



Broadside Ballads of 17th Century England

Lucie Skeaping

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We're going to spend the next hour exploring the world of the broadside ballad - the penny songsheets that flooded the streets of England during the 17th century, roughly between the time of Elizabeth I and William and Mary - and which acted both as the pop songs and the tabloid press their day. I'll be looking at who sung them, what they contained, how they looked and, with my colleague Robin Jeffrey on lute and cittern, I shall be singing some examples, including, towards the end, one or two that are rather 'near the knuckle' so you have been warned!. These simple ditties provide us with a fascinating street-level glimpse of the lives, attitudes, politics, sense of humour and sexual mores of our ancestors - and, as you'll hear, many of them were set to some of the most delightful popular tunes England has ever produced.

Painting of tavern scene

The picture you see here is a good place to start. 17th century London was a noisy, smelly, crowded place. By now, the crumbling line of old city walls had already become just a historical monument; they no longer "enclosed" the city at all, as houses, shops, taverns and churches spilled over into the suburban countryside.

London was in fact the most heavily populated city in Europe. It sucked in immigrants from all over Britain - medical men, writers, jewellers, wig-makers, lawyers, art dealers and so on - and all of them required tailors, cooks, transport, vintners and of course entertainment. Much of this could be found on the streets - in the form of the ballad singers. But even they could be drowned out by the multitude of street cries - the distinctive - and often tuneful - calls of the traders selling their wares; and there are many examples of songs which incorporate these street cries. This is an excerpt from 'The Traders Medley' published by Thomas Durfey, which gives a veritable shopping list of the sort of things you could buy in Restoration England.

SONG: Traders Medley

Come buy my greens and flowers fine

Your houses to adorn

I'll grind your knives to please your wives

And bravely cut your corns

Ripe strawberries here I have to sell

With taffety tarts and pies

I've brooms to see will please you well

If you'll believe your eyes

Old suits or cloaks or campaign wigs

*With rusty guns or swords
 When whores or pimps do buy my shrimps
 I never take their words
 Here's pippins lately come from Kent
 Pray taste and then you'll buy
 But mind my song and then e'er long,
 You'll sing it as well as I!*

Perhaps the most famous pedlar of ballads in English literature is found in Shakespeare's 'Winters Tale' - Autolycus. Here's a - slightly abridged - excerpt from the play, between him and some prospective buyers:

LUCIE: What hast thou here ?

ROBIN: Ballads! - pray now buy some. Here's one to a very doleful tune: how a usurer's wife was brought to bed of twenty moneybags at a burden, and how she longed to eat adder's heads and toads carbonado'd.

LUCIE: Come on, lay it buy, and let's see more.

ROBIN: Why this is a passing merry one, and goes to the tune of 'Two Maids wooing a man'. There's scarce a maid westward but she sings it. Tis in request I can tell you.

LUCIE: I love a ballad in print, a-life - for then we are sure they are true.

The sort of ballads Autolycus was selling covered a great range of subjects - political comment, news from abroad, comical or sentimental stories, moralising and religious tracts, royal gossip, remedies, advice on relationships - it was all there. And many show a strong vein of nostalgia for a 'lost rural past' - no doubt printed to satisfy the tastes of the crowded population of the rapidly expanding City of London.

SONG : The Country Lass

*Although I am a country lass
 A lusty mind I bear-a;
 I think myself as good as those
 That gay apparel wear-a;
 My coat is made of homely grey,
 Yet is my skin as soft-a,
 As those that with the chiefest wines
 Do bathe their bodies oft-a;
 Down-a down etc
 What though I keep my father's sheep
 A thing that must be done-a*

*A garland of the fairest flowers
 Shall shield me from the sun-a
 And when I see they feeding be
 Where grass and flowers spring-a
 Close by a crystal fountain stream
 I sit me down and sing-a*

'The Country Lass' - a ballad set to an old country dance tune known as 'Stingo' (or sometimes 'Cold and Raw' after an earlier ballad that began with those words). That particular tune was apparently a great favourite with Queen Mary. The story goes that one day, while the composer Henry Purcell was in attendance, she asked to hear it - and later, to please her, he incorporated it into the bass line of an Ode he composed to celebrate her birthday in 1692.

Broadside ballads were one of the first wide-spread, and widely-affordable, forms of the printed word. They were usually printed on large single folio-sheets - or 'broadsheets' - which were then trimmed down to roughly A4 size. Along with text, each ballad usually featured a headline or title, a subtitle, and often a woodcut illustration.

2. SLIDE: WONDERFUL STORM OF HAIL

Broadsheets were sold for around a penny each (roughly the cost of a loaf of bread) - and they were consumed by all classes of society. This was very much an urban means of expression, a form of mass-communication often delivered up by writers with only the most basic of skills - and with an eye on healthy sales rather than artistic merit.

And, as with today's newspapers, the important thing was to respond to current events as rapidly as possible. So if Londoners were frightened one day by a fire or earthquake, or some freak weather condition, the next day would see the publication of at least one ballad describing the disaster, and urging people to repent before another could strike!

'A Ballad of a Strange and Wonderful Storm of Hail which fell in London on the 18th of May 1680, which hurt several men, killed many birds and spoiled many trees; with other strange accidents, the like never before known in England'.

And here in this woodcut illustration we see it all (except that I think this looks more like a rather heavy fall of snow rather than hail, with the animals almost buried!

Although we do know the names of a few ballad-writers, most of them were simply anonymous hacks, often working from dingy rooms at the back of London's print-shops, many of them situated around St Paul's Churchyard, Bridewell and Fleet Street. They churned out ballads in their thousands, to be sold up and down the land in streets, taverns, marketplaces, fairs, theatres, bearbaiting's - anywhere, in fact, that a crowd would gather.

Mind you, not everyone was impressed by these 'ditties' - these 'rhyming news stories'. This is Joseph Hall, writing in 1592:

"Every red-nose rhymester is an author; and he, whose talent of little wit is hardly worth a farthing, yet layeth about him so outrageously as if Helicon had run through his pen! In a word, scarce a cat can look out of a gutter but out starts a halfpenny chronicler - and presently a proper new ballad of a 'strange sight' is indited'.

And here is what certainly must have been a 'strange sight' - described with all the exaggeration of anything you might find in today's tabloid newspapers...

3. SLIDE: STRANGE AND MIRACULOUS FISH

LUCIE: A description of a strange and miraculous fish cast upon the sands in the meads, in the hundred of Wirell, in the Country Palatine of Chester. The certainty whereof, is here related concerning the said most monstrous fish.

This is one of the broadsheets that was collected by the writer and antiquarian Anthony Wood - his ballad collection is now in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. There are quite a number of references in literature to 'great fishes' - some of you may recall a whale that beached itself in the Thames just a couple of years ago, that was all over the front pages of our tabloid press. This ballad reports it equally 'sensationally' - and as ballad singing is traditionally very much a participatory activity, we would like to invite you to join in the chorus.

Again, we'll sing just a few verses from a much longer ballad...

SONG: FISH SONG

*Of many marvels in my time
I've heard them oft before;
But there's a stranger now in prime,
That's lately come on shore,
Invites my pen to specify
What some (I doubt) will think a lie:
O rare, o rare, beyond compare,
In England ne'er the like!
It is a fish, a monstrous fish
A fish that many dreads;
But now it is, as we would wish,
Cast upon the sands in the meads:
The lower jaw-bone's five yards long
The upper thrice as much
O rare, o rare, beyond compare,
In England ne'er the like!
His tongue within his mouth so wide
But that is not the last,
His PISSLE is in length four yards,*

*As thick as a man round th'waist
His CODS are like two hogsheads large,
It is confirm'd for truth,
O rare, o rare, beyond etc..*

In the same spirit of 'hot news' we also find many ballads that allegedly printed the 'Last Words' of some notorious criminal about to be executed. We know that at least one prison chaplain, at Newgate, made a tidy living on the side by writing down confessions, turning them into rhyme, and delivering them to the ballad-printers in time to be sold to the crowds at the gallows the next morning!

4. SLIDE: LUKE HUTTON'S LAMENTATION

LUCIE: 'Luke Hutton's Lamentation which he wrote the day before his Death, being condemned to be hang'd at York for his robberies and trespasses committed thereabouts'

This is an example of the many so-called 'gallows songs'. It was first published in 1598 - probably the year Hutton was executed - and was reprinted again and again through the 17th century. Like many of them, it was probably turned out by one of the professional ballad writers, but it's just possible that in this case, Hutton did actually write it himself - he appears to have been something of a writer, producing a pamphlet called 'The Black Dog of Newgate' - which described the awful conditions in that prison.

'I am a poor prisoner condemned to die; Ah, woe is me for my great folly; Fast fettered in irons in place where I lie ; Be warned, young wantons, hemp passeth green holly'.

5. SLIDE: THE UNFAITHFUL SERVANT (1)

This is another ballad in the form of a 'personal confession' - but this time, as the criminal is a woman, the punishment, as you can see, is not hanging, drawing and quartering as it might be for men, but being burnt at the stake.

'The Unfaithful Servant and the Cruel Husband, being a perfect and true account of one Judith Brown who, together with her master, John Cupper, conspired the death of her Mistress, his wife - which accordingly they did accomplish, in the time of child-bed when she lay-in with two children, by mixing of her drink with cruel poison.

So anyone buying this ballad would not only have had the pleasure of looking at a rather graphic picture of an execution - but also of reading details of an exciting sexual liaison as well!

Now, let's talk about the TUNES. As you may just be able to see here, below the title the printer tells us which tune the ballad should be sung to - in other words, the 'tune direction'. And here we're given the titles of two possible tunes: 'The Rich Merchant Man' or 'George Barnwell'

For anyone wanting to sing ballads nowadays, here we hit a bit of a stumbling block. The trouble is, broadsheets hardly ever contain any actual musical notation - and most of these tunes are not well known to us anymore. Seventeenth century audiences would immediately have recognised a tune by its title, and simply fit the words to it. That's no problem for us today when the tune is something like, say,

'Greensleeves' or some other tune that's stood the test of time. Not so easy, though, when we're faced with titles like these - or, even more frustrating, is an instruction one sees all too often at the top of broadsheets: 'To a new Northern Tune much in request'.

And to make things even more tricky, ballad printers were in the habit of changing the names of tunes, and re-naming them after the most recent - or the most popular - ballad to which they'd been sung. So identifying and locating tunes often requires a good deal of detective work.

Luckily, many of the tunes are preserved in 16th and 17th century instrumental sources such as lute or harpsichord books, and, from the middle of the 17th century, we also have John Playford's compendium of dances which is a wonderful source of popular ballad tunes:

6.. SLIDE: PLAYFORD FACSIMILE/CUCKOLDS

The book was first published in 1651 as 'The English Dancing Master' and subsequently as just 'The Dancing Master', selling so fast that it ran into 18 editions. You might be surprised that such a popular collection of dance tunes was published right in the middle of Cromwell's regime. But in fact, far from stifling all music as is often assumed, the Puritans were only against elaborate church music; indeed, they considered dancing to be a healthy, wholesome activity and encouraged it.

Each dance tune on the page is accompanied, as you can see, by instructions for the steps. This tune, Playford tells us, is called 'Cuckolds All Awry'. A ballad of that title was registered in 1637 and although it no longer survives, there is at least one song, published in the 1660s with the refrain 'Cuckolds all a-row' which obviously relates to it. The tune, incidentally, also seems to have been a favourite with Charles II as Pepys records in his diary that at a New Year's Eve ball in 1662, the king called for 'Cuckolds All Awry' as the first of the country dances. Let's hear the basic melody on the lute...

MUSIC: PLAY CUCKOLDS

Another good source of ballad tunes are the Ballad Operas of the 18th century - in particular John Gay's 'The Beggar's Opera' published in 1727, in which more than sixty new songs are set to common ballad tunes which were already in circulation.

We must also be grateful to Thomas Duffey whose six volumes 'Wit and Mirth or Pills To Purge Melancholy', published over more than twenty years from the 1690s, contain well over a thousand melodies, songs and poems relating to earlier broadside ballads - although many are revised or set to new music.

7. SLIDE: 'UNFAITHFUL SERVANT'

So what tune does the ballad writer want for this broadside? Well, some of you may be familiar with the ballad of 'George Barnwell' from the 18th century play based on it - George Lillo's 'London Merchant' - and in fact the ballad is referenced again later, in Dickens's 'Great Expectations'.

However, the melody does not survive - so for this ballad, we look to the other tune specified on the broadsheet 'The Rich Merchant Man' which is extant.

SONG: UNFAITHFUL SERVANT

*Young maidens all beware
That see my dismal state,
Endeavour now to shun the snare
Before it is too late
I was a servant maid,
And liv'd most happily,
Until at last I was betray'd
To this debauchery
My yielding to his ways,
His wicked base desire,
Yea, by that means I end my days
In cruel flames of fire.
Other 'news ballads' might gloat over monstrosities or deformities.....*

8. SLIDE: MONSTER (SIAMESE TWIN)

..while others were concerned with issues of more global interest..

9. SLIDE: 'NEWS OUT OF EAST INDIA'

This has a particularly fine woodcut: 'News out of East India of the Cruel and bloody usage of our English Merchants and others, at Amboyna, by the Netherlandish Governor and Council there'

This is about a massacre that took place in Amboyna - which was the old name for Ambon Island, part of the Spice Islands of Indonesia. The Dutch had had a monopoly on the spice trade in the region since 1602 - and when a group of English merchants tried to muscle in on the profits, tension built up to such a pitch that in 1623 the Dutch attacked the English traders, torturing and killing nineteen men - and, as the ballad tells us, 'using gunpowder to blow off their arms and legs'.

10. SLIDE: GREAT FIRE PAINTING

This is by the Dutch artist Thomas Wyck - The Great Fire of London. You may be familiar with the entry in Samuel Pepys' Diary, when he's woken by his maid in the early hours to see a great fire burning in the distance - and goes back to bed thinking it probably won't spread!

But those who didn't get to see the drama in the night, heard the news soon enough - from a whole host of ballads that appeared on the streets shortly after...

11. SLIDE LONDON MOURNING IN ASHES

'London Mourning in Ashes or Lamentable narrative expressing the ruin of that royal city by fire which

began in Pudding Lane on September the second 1666, at one o'clock in the morning, being Sunday, and continuing until Thursday night following, being the sixth day, with the great care the King and the Duke of York took, in their own persons, day and night, to quench it'.....

SONG: LONDON MOURNING IN ASHES

*Of fire, fire, fire, I sing, that has more cause to cry,
In the great chamber of the king, a city mounted high,
Old London that hath stood in state above four hundred years
In six days space woe and alas,
Is burnt and drowned in tears
The fire so hot, a strength had got - no water can prevail
A hundred ton, were it pour'd on, would prove but like a pail,
The crackling flames do fume and roar, as billows do retire,
The city, though, upon the shore, doth seem a sea of fire....*

The song goes on to suggest that many people felt that the fire was a foreign plot to destroy London. However, the ballad writer finally decides that it was more likely to have been 'God's vengeance for the wickedness of Londoners

The ballad is from the Pepys Ballad Collection. Actually, Samuel Pepys's interest in acquiring broadside ballads wasn't always so much for their content. As an antiquarian he was interested in preserving examples of the old black-letter Gothic-style print which, towards the end of the century, was beginning to be replaced by a more modern type, or 'White Letter'.

There are a number of references in the diary to his enjoying ballads - in one, how a 'Mrs Aynsworth' taught him to sing 'a very lewd song' - but in fact many the 1700-odd broadsheets in the collection were in fact part of a job-lot Pepys bought at auction, rather than anything he'd chosen specifically.

Broadside ballads were heard in a variety of different settings. Many were bought for domestic entertainment; others were sung in taverns or village green festivities, or in the Coffee Houses.....

12. SLIDE: COFFEE HOUSE

.... which were fast becoming popular meeting places for doing business, or for a good all-male singalong.

You could hear ballads in the theatre too, where perhaps a husband-and-wife team would perform between the acts of a play, as an Interlude, or Afterpiece. These 'stage ballads' were often written for two characters in the form of a dialogue, and known as 'Jigs'. They were generally comical and entertaining - much appreciated after, say, one of the great Shakespearian tragedies - and they were frequently very rude. In fact they were so popular that audiences began turning up at the theatre just in time for the Jig, missing the main play altogether - and the authorities, at one stage, even issued an edict to ban them...

13. SLIDE: JOHN AND JOAN

The North country lovers or the Plain Downright merry wooing between John and Joan'..... 'A pleasant new song as it was sung before the court at Windsor'. ...so the royal stamp of approval!

Country folk - or 'bumpkins' were a favourite butt of jokes in the 16th and 17th centuries, and this ballad is actually printed in a northern accent which we will try to reproduce. John boasts to his sweetheart Joan of all the things he has down on the farm - in fact the only thing he seems to be short-of, is the time to woo her!. She suggests they go and 'do the business' under a tree right away - provided he agrees to marry her the next day!

SONG: JOHN AND JOAN

*Quoth John to Joan wilt thou have me
I prithee thou wilt and I'se marry with thee
My cow, my calf, my house, my rents
All of my lands and tenements
Then say me Joan, say me Joan, wilt that not do
I cannot come every day to woo
I'se corn and hay in the barn hard by
And three fat hogs penned up in a sty
I have a mare and she is coal black
I rides on her tail to save her back
Then say me Joan, say me Joan, wilt that not do
I cannot come every day to woo
To marry I would have thy consent
But I'faith I cannot complement
I can say nought by 'Hay, Gee, How!'
Words as I use at cart and plough
Then say me Joan, say me Joan, wilt that not do
I cannot come every day to woo*

LUCIE

*What is't my John that thou would'st ha'
A milking I must and I cannot stay
I'se hear my kine begin to moo
And I must dabble in the dew
Then say me John, say me John, what will you do
If you cannot come every day to woo!
Let's gang away to yonder hedge
To see if margery be fledge
Or I'se tomorrow at the kirk
Will provide thee for a sirk
Then say me John, say me John, what will you do*

If you cannot come every day to woo!

ROBIN

*Usbobs I likes it wondrous well
But thinks thou that the hedge won't tell'
If it do, by these new shoone,
I'se in revenge would cut it doone,
Then say me Joan, say me Joan, wilt that not do
I cannot come every day to woo*

LUCIE

*I'se under yon broad oak will lie
Upon mine back to see the sky!
But first you shall swear on my pail
That you tomorrow will not fail
Then say me John, say me John, what will you do
If you cannot come every day to woo!*

BOTH: *Now we have come unto the place*

*Let me my pretty pig embrace
Tomorrow for the wedding day
Then the priest will bid us play
Then say me Joan, say me Joan, wilt that not do
I cannot come every day to woo.*

Most people, though, would have heard the latest broadside ballad from the mouth of a single itinerant pedlar - a rough-singing professional commissioned, not by the organiser of some festival or public event, but by the printer of the ballads. The pedlar's success, in terms of sales, was entirely dependant on the ability to attract customers with his own renditions of the ballads, and yet - unlike the old 'minstrels' of the pre-Elizabethan era who were a respected breed of musicians, traditionally attached to some noble household - these 'balladmongers' often had only very basic musical skills, if any.

14. SLIDE: BALLAD PEDLAR 1 (man)

Some ballad pedlars would be trained up for just a few days by the printers and sent off around the country with - as one source tells us: 'a dozen groatsworth of ballads' on a sale-or-return basis. Others are simply described as:...

'idle youths who, loathing honest labour and lawful trades, betook themselves to vagrant life, singing and selling ballads full of ribaldry and scurrilous vanity'.

15 SLIDE: BALLAD PEDLAR (with tray)

The balladsheets were collected from the printing houses around St Pauls, Blackfriars and Smithfield. But many pedlars also carried all sorts of other useful items - as we hear in this extract from William Cavendish's play 'The Triumphant Widow':

'Come maids, what is it that you lack' I have many a fine knack for you in my pedlar's pack. Brushes, combs of tortoise shell, cambric, lawn as white as milk, taffeta as soft as silk, garters rich with silver roses, silver bodkins for your hair, toothpick cases, Flanders laces, stoppers and tobacco boxes, crystal cupids looking glasses, fine prayer books, ballads fresh, all singing new - and all these ballads are true!

16 SLIDE: BALLAD PEDLAR (French picture of woman)

As you can see, it wasn't unusual for women to sell ballads too. This is one of a collection of engravings of street traders made by the Franco-Flemish artist Marcellus Laroon who settled in London after the Restoration.

17 SLIDE: WOMAN WITH BABY

And this woman has her hands full with a baby as well - which just goes to show that female multi-tasking skills are much older than we think!

A good many ballad pedlars also went much further afield than London. They would catch a carrier at the various stopping-points in the city and travel up to the Midlands and the North of England, stopping off at country inns to sell copies of a new ballad which might then be pasted up on the wall for future use, or just decoration - only to disappear eventually under layers of paint. Others might stop off at a large country house where the servants of a well-to-do family would be eager to purchase the latest hit song from the London stage.

With such a coarse company of performers, all sort of tricks were needed to entice customers. A good woodcut was always an attraction and printers would frequently use the same old worm-eaten favourites again and again...

18 SLIDE: THE RANTING WHORE'S RESOLUTION

..and here is the same couple again'

19 SLIDE: THE MOURNING CONQUEST

This woodcut also turns up frequently on broadsheets....

20 SLIDE: THE DOCTOR AND THE BEGGAR WENCH

21 SLIDE: KATE'S HUE AND CRY

And this time the couple are, at least, in the bedroom, rather than sporting in the open: 'Kate's hue and cry after her maidenhead with a reward of five shillings to any young man that can help her to it again'

22 SLIDE: GOOD SPORT FOR PROTESTANTS

'Good sport for Protestants in a most pleasant dialogue between and old bawdy priest and a wanton young nun'..and here we have an adaptation of the same woodcut: You can just see over on the right, an extra figure - perhaps it's a 17th century Peeping Tom!

So the woodcuts were certainly attractive to potential buyers. The idea that a song was 'new', or contained particularly extraordinary material was another enticement so - regardless of content, a good many ballads begin with verses like: 'Here is a pretty new song' or here is a jest and it is all new' and so on.

Once the ballad-pedlar had established his or her patch in a market or street corner, he would begin singing. As the audience became more involved in the song, he might stop halfway through, announcing that if they wanted to hear the rest of the story they must purchase a copy of the broadsheet.

23 SLIDE: CAVEAT FOR CUTPURSES

Other sources describe ballad singers working in league with gangs of pickpockets, or 'cutpurses' - and Ben Johnson's play 'Bartholomew Fair', of 1614, gives us a good idea of how this worked. Perched on top of a barrel with a good view of his audience, the ballad pedlar would stop singing for a moment and warn people to watch out for cutpurses. Everyone would then instinctively pat that side of their belt which held their money pouches, the eagle-eyed thieves would note exactly where to aim for, and, as the singing resumed, the punters would be speedily relieved of their cash!

'A Caveat for Cutpurses: a warning to all purse-carriers showing the confidence of the first and the carelessness of the last'.

This ballad is actually an extended version of the song heard in 'Bartholomew Fair', and it appeared on the streets as a broadside soon after the production was staged.

SONG: CUTPURSE SONG

The tune is the Elizabethan 'Packington's Pound', thought to be named after one of the Queen's favourites, Sir John Packington. It was the single most popular ballad tune of the age, and more than a hundred broadsheets call for it.

*My masters and friends and good people draw near,
And look to your purses for that I do say,
And though little money in them you do bear,
It costs more to get than to lose in a day,
You oft have been told, both the young and the old,
And bidden beware of the cutpurse so bold,
Then if you take heed not, free me from the curse,*

*Who both give you warning for and the cutpurse;
 Youth youth thou hadst better be starved by thy nurse,
 Than live to be hanged for cutting a purse.
 Like today, one thing that always guaranteed good sales was a royal story....*

24 SLIDE: ENGLAND'S DARLING

This handsome fellow is James, Duke of Monmouth, known affectionately as 'Young Jemmy' or 'England's darling' as the title of the ballad tells us. He was an illegitimate son of Charles II and his mistress Lucy Walter - a brave, and thoroughly Protestant fellow who many felt should be the rightful heir - and this ballad, with its rather unusual tune, sings his praises, calling him 'Britain's joy and hope'.

SONG: ENGLAND'S DARLING

*Young Jemmy is a lad, that's royally descended
 With every virtue clad, by every tongue commended
 A true and faithful English heart
 Great Britain's joy and hope
 And bravely will maintain their part
 In spite of Turk and Pope
 Young Jemmy is a youth who thinks it no transgression
 To stand up for the truth and Protestant profession,
 A heart and soul so great and just
 Such conduct and command,
 A champion to his country's trust
 Young Jemmy still will stand!*

All this praise didn't last long, though. Soon after this ballad appeared, our royal pin-up began his downfall. He claimed the throne and raised a rebellion in the West Country which was put down very bloodily. He was executed on Tower Hill in 1685. But, if a handsome mustachio-ed prince (even a bastard one) was an exciting enough illustration on a broadsheet, then this later ballad about the new King and Queen themselves, must have been pure 'ecstasy'!

25 SLIDE: ENGLAND'S EXTASIE

Here are William and Mary looking very regal at their coronation. As you can see, the broadsheet calls for the tune 'Grim King of the Ghosts'. This was a very popular Elizabethan melody which you may recognise from the Beggar's Opera of 1727... and note the last line of each verse 'And Popery now must down' - celebrating, of course, the fact that the new King and Queen were very Protestant.

SONG: ENGLAND'S EXTASIE

*Hark how the huzzas go round
 In this happy joyful day
 The royal bless'd pair are crown'd*

*Confirm'd both in sovereign sway
 See, see how the nation is pleased
 Our rights, now, again are our own
 The Protestant church is rais'd
 And Popery now must down*

The ballad goes on to make quite a big deal of Mary's 'humility, purity and modesty' - so it's a surprise to come across this ballad about her.....

26 SLIDE: PRINCESS WELCOME TO ENGLAND

'Princess Welcome to England - the unanimous joy of her loyal subjects'. Now this is interesting as, although the text is equally reverential, Mary is portrayed in the woodcut as.....well, as a bit of a tart, with her breasts exposed, and her face full of patches normally associated with whores.

There have been various theories about this particular broadsheet. Topless dresses were high fashion at some levels of 17th century society - and exposing the breasts may also be a symbol of fertility, portraying Mary as a kind-of classical goddess. But I think it's most likely that the printer has simply re-used a popular, eye-catching woodcut - one he'd no doubt used many times before - and why not, since his priority was profit rather than accuracy! Indeed, here we see the same woodcut again - on a quite different kind of ballad.....

27 SLIDE: THE YOUNG MAN'S LABOUR LOST

'The Young Man's Labour Lost' - a dialogue between a milkmaid and an eager young man.

29 SLIDE: ARIEL VIEW OF LONDON WITH GLOBE

By the mid 17th century, London was now spreading rapidly across the river, and the South Bank with its Bearbaiting pit and theatres was - like today - the place to go for a bit of entertainment. 350 years ago it was full of brothels as well, whereas today we just have the Festival Hall and the London Eye!

Much of this expansion of the city was the result of immigration from the countryside. And so a large market developed for ballads on 'pastoral themes' - songs that featured fresh-faced milkmaids or mythical characters from Arcadia, which compared 'city life' with 'country life' - all, no doubt, to satisfy the nostalgia many town dwellers felt for some idealised lost rural heritage.

Nevertheless, along with this idealising of the simple country life, there was also a kind of pride in being part of the rough-and-tumble of the town. So we also find many ballads and plays that make fun of 'country folk', portraying them as ignorant and stupid, and overwhelmed by life in the big city.

30 SLIDE: COUNTRYMAN'S JOY

Here we have a different slant on the coronation of William and Mary. A 'country bumpkin' takes himself up to town to join the cheering crowds lining the streets - and he marvels at everything he sees. As you can

see, this is a much plainer, more modern-looking broadsheet. This sort of format began to appear towards the end of the 17th century - without woodcuts and, instead of the old 'black-letter' Gothic print, we now get the clearer, 'Roman' type.

As you can see here, the tune indicated on the broadsheet is called 'I'll tell thee Dick'. This is a reference to the first line of an earlier song - a parody, written in 1640 by the Cavalier-poet Sir John Suckling for a friend's wedding - and the tune soon went into general circulation.

SONG: COUNTRYMAN'S JOY

And it was during the reign of William and Mary, of course, that the complicated religious politics of Ireland were developing...

31 SLIDE: HO BROTHER TEAGUE

The Irish being soundly Catholic, were supporters of the exiled King James who based his campaign to regain the crown, in Ireland. A lot of ballads appeared, written by the Royalists, that lampooned the sound of the Irish language - in this case, the repeated words 'Lero, lero, lillibulero'. There are a few theories about the meaning of this - the Irish writer Brendan Behan claimed it's actually a corruption of the Gaelic: 'An lili ba-leir e, ba linn an-la' which roughly translates as 'The lily has won the day for us' - the 'Lily' a reference to the 17th c astrologer 'William Lilly'.

By the way, the 'music' printed on this broadsheet is actually meaningless nonsense! We do find music like this from time to time on broadsheets - but it's very often just for decoration, or just to add a touch of class!

SONG: IRISH LILLIBULERO

Ho brother Teague dost hear de decree'

Lilli bulero bullen a la

Dat we shall have a new deputie

Lilli bulero bullen a la

Lero, lero etc

And he dat will not go to Mass

Shall be turned out and look loike an ass

Now, now de hereticks all will go down,

By Christ and St Patrick's the nation's our own!

The tune 'Lillibulero' is still known today, of course - it was the theme for the World Service for years and is still a favourite with military bands. Another notable 'survivor' into our own times is this...

32 SLIDE: DIDDLE DIDDLE

...'Diddle, diddle' or 'Lavenders Green' which did service in the Victorian nursery, and has come down to us today as a children's song. So it may be surprising to learn that it actually began life as a lewd broadside ballad!

SONG: DIDDLE DIDDLE

*Lavenders green , Lavenders blue
 You must love me, Cos I love you
 I heard a bird
 Sing in my ear
 Maids will be scarce
 The next new year
 For young men are
 Too wanton grown
 That they ne'er mind
 which is their own
 Down in the dale
 Where flowers do grow
 And birds do sing
 All in a row
 A brisk young man
 Met with a maid
 And laid her down
 All in the shade
 Oft have I lain
 With him in the dark
 But he has ne'er
 Shot at the mark
 But now my dear
 Have at thy bum
 For I do swear
 Now I am come
 Lavenders green, Lavenders blue
 You must love me, Cos I love you*

That leads us into some examples of the more bawdy ballad repertoire...

33 SLIDE - GELDING OF THE DEVIL (woodcut)

'The Gelding of the Devil' - this is a ballad of Chaucerian earthiness in which a Baker's Wife cunningly outwits the Devil by castrating him, as you can see in this 'painful' illustration.

34 SLIDE: HARRY THE MILLER'S MISERABLE MISFORTUNE

And in this one we hear about 'Harry the Miller's miserable misfortune in courting of young Kate who declared he had lost his testicles and was therefore unfit for wedlock'. I would sing you an excerpt but the broadsheet is mostly indecipherable.

So, with these sorts of themes, what about censorship? Well, it seems to have been a pretty haphazard affair - and many ballads escaped the censors by simply not being registered at all with the Stationers Company - a legal requirement since 1556.

By the 1620s there was already something called a 'Statute for Swearers' with a fine of £10 issued to any performer who 'speaks the name of God in a jesting manner'. Then from the 1640s onwards - during the Commonwealth - nearly every year parliament passed new, stricter laws to ban itinerant balladmongers. Obviously it was the Royalist ballads that were stamped upon first - although they were still sold secretly. But by 1649 - although ballad printing did continue underground - ballad pedlars were no longer legally on the streets, and no ballads were registered until after Cromwell's death and the Restoration, when production started up again with renewed vigour.

35 SLIDE: DILDOUL

'The Maid's Complaint for want of a Dildoul'. Not surprisingly, this ballad doesn't seem to have made it into any modern publications (apart from my own, of course, which you can purchase on your way out!). Don't be fooled by the genteel couple in the pictures. There's nothing genteel about this...do feel free to join in the chorus...

SONG: DIL DOUL

*Young men give ear to me awhile,
If you to merriment are inclin'd;
I'll tell you a story shall make you to smile,
Of late done by a woman kind,
And as she went musing all alone,
I heard her to sigh, to sob and make moan,
For a dildoul, a dildoul a dil, dil doul,
Quoth she, I'm undone if I han't a dildoul
For I am a maid and a very good maid,
And sixteen years of age am I,
And fain would I part with my maidenhead,
if any good fellow would with me lie;
But none to me ever proffered such love,
To lie by my side and give me a shove,
With his dildoul etc..
Quoth she..*

Of course, much as it's tempting to dwell on these kinds of ballads, it would be wrong to leave you, today, with the impression that bawdier themes are in the majority. The fact is that a substantial number of broadside ballads were quite serious - religious or moralising...

36 SLIDE: 'MOST GODLY BALLAD GLORIOUS RESURRECTION'

'A Most Godly and Comfortable Ballad of the Glorious Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, how he Triumphed over Death and Hell and Sin, whereby we are certainly persuaded of our Rising again from the Dead'.

SONG: A MOST GODLY BALLAD

What faithful froward sinful man

So far from grace has fled

That doth not in his heart believe

The rising of the dead'

Or why do wicked mortal men

Their lives so vainly frame

Which, being dead, they do suppose

They shall not rise again

A word or two about the development of the broadside ballad.

As we've seen, towards the end of the 17th century, as printing techniques changed, the old Gothic-style type was replaced by Roman, or 'White Letter'. 1695 saw the end of ballad licensing altogether, and now the market was flooded with News Pamphlets and Chapbooks - early paperbacks, I suppose you could call them - which, alongside songs, offered things like horoscopes, full-length stories, palm-readings, histories and advice on marriage and morals - and now, often in prose, rather than for singing.

The great vogue for Italian opera during the Hanoverian period also played an important part in changing popular tastes and, as demand grew for the more refined style of song, the roughly-printed broadside ballad gradually gave way to elaborately engraved song-sheets which offered both musical notation and words.

37 SLIDE: 18TH CENTURY COLOURED SONGSHEET

Many of the old 17th century broadsheets eventually found their way into the personal libraries of the great and good - people like Samuel Pepys and the Earl of Oxford, whose ballad collection - known as the Roxburghe - is housed in the British Library.

At the turn of the 19th century the broadside ballad had a spectacular resurgence with songs about the Napoleonic Wars and the heroic deeds of Lord Nelson and the Duke of Wellington. A little later, some of them were to pop up in the Victorian nursery, albeit in censored form as we've heard, and some of the old ballads also appear in adapted versions as Music Hall songs.

But many more, were to disappear - pasted up on the walls of a local tavern to be hidden forever under coats of paint, or used as draft-excluders, firelighters, book liners or toilet paper - discarded in the same way that our own old newspapers were used to wrap up fish and chips!

Thank you for having us today. All that's left is to ask you to join us in our final song.

38 SLIDE: HARVEST HOME

'A New Playhouse song of the husband's delight, suiting the humours of a country Life'. This is a version the famous song 'Harvest Home' from Purcell and Dryden's 'King Arthur' of 1691 - and with such a 'hit song', it wasn't long before this version of it appeared on the streets as a penny broadside ballad.

SONG: HARVEST HOME

*Your hay it is mowed and your corn is reaped
Your barns will be full and your hovels heaped
Come boys come, come boys come
And merrily roar our our Harvest Home
And merrily roar our our harvest home*

CHORUS: *Harvest home, harvest home
And merrily roar out our harvest home
And merrily roar out our harvest home!
We've cheated the parson, we'll cheat him again
For why should a blockhead have one in ten
One in ten, one in ten
For why should a blockhead have one in ten
For why should a blockhead have one in ten*

CHORUS: *Harvest home, harvest home
And merrily roar out our harvest home
And merrily roar out our harvest home!
For prating so long like a book-learn'd sot
Till pudding and dumpling are burn'd to pot
Burn't to sot, burn't to pot
Till pudding and dumpling are burn'd to pot
Till pudding and dumpling are burn'd to pot*

CHORUS: *Harvest home, harvest home
And merrily roar out our harvest home
And merrily roar out our harvest home!
We'll toss off our ale till we cannot stand
And hey for the honour of old England
Old England, old England
And hey for the honour of old England*

*CHORUS: Harvest home, harvest home
And merrily roar out our harvest home
And merrily roar out our harvest home!*

END

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