

16th Century Broadside Ballads

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When you run into something called a "ballad" in an SCA context, mostly likely it will be a Child ballad, from a collection of books entitled *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, by Francis J. Child. Child first published these books in 1858, and had definite views on what constituted a popular ballad: ballads tell stories, and were around for a long time. Child's books were part of a huge wave of interest in antique music and verse, both in surviving folk tradition (Morris Dance, Country Dance, songs and stories) and in printed and handwritten documents. This interest has not died out in the subsequent 150 years: Guns -n- Roses recently recorded "Whiskey in the Jar" as a rock song, and the Bay Area is home to a bunch of folk dance groups dancing Scottish and English Country Dances, and Contra dances, all 3 of which were being collected "in the wild" by folklorists only 100 years ago.

Given the way everything else works in the SCA, it's no surprise that many people approach SCA music through traditional music, and Child ballads in particular. In the traditional music community, is not unusual to see claims that a song about some historical event was likely to have been written when the event happened, and that the music now sung to the song is probably pretty old. Child's comments about tunes and lyrics sometimes display this sort of thinking. But even more than the actual ages of the lyrics and tunes collected by Child, Child's selection of what was "popular" and "long lived" doesn't necessarily tell us anything at all about what the general public in 1600 or 1550 would have thought of as a popular ballad.

(For those who are counting, 17 Child ballads are known to have pre-1600 lyrics, but only 2 Child ballads are known to have pre-1600 music. One is Greensleeves, which was "a new tune" in 1580, and wasn't written by Henry VIII. The other is "Heigh Ho Holiday," which appears in one of Holborne's collections of dance music.)

We have another source of ballads from before 1600, which are called "Broadside Ballads". These were single sheets of wide paper, sold on the street-corner for a penny. They usually did not contain printed music; Queen Elizabeth granted a monopoly on music publishing early in her reign to two well-known court musicians, who didn't publish much at all. Because of the lack of music, we are left to try to match the titles of the tune directions given in ballads to tunes, double-checking by looking at the poetical meter.

Approximately 260 pre-1600 broadside ballads survive today, and many other ballads published in collections (often called "garlands") from before 1600 were originally published as broadsides. The broadside continued to be a popular medium for distributing

lyrics, poems, and news, well into the 18th century. Many Child ballads were published on broadsides at some point or another in their lifetimes – Bruce Olson' s index of 17th century ballads (on the web) is an excellent resource.

While Child' s collection doesn' t contain many of these ballads, there are some easily-available resources for learning about broadside ballads. Claude Simpson' s 1965 book *The British Broadside Ballad and Its Music* is an exhaustive collection of music for broadsides of all eras. By flipping through all the pages of Simpson, I collected a list of 63 tunes which were named by broadside ballads, and for which either the tune or the words can be dated to before 1600. Many more tunes are named on the surviving broadsheets, but only a subset survive, mostly as dance music or as sets of variations for lute or virginal.

Another important secondary source is Carole Livingston' s PhD thesis *British Broadside Ballads of the Sixteenth Century*, which contains a catalog of all 260-odd surviving broadsheets. This book is still in print. Unfortunately for us, while it does have a well-chosen cut-off date, it only considers broadside ballads which actually survive today on broadsheets, and does not include broadside ballads which only survive as reprints. This catalog contained details about 6 tunes not contained in Simpson.

An important source I have not yet mentioned is the *Stationers' Registers*, which is a record of items printed by members of the Company of Stationers (i.e. the printer' s guild) of London. The main object of registering publications didn' t really seem to be preventing knock-offs; rather, it seemed to give the authorities a way to find out whom to punish if Someone Important was annoyed by a publication.

From 1557 to 1600, the Stationers' Registers includes 2000 entries for broadside ballads. The Company of Stationers only covered London, and not all broadsides were registered -- we can confirm this by looking through our 260-odd examples. The actual number published between 1557 and 1600 is estimated to be at least 4000.

The broadsides themselves are transcribed in many Victorian-era books, mostly presenting them as poetry. Interestingly enough, quite a few of them have religious subjects, and there are quite a few sets of ballads to the same tune, some somewhat scandalous, with countering "solomizations". I have printed some examples on the pages following this article. If you ever wanted an excuse to sharpen your pencil and write a ditty, here' s an excellent one.

If you' re looking for untapped sources of ballad music, I would suggest looking into psalters of the Elizabethan era. A psalter contains the Psalms set to music. Ravenscroft' s 1621 update of Est' s psalter, in particular, seems to contain a bunch of melodies collected from all over England. If you' d like to experiment with these tunes, please contact me.

Resources:

Child, Francis J, ed. *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. Many editions exist, but the Dover reprint of 1965 is probably the easiest to find.

Livingston, Carole Rose. *British Broadside Ballads of the Sixteenth Century: A Catalogue of the Extant Sheets and an Essay*. Garland Publishing, 1991. ISBN 0-8240-7226-X. The second volume, which was to contain transcriptions of all 260 ballads in her list, hasn' t been published yet.

Simpson, Claude M. *The British Broadside Ballad and its Music*. Rutgers University Press, 1966. I have seen several of these for sale used, running \$50 to \$100 or more.

Gundry, Roxanna. *The English Ballad*. Mel Bay Publications, 2000. 64 pages. ISBN 0786629142. I was astonished to find this book while preparing for this class. I haven' t seen it, but the list of tune names is straight out of the list in my ‘Music of the Broadside Ballad’ article: 1. Come Live With Me And Be My Love ~ 2. Daphne ~ 3. Fortune My Foe ~ 4. Go From My Window ~ 5. Greensleeves ~ 6. John Come Kiss Me Know[sic] ~ 7. Light O Love ~ 8. Lord Willoughby' s Welcome Home ~ 9. Monsieur' s Almain ~ 10. Rogero ~ 11. Sellenger' s Round ~ 12. Sick, Sick, And Very Sick ~ 13. The Hunt Is Up ~ 14. Watkins Ale ~ 15. What If A Day ~ 16. Wilson' s WildIt apparently includes a CD, and I see it for sale for \$8.50 (including shipping) on the web. And yes, it' s kind of embarrassing when Mel Bay publishes a book that' s better than the recent Compleat Anachronist issue on ballads. I do recommend checking the actual melodies against the melodies from Simpson on my webpage.

Victorian-era ballad transcriptions:

Collmann, Herbert L., ed. *Ballads and Broadside chiefly Of the Elizabethan Period and Printed in Black-Letter, Most of which were formerly in the Heber Collection and are now in the Library at Britwell Court Buckinghamshire*. 1912; reprint New York, 1971.

Lilly, Joseph, ed. *A Collection of Seventy-Nine Black-letter Ballads and Broadside, printed in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, between the years 1559 and 1597*. London, 1867.

CDs:

Barlow, Jeremy. *Popular Tunes in 17th Century England*. Harmonia Mundi, France. Don' t be fooled by the title – most of the music on this CD predates 1600, including all 3 of the ‘3 most popular 17th century ballad tunes.’” Retail on the web is \$6.98.

Taylor, William. *Graysteil: Music from the Middle Ages and Renaissance in Scotland*. Dorian. The track for which this CD is named is the combination of a poem in ballad meter named ‘Graysteil’ and a ballad-meter song in a lutebook named ‘Gray' s Tale.’”

B494– Watkin's Ale



Watkins Ale appears as the tune direction for a 1590 ballad. The music was published in several lute books and the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*, all before 1600. I' ve found it on CDs, both as a set of lute divisons (elaborations), and with rather earthy vocal renditions. The 1590 ballad text is reprinted in Lilly.

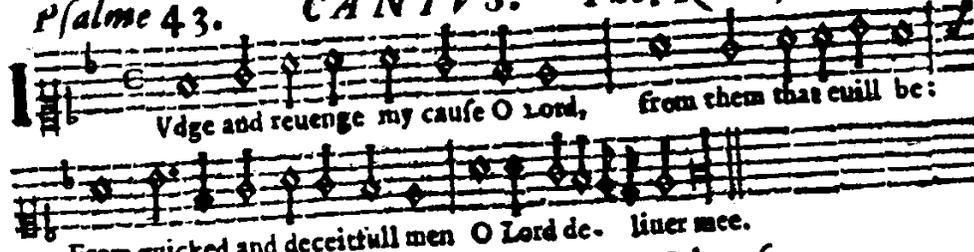
A Ditty delightfull of mother Watkins ale,
A warning wel wayed, though counted a tale.

There was a maid this other day,
And she would needs go forth to play;
And as she walked she sithd and said,
I am afraid to die a mayd.
With that, behard a lad,
What talke this maiden had,
Whereof he was full glad,
And did not spare
To say, faire mayd, I pray,
Whether goe you to play?
Good sir, then did she say,
What do you care?

For I will, without faile,
Mayden, giue you Watkins ale;
Watkins ale, good sir, quoth she,
What is that I pray you tel me?

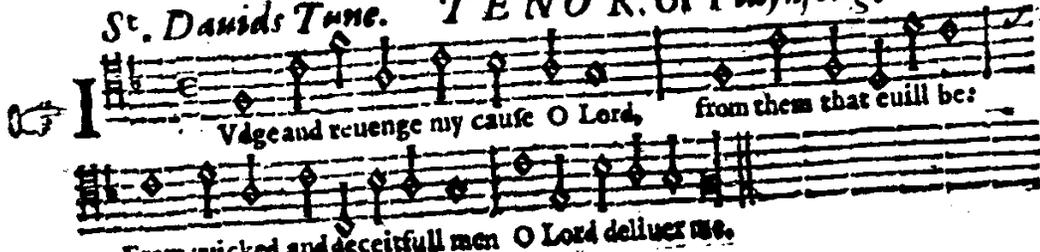
This tune is labeled "Welsh" in the index of Ravenscroft's 1621 psalter.

Psalme 43. CANTVS. Tho. Ravens. B. of M.



Vdge and reuenge my cause O Lord, from them that euill be:
From vicked and deceitfull men O Lord de. liuer mee.

St. Davids Tune. TENOR. or Playnsong.



Vdge and reuenge my cause O Lord, from them that euill be:
From vicked and deceitfull men O Lord deliuer mee.