

When Morris Men come together,
The sweetest songs are heard;
There's soul in every syllable
And weight in every word;
A song's a flower blossoming;
It blooms and then is gone
And we go on and on
And on and on and on.
On and on and on and on and on and on and on
And on and on and on and on.

The song I sing is precious,
A gift to every friend,
My music ever-sensitive
Until the very end.
On the stillness of night's water,
Each song a graceful swan
Then we go on and on
And on and on and on.
On and on and on and on and on and on and on
And on and on and on and on.

My song is overhanging,
A loud and sweaty paunch;
A chorus on the slipway
Just waiting to be launched;
Beneath a wave of (*insert brewery*) Bitter
It sinks and soon is gone
But we go on and on
And on and on and on.

Over The Hills and Far Away

After John Tams

Hark now the drums beat up again
How those bodhráns drive us insane.
So let's get pissed and march I say
And go over the hills and far away.

*Chorus: Over the hills and o'er the main,
To Saddleworth, Hartley, again and again.
The Squire commands and we'd obey
But we're over the hills and away.*

There's twenty shillings on the bar.
These bloody days it won't go far.
For a bag of crisps it just might pay
To take over the hills and far away.

Come Landlord, Landlady, have a mind
To serve us beer that's strong and fine.
We'll drink and sing until we sway
Over the hills and far away.

It's PJ's turn to sing we're told,
A Poor Old Man was Crossing The Road.
With one voice we all do pray
To be over the hills and far away.

And we shall live more happy lives
Until our squeeze box players arrive.
Their music sounds best when they play
Over the hills and far away.

The Kennet Squire may well refuse
To praise the brilliance of his Fools
But if he wants the sticks today
He may find they're over the hills and far away.

No more to beer gardens do smokers retreat
For their Marlboroughs and Gauloise. They cannot beat
The Kennet dancing Shepherd's Hey
So they puff over the hills and far away.

October 2008

Percy Vere vs Jones MC & Bar

After Frank Crumit's Abdul Abulbul Amir

The singers of Kennet are hardy and bold,
Though best when accompanied by beer,
The most forgetful of those was a Fool, I am told,
Who went by the name Percy Vere.

This son of the session, in folk song aroused,
Had learned twenty songs, all by ear.
An unusual singer, his ear plugged by his finger
To whom everyone said Percy Vere.

When Kennet needed a man to silence the band,
Or to barrack the Squire from the rear,
Or to drive dancers out, they would all shout
Don't give up, please Percy Vere.

There were singers aplenty and men known to fame
In Cuphill, a team from afar;
But the one who came was a man by the name
Of Peter Jones MC and bar.

He could imitate Cotswold, he danced in a dream
And performed on the kazoo or combs.
In fact, quite the cream of the Cuphill B team
Was the inimitable Bombardier Jones.

The ladies all loved him, his rivals were few;
He could drink them all under the table.
When it came to a prank, there was no one to rank
With Jonesie of wheel barrow fable.

One day this bold morris man had shouldered his stick,
And holding a full pint of beer
In the pub he did go, where he trod on the toe
Of the singer – yes it was Percy Vere.

"Old man" quoth Vere, "has your hair grown so long,
That you're anxious for a shampoo of beer?
Cuphill man know, you have trod on the toe
Of the master of song, Percy Vere."

"So take your last look at your words and song book
Unless you can beat me in song;
But by this I do curse you'll not reach the last verse,
Mr. Peter Jones MC and bar."

Quoth Jonesie, "My friend, your remarks, in the end,
Will avail you but little, I fear,
For I'll wager a bet that your words you'll forget,
You're no master of song, Percy Vere!"

Then this bold mameluke threw away his trusty tunes book
With a cry of "You've gone too far!"
And he launched into a song, but he soon got it wrong,
Round one to Jones, MC and bar.

Jones responded in turn with a song he had learned
Of far canal, and barges of past years.
But his memory was rotten and the chorus forgotten
Round 2 was soon Percy Vere's.

They sang all that night, 'neath the pale yellow moon;
The din, it was heard far and near;
But no song was ended, no last words remembered
By Jonesie or the Fool Percy Vere.

The Kennet Squire came in to end the din
As there could be no victor to cheer.
But he only drew nigh to hear the last sigh
Of the now voiceless Fool, Percy Vere.

The Cuphill Squire, too, on hearing the hue
Arrived in his bright red tabard.
He arrived just in time to miss a last line
As did Peter Jones MC, now barred.

Next a loud-sounding splash from the river was heard.
The crowd had carried both out.
After crossing the road the poor old men were thrown
Into the Kennet without.

There's now a tomb rises up where the blue Kennet flows;
Engraved there in characters clear;
"Ah stranger, when passing, pray for the Duel Fool,
The master of song Percy Vere."

An Ash Vale maiden her lone vigil keeps,
'Neath the light of the pale polar star;
And the name that you'll hear as she sheds a tear
Is Mr. Peter Jones MC and bar.

July 2018

Ringling Phone

Late after Morris ended
Up the stairs you creep.
In her land of milk and honey
The wife lies fast asleep.
There'll be peace and there'll be plenty
If the staircase doesn't groan,
And then your bloody mobile rings
And her rolling pin is shown.

Chorus: *Ringling phone, turn off that ringling phone.
Turn off that ringling, ringling, turn off that ringling phone.*

The Foreman calls for order.
The men stand all alert.
Even young Tom Gregory
Has stopped tucking in his shirt.
Peter Jones almost stopped talking.
"I've two points – and perhaps a third..."
Then your bloody mobile rings.
So his wisdom's never heard.

The evening dancing ended
It's time for the après
When we poor weary morris men
Can drink and sing and play.
The One Wheeled Barrow's chorus
Is one despairing moan
For once the sound is welcome
Of your ringling mobile phone.

The Kennet in their fine array
Have been dancing night and morn.
Back to the Kanvas Kastle
We must go before it's dawn.
In sleeping bags we snuggle,
Our snoring men lay prone.
Then your mobile phone rings.
And out the door you're thrown.

So pass the bottle round,
It's speech time at the feast.
The Squire is thanking everyone,
Except the Fool and Beast.
To the Immortal Memory,
Our respects must be shown.
Our tankards raised in silence,
Shattered by your mobile phone.

Tune: *Rolling home*

July 2013

Silkmen Away

With apologies to Dave Tindall

I dreamed a dream the other night,
Silkmen, Silkmen away, the lads,
Their second strip was gleaming white,
Silkmen, my Silkmen away.

And I dreamed I saw the great Macc Town,
Silkmen, Silkmen away, the lads,
And we were only one goal down,
Silkmen, my Silkmen away.

And the ref'ree's whistle was to his lips,
Silkmen, Silkmen away, the lads,
When our shot beat their goalie's finger tips,
Silkmen, my Silkmen away.

And then I heard the home fans' cheers,
Silkmen, Silkmen away, the lads,
And then my smile turned into tears,
Silkmen, my Silkmen away.

It was then I knew my team was toast,
Silkmen, Silkmen away, the lads,
Our shot had only hit the post.
Silkmen, my Silkmen away.

My sorrows were drowned in their supporters bar,
Silkmen, Silkmen away, the lads,
A bloody good job I didn't come by car,
To see the Silkmen, my Silkmen away

July 2016

Those were The Days Old Friend

Once upon a time there was a tavern
Where we used to raise a glass or two
Remember how we danced away the hours,
And dreamed of all the supping yet to do?

*Chorus: Those were the days old friend
We thought they'd never end
We'd sing and dance forever and a day
We'd live the life we chose
We'd drink up all the booze
For we were young and sure we needn't pay.
La la la la la la
La la la la la la
Those were the days
Oh yes those were the days*

Then the busy years brought on arthritis
We lost our embrocation on the way
If by chance I'd see you in the tavern
We'd wince at one another and we'd say

Just tonight I stood before the tavern,
Nothing seemed the way it used to be.
In my glass I saw a strange reflection,
There was some change from three pound fifty p.

Through the door there came familiar laughter
I saw your faces, heard you call me names.
Oh my friends were older but no wiser
Still dancing, but now with Zimmer frames

"Those Were the Days" is a song credited to Gene Raskin, who put English lyrics to the Russian romance song "Dorogoi dlinnoyu" ("Дорогой длиною", lit. "By the long road"), composed by Boris Fomin (1900–1948) with words by the poet Konstantin Podrevskii.

March 2012