
PEDALLING IN THE DARK

**THE FOLK SONG COLLECTING
OF ALFRED WILLIAMS IN THE
UPPER THAMES VALLEY
1914-16**

The greater part of the work of collecting
the songs must be done at night, and
winter is the best time, as the men are
then free from their labours after tea.
Folk Songs of the Upper Thames

IN TWO VOLUMES

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ALFRED WILLIAMS'S FOLK SONG COLLECTING IN THE UPPER THAMES, 1914-16

ALFRED WILLIAMS | UPPER THAMES | FOLK SONG: an obscure variant on a byway of knowledge which appears self-articulating. From an unexpected dawning in 1914, these elements conjoin as subject and object with, after their fashion, apocalyptic effect, creating a *before* of rustic toilers (who chanced to sing) and a truculent, questing autodidact who partly shared their decaying world, and an *after* of meaning and value occluded as much as clarified in the shibboleth 'folk'. The condition of the singers—their occupation, literacy, mobility—is explored from official record, and correlated to 'folk' song through a pondering of transmission. The consciousness of the self-anointed chronicler, variously apprenticed but musically unformed, is examined in private document and printed pronouncement. Knowledge extends through biographical particularity, specifics of the variety of the song (sung) corpus, a drawing together of the Alfredian documentary *Nachlass*. In that his predilections are parochial, his equipping pre-eminently literary and moral, Williams is at once aligned with 'his' district and its denizens, and egregiously removed from the melodico-verbal artefact which would, in the course of peregrine pedallings, become undesignedly the object of his attentions. The construction is heroically achieved, but results from an amalgam of postulate militating against any cogent reconciling of components, such that the cardinal constituent remains, finally, prosthetic. Unaccustomed as he was to faltering in his prodigious stride, 'folk' song rather finds him out (as it must find us all out): in this sense he serves as the baroque emblem of allegories of disaffection. A neglected figure of the early folk song movement steps from the shadows. Far from self-articulating, his negotiations offer the spectacle of heterogeneous musical materials only problematically peculiar to an inspecific locale, mediated in the affiliations and alienations of a fractured self: FOLK SONG? UPPER THAMES? ALFRED WILLIAMS?



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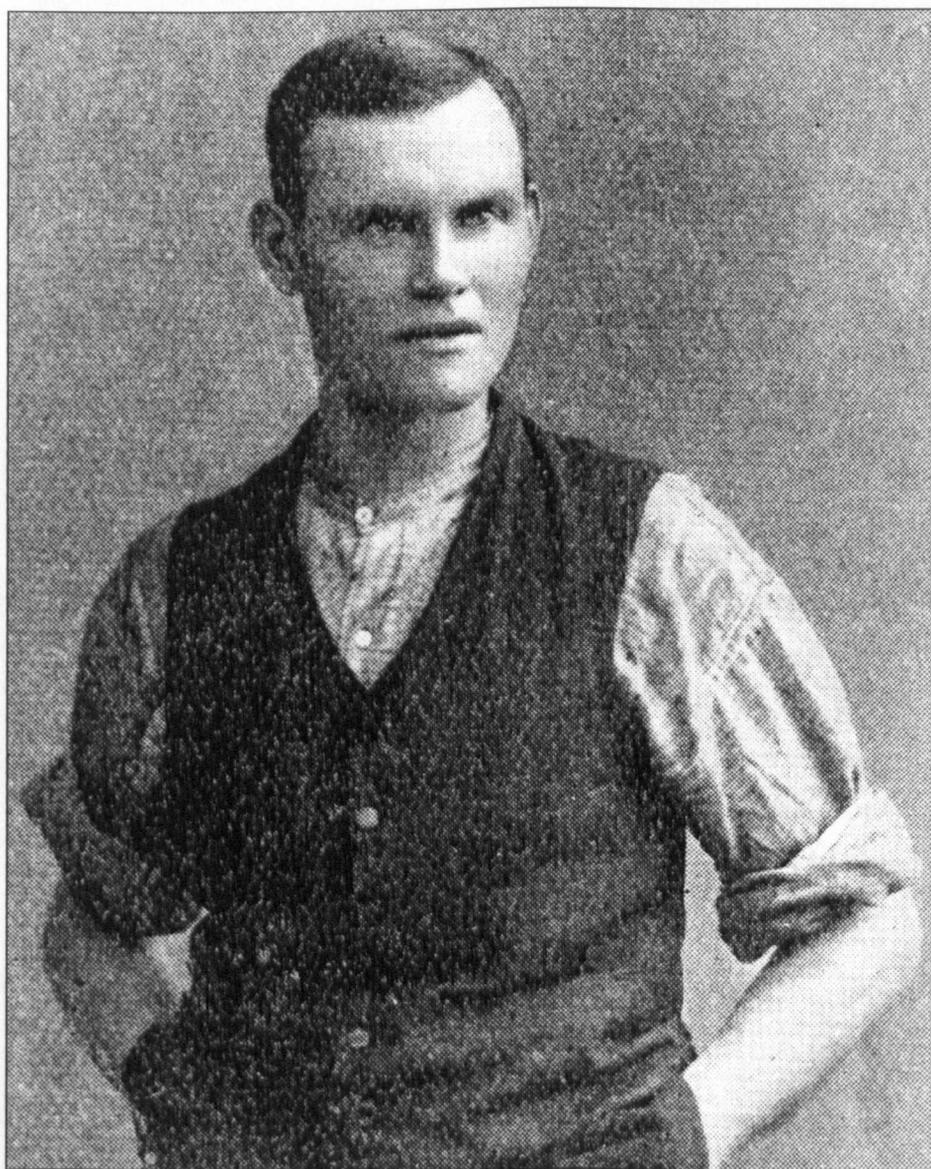
PREFATORY Do we ever quite grasp the nature of the game? Is there any carnival more self-serving than the academy as it has been suffered to evolve, any institutional enterprise more unvaryingly hijacked by freaks than 'education'? (Newspapers, conceivably.) A whole crypto-Flaubertian glossary beckons of scripted pedagogic obliquities, coercion disguised as liberalism, functionaries mistaking quirky impression for adjudicatory absolute. If I have endured manifold mountebanks sanctioned as pedagogues—huffers and puffers, nest featherers, traders on the sexual fears of young people, abusers of office of one stripe or another—I have not seen a *teacher* (in the *echt*, Socratic sense). It has taken too long to learn to have to kick back; it has been a chastening experience. What endures is the vertiginous anguish of language. All that is written should (seek to) be a *tour de force*: that is why we have writing, a self-examining performance to be honed long into the night. All lucubration is *ipso facto* an act of pretension, inviting *scherzando* ironizing not po-faced ovine denial. What is this sedimented cult of mediocrity? What is this enracinated fear of expressive possibility, this ritualized shying away from words? Finally, having in all essentials failed to achieve what I set out to (fail to) achieve, I wince at my own incapacity to muster other than banalities. The irreducibly enigmatic musical enactments of the ethnically initiated are, *est-il besoin de le préciser*, no business of mine. Yet regret lingers—gnawing, inexpungible—at *not having gone far enough*. If there is a journey, it has barely begun.

PRÆLUDIUM

WHO WAS ALFRED WILLIAMS? WHAT DO HIS SINGULAR ACHIEVEMENTS MEAN NOW? His exceptional life and hard-won publications, subject of a freak show response in his own day, lie shrouded in the penumbra of a century's indifference: the flame of recognition has flickered only fitfully. An apprehended solemnity, furthermore, clinging to the man and his works has induced the motley band of expositors to be unreceptive to a quintessential edge of rapture. A finer ear will detect in Williams's multifarious endeavours, not least in the encounter with song, a relish for world and book, a predilection for baroque practices, a defining delight recognizable beneath the surface of earnestness. In this sense the body of deliberation—barely constituting, in its perfunctoriness, a prelude to rigorous scholarly appraisal—has been pre-ludic.



ALFRED
WILLIAMS
1877-1930



I: CONTOURS OF A SINGULAR STORY

CHILDHOOD (1877 SEQ): *ET IN ARCADIA EGO?*

THE LINEAMENTS OF THE LIFE AND WORK OF ALFRED WILLIAMS ARE MUCH REHEARSED.[Ⓢ] Entering the world at South Marston in the tip of north-east Wiltshire on 7 February 1877, Williams was born into an agrestic world in mutation, the perceived effects of which were later to furnish grist to the mill of letters. The hardships of his childhood and early adolescence, however, are attributable more to domestic circumstance than to the crisis of agriculture. The brood of eight was raised respectable and hard working by a resourceful mother following ejection of the improvident Cambrian father:

Some Welsh people are over-generous ... and he was ... and very gullible ... anyone could talk him out of money ... he mortgaged grandmother's [Alfred's mother] house which was hers, left to her by her grandfather ... well she forgave him the first time and paid off the mortgage, but the second time he did it she said, "No way, you're not coming in again, I've finished with you, we don't want to see you." She would never accept a penny more from him, even for the keep of the children, and there were eight of them ... and he said, "And I would like to visit the children." My mother [Laura, Alfred's sister] used to tell me the only way he could come and see them ... they used to go to a little chapel not far away on a Sunday morning to the Sunday School ... and he would arrange to be outside the chapel and meet them out and see them that way ... but she never would see him again or have him in the house ... she finished.'¹



Williams began his participation in the immemorial tasks of husbandry as a 'half-timer' at eight, dividing his time between school and bird-scaring, before entering full-time farm work at 11 (1888), veritable Jude the Obscure as it would later prove: 'At one farm, as a boy, I did nothing but carry ale and food to the men in the fields with yoke and pails, or gallon bottles, all day long.'²

[Ⓢ] The straggle of short articles about Williams listed in the bibliography exemplify the point, a bland recycling of hard circumstance and exceptional achievement. Russell Wortley, as editor of the *Folk Music Journal*, was alive to this tendency when advising Ivor Clissold on the latter's background piece for the Williams Symposium issue of 1969: 'It's not that I want the piece any longer but it would be good to have as much 'original' information as possible (i.e. not in existing biographies).' (Wortley to Clissold 26 November 1968, Clissold Papers.) The sketch here seeks to follow that injunction.

ARTISAN (1892–1914): SIC EFFINGEBANT FERRUM CYCLOPES[©]

The adolescent years of Alfred Williams remain rather shadowy, the period for which records are patchiest. The searing experience of this period was of industrial production in the stamping shop of the Great Western Railway works at Swindon. If he entered the GWR at 15, that would have been 1892. Did he stride manfully into the maw of iron and steel that first morning, embryonic artificer, to take up his place amidst the hostile horde? He later recorded his trepidation on first entering the Works: ‘You remember what a small dark fearful place it was, packed full of furnaces, boilers and machinery’.³ Ploughboy duly became hammerman, uncontrivedly thereby gaining membership of antithetical proletarian tribes. Yet accidental insiderdom was in time to give way to an outsiderdom as much temperamental as intellectual.

AUTODIDACT (1897 SEQ): RERUM COGNOSCERE CAUSAS

The thirsty work of forging was as nothing to the thirst, all but unslakeable, he developed for the things of the mind, the occasion of a certain domestic anxiety:

he taught himself Greek and Latin ... and he used to write up symbols on the factory walls where he worked in the Great Western in those days and read them as he was doing his labouring job, whatever ... and he used to walk to Swindon factory on the sleepers of the railway ... he always had his head in a book to learn ... never looking ... and she [his mother] was always terrified he'd get run down by a train ... that was her nightmare ... she used to say, “He's in these brown studies all the time” ... she was worried to death ... anyhow, happily it didn't happen.⁴

Contracting in 1903 a felicitous marriage to Mary Peck, to whom he was ever in his egotistical manner devoted, Williams settled down, until his health failed in 1914, to a heroic regime of physical labour, unremitting autodidacty—and scribblerdom.

AUTHOR (1909 SEQ): EXEGI MONUMENTUM

Authorship it was that most intensely engaged his self-identification, resulting in a string of volumes of poetry and prose in the period 1909–1915, in retrospect the period of principal achievement. In the autumn of 1911, he announced to J B Jones:

I have had a very busy summer, have written a prose work “Life in the Factory” 250pp. during the last three months. My new book “Poems in Wiltshire” will be ready by the end of this month and it has all made me “full up”. I am very well satisfied with the year's work so far! ⁵

Then, from some point in 1914, his single-mindedness turned to song collecting.

[©] ‘So toiled the swarthy Cyclops once’, from his own poem ‘Fornax’ (‘The Oil Furnace’), an original composition in Latin and one of the few poems dealing with industrial conditions (*Poems in Wiltshire* (1911), p. 41).

WARRIOR (1916–1919): PUGNARE PRO ARIS ET FOCIS



Gunner 192190 Williams pictured during training at Sible Hedingham, Essex, December 1916.

In November 1916, Williams was finally accepted for military service, joining the Royal Artillery. (As he was at pains to proclaim, he was a *volunteer* not a conscript.) Offered a place forging munitions, the eager aspirant warrior elected rather to serve the insatiable, erectile engines of war—though in the event he was not to fire (nor to endure) a shot in anger. Consistent with his distaste for the work of contemporary poets, the *vade mecum* he carried in his tunic pocket was Horace (with the page doubtless turned down at *dulce et decorum est: Odes III, 2*), in preference to Housman; although there is, of course, nothing to suggest the *Odes* were any more proof against

stray bullets than *A Shropshire Lad*.²⁸ Basic training at High Wycombe and in Essex (November to December 1916) was followed by working up in Ireland for active service (January to June 1917); July to September 1917 was a pre-embarkation period in Edinburgh then near Winchester, after which came a posting to India (October 1917 to November 1919). If he saw no action, he yet saw the empire: and it fair took his breath away. Service was spent in the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh), moving among the camp at Roorkee, the township of Cawnpore (Kanpur) and the hill station of Ranikhet, from where the sight of the snow-capped Himalayas inspired a return to poetry, and whose name he later implanted in stone at South Marston.

²⁸ The Horace he carried with him was a gift from John Bailey, the poetry critic and one of Williams's patrons: 'I heard from Mr Bailey and he sent me the two books. They are two little beauties: The Greek Testament and the Odes of Horace. I had a good read at both, and much enjoyed myself.' (Letter to his wife, 7 December 1916, WSRO 2598/59.) The romantic cliché is of Housman's own imagining. Lamenting a doubling of the price of his collection in 1916, he writes: 'it diminishes the sale and therefore diminishes the chance of the advertisement to which I am always looking forward: a soldier is to receive a bullet in the breast, and it is to be turned aside from his heart by a copy of *A Shropshire Lad* which he is carrying there. Hitherto it is only the Bible which has performed this trick.' (Letter to Grant Richards, his publisher, 'summer 1916', cited in Richard Perceval Graves, *A. E. Housman: the Scholar-Poet* (1979), p. 174.)

THE LAST PHASE (1920–1930): *ET IN ARCADIA EGO ...*⁵

Williams's homecoming from the wars, while assuredly less dramatic than that of Odysseus, was fraught with difficulties after its fashion. Liquidation of the South Marston estate at a sale in November 1918 had rendered them homeless; and he had little prospect of employment. The first of these difficulties Williams solved in typically resourceful manner by building himself a house, christened 'Ranikhet', from the windows of which Liddington Hill did service for the Himalayas.⁶ Less tractable to improvisation was the matter of income. Throughout the 1920s, the couple subsisted on the barely fruitful (*sic*) exactions of market gardening supplemented with yet more meagre book royalties. The living was indubitably ascetic beyond virtue, although a display of hospitality could always be mounted for the benefit of family:

when Harry and I ever went ... the table was always well spread, you know ... and they had a very nice home ... very quality home ... and always were ... well I thought very nicely dressed ... Aunt Mary ... and of course Uncle ... I'm not saying they had roast beef every day but they lived quite decently you know ... they weren't anywhere near starvation point ...⁷

'Ranikhet' once erected and occupied, the incorrigible autodidact turned his energies to a last philological challenge, stimulated by wartime experience in the East:

I have taken up Sanscrit, so I shall not be idle for a time. It's an amazing language, very, very technical, but it "licks" Greek easily. I don't mean that the *contents* of the language are *uniformly* comparable to those of the Greek, but the vowel sounds are lovely and the euphonic character of the whole artistic and finished to the last degree. It is also a *vast* affair; but I feel that my affinities in blood, intellect, and, more so, in *sympathy*, are Aryan, and Sanscrit is *my* language to a greater extent than Greek or Latin ever could be. (I've only got a little way yet). Now am I not something of an ancient fossil?⁸

What might appear a sturdy monument to self-help, a tabernacle to pure learning, proved at length to be an austere sarcophagus of his own confecting as the scribbler's triumphal progress descended, inexorably, into a *via dolorosa*. Even Williams's faculties, in those straitened final years, were not what they had been, as a former GWR workmate, whom he visited in the late 1920s, observed:

Then I discovered how deaf he was, which no doubt would account for his withdrawal from personal contact with people. He served with the Gunners in India which may have had some influence upon his hearing.⁹

⁵ 'And I dwell / have dwelt in Arcadia, too.' Ego? The equivocal pronoun, by which 'And I, too, have known good times' contains its obverse: 'I (Death) lurk even here' (see Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), pp. 245-6). A neat classical clinch of the Alfredian trajectory.

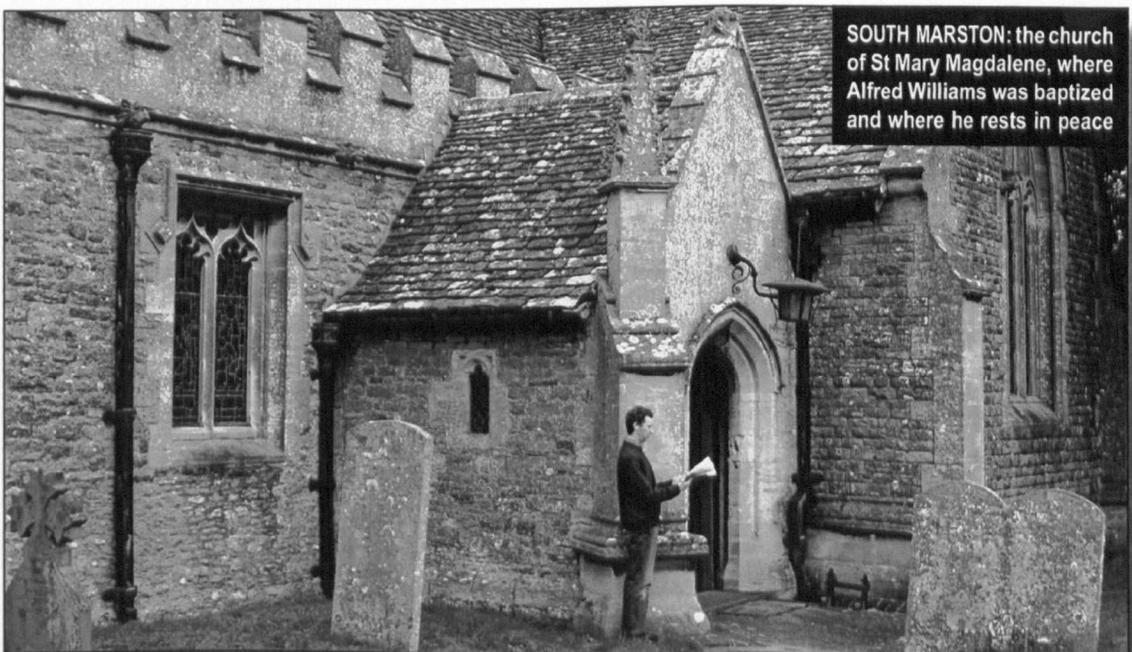
The revenge the gods finally took on Alfred Williams was swift and merciless. In early 1930, the wife from whom he had been inseparable was pronounced terminally ill. His anguish at the pitiful *dénouement* is expressed in a letter to E J Trowbridge:

it seems that tragedy was destined to be ours, though we struggled bravely on. This is the bitterest stroke of all. The dear girl has been at death's door several times since the operation; of course, we cannot look for any improvement: she gets weaker & weaker. How long it will drag on I don't know. I love her so much that I cannot spare her a moment; when the blow falls it will be too awful to express in words. ... I am all alone now, and nothing seems to possess any value, and it will never be the same to me again.¹⁰

Exhausted by the strain of hospital visiting, he expired of heart failure on 9 April 1930. An acquaintance, living at Stratton Park, recorded a macabre encounter:

a rustic horse-drawn trolley drew up at the indication signs which preceded [*sic*] "Halt" signs and traffic lights at this spot as I left my door. I greeted the driver without knowing the nature of the burden he bore. "Got the poet here," he announced dramatically. Before I could voice any sort of reply—"Died of a broken heart he did," said the driver."

In his 53 years of unrelenting strife, Alfred Williams had undergone an array of apprenticeships, some visited upon him, some ardently self-imposed. For this plough-boy of the western world, this zealous artisan-autodidact, this remorseless cyclist, viscerally inquisitive and *durchaus abendländisch*, there were no half measures, least of all in the resolute hunting down and documenting of folk song in his native lands.



SOUTH MARSTON: the church of St Mary Magdalene, where Alfred Williams was baptized and where he rests in peace

II : POSTERITY'S PARTIAL FINDINGS

*Stat sua cuique dies, breve et irreparabile tempus
omnibus est vitæ, sed famam extendere factis,
hoc virtutis opus.
Aeneid X*[Ⓞ]

DURING HIS LIFETIME WILLIAMS WAS, IN VARYING CONTEXTS, FÊTED, PATRONIZED and coldshouldered; since his death he has been intermittently '(re)discovered' but the heralded full coming has yet to happen. So how shall we properly estimate, a century after his first hesitant, hopeful gropings, the stature of the œuvre he bequeaths?

Casting back across 80 years, Williams's last surviving niece, who as a schoolgirl had often enjoyed the frugal hospitality of Ranikhet, articulates the quintessential lament: 'I was glad to meet you and to know of your interest in my uncle—such a pity that he was not appreciated during his life time.'¹² Acolytes Henry Byett and J B Jones (BA)—chief among those who strove to support him in his travails and to promote his posthumous prestige—loyally, not to say fulsomely, overstated the case:

Had he lived, there can be not the slightest doubt he would have been accorded fully both national and academical recognition. These notes show that both were already on the horizon. Just as he was about to drink from the cup of success, unkind Fortune dashed the vessel from his lips.¹³

Some day pilgrims will wend their way to South Marston, as they do now to Coate [birthplace of fellow Wiltshire author, Richard Jefferies], to see Ranikhet, the home of the Wiltshire writer, Alfred Williams. His enthusiastic admirers will raise subscriptions to provide a marble tablet for his house, and a fine tombstone for his grave in the adjoining churchyard. There will be high ceremonial on occasions of reunion when distinguished speakers will vie with one another in singing his praises, and extolling his accomplishments.¹⁴

These reverent imaginings have remained—*est-il besoin de le préciser*—unfulfilled. In testimony from their dotage transmitted by wireless, the grain of the voice lending an edge of poignancy, Byett and Jones proclaimed their advocacy to the last.¹⁵ The worthy but maladroit efforts of these tireless partisans aside, the sole coherent book-length study of Williams remains Leonard Clark's biography of 1945. Clark, then a novice in letters, initially joined this ovation to Williams's literary achievements (he had not been an acquaintance, but enjoyed the approbation of those who were), only to recant a quarter of a century later in his introduction to a reprinting:

Ⓞ "Every man's last day is fixed. I Lifetimes are brief, and not to be regained, I For all mankind. But by their deeds to make I Their fame last: that is labour for the brave." Jupiter to Hercules (Fitzgerald). This clinches the Alfredian design.

If I were writing this book again, from scratch, I believe that I should do it rather better. Amongst other things, I should not only tone down some of my remarks but also be more economical of language. I should omit a great deal of what I wrote originally about Alfred Williams's books and about what the reviewers of his day had to say about them. Although he was a most gifted and accurate writer of topography, and a genuine poet, I should not now make the extravagant claims I once made for him, nor include so many clogging details.¹⁶

His implication is that, within the longer perspective, the life is of greater moment than the work (his greatest work was his life), a line still periodically (*sic*) peddled: 'The life is the great achievement. Appropriate, at a time of celebration of conquest in war, to have this reminder that grand, instinctive courage is a peaceable virtue too.'¹⁷ This, surely, is self-defeating. The exceptionality of the life is entangled with the work: striving to achieve the work, within those conditions, was what made it exceptional. Oblivious to Jones's compelling question—'What worthier homage can we pay his memory than to scrutinise closely and study his works?'¹⁸—the confectors of spasmodic articles have done little more than round up the usual biographemes, baroque though they undoubtedly are. In neglect of the writings generally, there is no recognition specifically that Williams's enduring legacy might have been the song collecting. The memorialist which he, in common with the many brave men before Agamemnon, has principally lacked lies, precisely, in this domain.

By the early 1950s, the Old Guard of supporters had perished, and any repute which may once have accreted around Williams's name faded with them. The resonance of Clark's biography is not of a new dawn of recognition but of homage, rather dutifully, rendered. A lull ensued. Where Williams the song collector had been pointedly ignored by the establishment of his own day, glimmerings of renewed interest came—in a development that would surely have surprised the original proponents—with the post-war folk music movement: he was, after all, to be applauded not for his poetry or his prose chronicles, but for his gathering of song in the Upper Thames. (This trajectory is traced in Chapter IV.) The founding of a folk song club in Swindon in 1960¹⁹ led within a few years to his recovery and espousal as collector by local enthusiasts.²⁰ (Resultant indexing of his song manuscripts is detailed in Chapter I.)

²⁰ Williams's early death (1930) creates the sense of belonging to a remote epoch, but a little elementary calendar work shows he might have survived into the Second Revival period. Had he lived to 90, as many of his informants, he would have been alive in 1967 when his work was being 'rediscovered': it is an intriguing, almost unsettling thought that Swindon Folksingers' Club members could then have made the pilgrimage to South Marston to consult the man in person.

The late 1960s promised to be the moment when Williams would finally come. The *Folk Music Journal* (organ of the English Folk Dance and Song Society) for 1969 was largely given over to a three-part symposium on his work, occupying more than 50 pages. Congratulating Ivor Clissold on his contribution, Frances Gay, Secretary of the Richard Jefferies Society in Swindon, wrote optimistically:

I think the Williams Folk Song Article is a triumph. You will have seen in the *Advertiser*, no doubt, that there is a move towards bringing Alfred Williams forward here on all fronts and your work will be valuable.²⁰

That year there were also reissues of Clark's biography and of *Life in a Railway Factory*, and the inaugural, and in the event last, Alfred Williams Festival staged by Swindon Folksingers' Club:

On Friday 11th and Saturday 12th September, 1969, we organised a mini-commemorative festival within Alfred's village—South Marston—hoping that this would be an annual event.²¹

The following year saw a reprinting of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* with a new preface by Stewart Sanderson. In the same period, the Friends of Alfred Williams formed in Swindon to sustain his memory.²² And there it all rather fizzled out. The Friends meet monthly and consume tea and biscuits (but manage little more); and a trickle of short press articles testifies to periodic 'discovery' by those with a taste for obscure scribble and an odd story. Due appreciation of efforts in the domain, particularly, of song was hoped for by Williams himself and by others at the time:

it is possible that though few may take notice of my remarks now, in time more may feel the truth of them—if they are true!

Some day the remarkable work that Mr Williams has done in his own particular district, the upper Thames basin, will be generally recognised. At present it seems to be very little known.²³

Despite fitful attempts since the 1950s to promote him as the unsung (*sic*) hero of the early folk song movement, this prophecy has remained, more than 70 years after his death and not far short of a century since his fieldwork, essentially unfulfilled. A comprehensive, scholarly evaluation of Williams's typically strenuous intervention in the music-making of working people of the countryside remains to be performed.



NOTES TO PRÆLUDIUM

- 1 Alfred Williams, 'Farm Wages and Vanished Privileges', *Wiltshire Times*, 7 May 1927, p. 10.
- 2 Interview with Doris Ellen Claridge at Long Burton, Dorset, 18 October 2004. The received wisdom is that Elias Williams deserted the family.
- 3 *A Worker's Letters to Workers* (unpublished work, WSRO 2598/39).
- 4 Mrs Claridge.
- 5 Letter to J B Jones, 2 October 1911 (WSRO 2598/74).
- 6 Alfred Williams, 'How I Solved the Housing Problem', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 14 October 1926, p. 3.
- 7 Mrs Claridge, recalling visits to Ranikhet in the late 1920s.
- 8 Letter to J B Jones, 21 February 1923 (WSRO 2598/74).
- 9 A G Harris, letter to the *Swindon Evening Advertiser*, 3 April 1970, p. 10.
- 10 Letter to Edgar J Trowbridge, 18 February 1930, The Wiltshire Archæological and Natural History Society, Devizes (Box 313 / MS 2751).
- 11 W Bramwell-Hill, 'Wiltshire's Craftsman-Poet. Cameos of Alfred Williams', *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 7 February 1953, p. 10.
- 12 Private letter from Doris Ellen Claridge, 26 October 2004.
- 13 Henry Byett, *Alfred Williams: Ploughboy, Hammerman, Poet & Author* (Swindon, 1933), p. 88.
- 14 J B Jones, *Williams of Swindon* (Swindon, 1950), p. 5.
- 15 Victor Bonham-Carter, 'Alfred Williams', BBC West of England Home Service broadcast, 3 July 1949.
- 16 Leonard Clark, *Alfred Williams: His Life and Work* (Bristol, 1945; reprinted Newton Abbot, 1969), Introduction to the 1969 edition (unpaginated).
- 17 David McKie, 'A life of hard graft and great craft', *Guardian*, 17 May 1995, p. 15, piece prompted by a review of Clark in reprintings of 1945 newspapers.
- 18 Jones, p. 22.
- 19 See A. Bathe, *Swindon Folksingers' Club: A Continuing History* (Swindon, 2002).
- 20 Gay to Clissold, 1 January 1969 (Clissold papers, private collection).
- 21 'Alfred Williams, Folk Songs of the Upper Thames Pack', issued as part of Swindon Folksingers' Club 40th anniversary celebrations (2000).
- 22 Apparently formed in 1970 from interest within the Richard Jefferies Society, though no exact date is recorded. See *Friends of Alfred Williams Newsletter* 1 (January 1996), pp. 5-6.
- 23 Letter to J B Jones, 11 May 1923 (WSRO 2598/74); *Word-Lore*, 1, no 2 (March-April 1926), p. 82.

PART ONE: CONTEXTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Materials & Methods



CHAPTER II

UPPER THAMES VALLEY

Place | People | Pastime



CHAPTER III

ALFREDIAN PERSONÆ

The Questing Subject

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Materials & methods

As I walked out one morning,
All for sweet recreation,
So happy in my station,
No care to trouble me;
To view the fruits of nature,
And every happy creature,
And all the gay amusements
Before my eyes could see.

To watch fair flowers together,
And the fruits among the heather
The pretty little lambkins
How they did sport and
Bright shining came Amrod,
Accompanied by Flora,
And the bright rays of Phoebus
Began to feed the day.



ALFRED WILLIAMS'S MANUSCRIPT FAIR
COPY OF 'BETSY OF THE MOOR' (GL 40)



PART I : PURPOSES

HABILITATION | CHRONICLE | REFRACTION | FOLK?

§I HABILITATION: AN OVERDUE RESCUE OPERATION

THIS NEGLECT, IN THE SONG DOMAIN, OF REQUISITE SPADEWORK DECREES THAT any rigorous examination of Williams's intervention must furnish its own prelude, the notable exception being the comprehensive classified catalogue of the song manuscripts prepared in the late 1960s (*see p. 26*). Preparatory undertakings must certainly include: a full critical transcript of the song texts; an annotated transcription of discursive writings on song; a minute examination of editing practices; full cross referencing to the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* serialization; a listing of identifiable compositions in the collection; and biographical details of the singers beyond what Williams quirkily supplies. In the absence of propædeutic procedures of this order, the ruminations of the few commentators to have passed this way have at best been consigned to insufficiency, at worst to perpetration of fallacies. By extension, accepting that Williams could no more than anyone else conduct his pursuit of song *in vacuo*, the character of his thinking—knowledge, assumptions, values, preoccupations—demands more careful investigation than has hitherto been accorded (the matter of Chapter III), as a frame for the song writings. With the exception of the first of these exercises, what follows is an initial attempt extensively to perform this ground clearing. A properly pondered evaluation of the cast of Williams's work, ultimately in relation to the efforts of his contemporaries, can then be broached. In this sense, *rehabilitation* is less to the point than (inaugural) *habilitation*.

A CATALOGUE OF ERRORS A necessary function of *déblayage* bears on corrections to the literature. If Williams the song collector is in need of 'rescuing' it is as much from Deutero-Revival (largely) benevolent misrepresentation as from Proto-Revival spurning, misrepresentation deriving in part from this restricted access to capital sources. (There are also, unavoidably, partisan anglings attendant upon interpretation.) By extension, laxities in the particularist secondary accounts will carry over into works of *haute vulgarisation*, dependent necessarily upon existing literature. In allotting Williams a chapter to himself, Dave Harker's ambitious polemical synthesis *Fakesong* (1985) propels him to a par with Child, Sharp and Lloyd (all other mediators

being relegated to composite chapters); but in taking his lead from Leonard Clark's sympathetic but unscholarly biography and the essentially jejune pronouncements of the *Folk Music Journal* symposiasts, Harker finds himself betrayed into the sapient perpetuation of error which so often passes for 'knowledge'. The more sympathetic reception accorded to Williams's work by agents of Second Revival (which might, in its antipathy to its forebears, be dubbed Counter Revival) has exposed him to traducing: here are the makings of a veritable *sottisier*. The paradoxically protective layer of hostile silence once removed, he is exposed to the Murphyism that increased attention will tend to engender increased lapsus.

§2 CHRONICLE *What does Alfred Williams have to tell us about folk song in the Upper Thames?* (The matter of Chapter II)

THE WHOLE CORPUS? The manifest, object centred, interest of Williams's efforts lies in the record he leaves of country song in time and place, a piece in the national jigsaw which would otherwise lack, yet much of what he contributes has lain buried. Ironically given his authorial propensities, the book which Williams published in 1923 under the title *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* has hampered proper evaluation of his contribution, in that the ready access it accords is confined to a portion of the texts he noted and the ideas he framed: some two thirds of the songs and a host of notes and articles either exist only in manuscript or as published in the parochial press during his lifetime, much of this unknown to commentators.[⊙] Frank Howes, in the first formal acknowledgement by the English Folk Dance and Song Society of Williams's existence, clinches this misconception: 'Alfred Williams's contribution to folk-song studies is confined to a single book'.[†] ¹ Documentary excavations described in Chapter I have been conducted with a view to correcting this limiting equation of Williams with *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*. Beyond the

⊙ If a further example be needed, Ronald Hutton's massively documented *Stations of the Sun* (1997) cites *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* (apropos 'Valentining', at p. 148), but is unable to draw on Williams's important, but hitherto occluded writings on other practices, such as Plough Monday.

† There is some indication that Williams, himself a child of Gutenberg, was aware of the weight his compilation would carry: 'I imagine it's going to be a rather good book, the most important of everything I've done'. (Letter to J B Jones, 15 March 1923, wsmo 2598/74.) Paradoxically, the reprinting of 1970 intended to raise awareness of Williams's work may have exacerbated this effect. Since then, the texts of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* have become a stock *repère* in the cross-referencing accompanying publication of songs. Frank Purslow, for example, in his four volumes of selections from the Hammond and Gardiner collections, routinely makes the connection to Williams's book, as do the confectors of notes accompanying sound recordings.

song notations and writings as such, the body of information bearing indirectly on the problem (principally, informant biography) can be augmented through archive and fieldwork sources independent of the Alfredian *Nachlass*. To a degree, this permits significant revision of the picture painted, furnishing a means of testing and adjusting Williams's pronouncements as much as amplifying them.

The elementary components of the problem are text (in this case) and context.

TEXT The aims of this investigation mean that emphasis is on discursive writings more than on song texts as such, comprehensive evaluation of which would require a separate study turning on detailed comparison with contemporary collections to establish the degree of fit of Williams's findings with the wider picture. A kind of rarity scale is entailed, at one end of which stand those songs variants of which were found all over the country, and at the other, more engagingly, items peculiar to Williams, which qualify more than they confirm the larger state of affairs. Discussion here is therefore confined to the overview presented in the second part of Chapter II, along with selective examination of parts of the collection, most promisingly the popular songs deemed to transgress the canon established by pioneer collectors.

CONTEXT Characteristically, Williams dilates much on country life generally in his 'Upper Thames' district, record which can be fleshed out from historical sources. This information is contextual to music-making in that it sketches in manners and milieu, and can more specifically be adduced to promote understanding of mechanics of a song tradition, such as distribution (song materials in relation to location) and especially *transmission*: contexts of performance (venues such as inns, occasions such as singing matches), the broadside trade, kinship connections. This dimension of the thesis inserts into the trend in recent decades of plugging the context gap left by First Revival fieldwork.² In these ways, a more rounded, *nuancé* sense may be created of vernacular song and singing (and life) in the Upper Thames in the period, built around notations supplied by Williams himself.

² The bulk of this endeavour has tended to address not song but the related province of morris. See for example Keith Chandler, 'Putting the history back into Morris: Sources, Methodology and Research Techniques', *Downs Miscellany*, volume 2, number 2 (November, 1984), pp. 8–15. In Williams's writings, of course, the 'history' (in the sense of extra-musical circumstance) was never entirely lacking in the first place. There is, incidentally, a danger of the pendulum swinging back too far: the music gets buried under a mound of indulgent demographic data.

§3 MEDIATION *What do the forms of Alfred Williams's intervention in folk song in the Upper Thames have to tell us about him?* (The matter of Chapters V and VI)

To inspect the topic thus is to suppose direct apprehension of what somehow just *is*. In practice, access and its imperfections result from an act of intervention by a questing, ruminating subject, the particular forms of whose intercession will be integral to the weave of her account. Observation alters. How the enquiring subject endeavours to make sense of the object of her enquiry serves as rudimentary gloss on the knowledge problem, essentially the informing contingencies of her *mediating*. In one sense, this effect is culture-specific and historically determined:

There are certain doctrines which for a particular period seem not doctrines but inevitable categories of the human mind. Men do not look upon them merely as correct opinions, for they have become so much a part of the mind, and lie so far back, that they are never really conscious of them at all. They do not see them, but other things through them. It is these abstract ideas at the centre, the things which they take for granted, that characterise a period.²

In another, more engaging, sense, the process is peculiar to individuals. Either way, the challenge is to inventory the contents of these 'doctrines', collective or particular, propædeutic to tracing their contingent carrying over into instances of attempted sense-making. The figures are hackneyed—'baggage', 'fingerprints', 'prism', 'alembic'—to express the core idea of transmutation, of some alteration brought about by a ruminating instance. Eco proposes 'background books':

We (in the sense of human beings) travel and explore the world, carrying with us some "background books". These need not accompany us physically; the point is that we travel with preconceived notions of the world, derived from our cultural tradition. In a very curious sense we travel knowing in advance what we are on the verge of discovering, because past reading has told us what we are supposed to discover. In other words, the influence of these background books is such that, irrespective of what travelers [*sic*—US orthography] discover and see, they will interpret and explain everything in terms of these books. For example, all medieval tradition convinced Europeans of the existence of the unicorn, an animal that looked a gentle and slender white horse with a horn on its muzzle. Because it was increasingly difficult to come upon unicorns in Europe ... When Marco Polo traveled to China, he was obviously looking for unicorns. Marco Polo was a merchant, not an intellectual, and moreover, when he started traveling, he was too young to have read many books. But he certainly knew all the legends current in his time about exotic countries, so he was prepared to encounter unicorns, and he looked for them. ... because an entire tradition had prepared him to see unicorns. ... In fact, what Marco Polo saw was the rhinoceros. ... He was a victim of his background books.³

The importance of this elegant seeing off of the empiricist fallacy of a *tabula rasa*, by foregrounding the altering effects of the subject's determinant formation, is that it regrades the status of preconception from its vulgar (mis)construal as error into truism: the preconceived enables and disables but cannot be excised. It is less, despite the neatness of the clinch, that *observation alters* than that *people*—especially those who appoint themselves to observe—alter *by means of* observation. What shapes observation is the agent's equipping, or in artisanal terms apposite to the case of Alfred Williams, tooling. The engaging twist on this is less its obverse (absence of tooling) than presence of the wrong tools. Eco provides a further exemplification:

So what was the big argument all about in the time of Columbus? The sages of Salamanca had, in fact, made calculations more precise than his, and they held that the earth, while assuredly round, was far more vast than the Genoese navigator believed, and therefore it was mad for him to attempt to circumnavigate it in order to reach the Orient by way of the Occident. Columbus, on the contrary, burning with a sacred fire, good navigator but bad astronomer, thought the earth smaller than it was. Naturally neither he nor the learned men of Salamanca suspected that between Europe and Asia there lay another continent. And so you see how complicated life is, and how fragile are the boundaries between truth and error, right and wrong. Though they were right, the sages of Salamanca were wrong; and Columbus, while he was wrong, pursued faithfully his error and proved to be right—thanks to serendipity.⁴

Columbus may serve as device for the amalgam of present knowledge, absent knowledge (ignorance) and present mistaken knowledge (error) constituting an individual's apparatus of (in)comprehension. Save that the humble bicycle is a vehicle less majestic than the sailing ship, the voyage of discovery undertaken by the pioneering folk song collectors was subject to the same (il)logic: oriented on some working model of 'folk'—a qualitatively discrete musical domain, privileged on its own terms—before any rigorous theoretical apparatus had been developed (in so far as such a thing can be said now to obtain). The examination of the collector's 'background books' which this supposes is neglected territory. It did not occur to Lloyd, for example, in lamenting unacquaintance with the psychology of *singers* to extend the observation to collectors.⁵ *Autrement dit*: in the preoccupation with where a collector seeks to get *to* we readily omit where she comes at it *from*. This is the dimension which Dave Harker's *Fakesong* sets out to restore under the rubric of 'mediation', drawing on E P Thompson, Raymond Williams and Tony Cliff's *Lenin*:

By *mediation* I understand not simply the fact that particular people passed on songs they had taken from other sources, in the form of manuscript or of print, but that in the very process of so doing their own assumptions, attitudes, likes and dislikes may well have significantly determined what they looked for, accepted and rejected. Not only that, but these people's access to sources of songs, the fact that they had the time, opportunity, motive and facilities for collecting, and a whole range of other material factors will have come into play. ... *Fakesong* aims to show why these people mediated songs, who [*sic*] they did it for, and how their practices and the results of their mediations related to more general cultural and historical tendencies and developments.⁶

Harker's efforts at elaborating this compelling project remain jejune in the face of its complexities and a lack of scholarly groundwork. Moreover, it is perhaps less a matter of *why* 'mediation' occurred—as such it designates a banality: we all mediate all the time—than of *what made mediation possible* in this particular (unusual) realm. Those who determine to intercede must negotiate a passage—gathering, editing, glossing—through what proves a surprising quagmire, propelled or impeded by their degree of equipping.⁹ In this perspective, Williams proves an especially promising case. If all folk song collectors at the time wanted properly constituted means, each was ill-equipped after his (they were, overwhelmingly, male) own fashion. Yet where most operated within a frame of shared premise (Chapter IV.2), Alfred Williams, aculeate artisan-autodidact, negotiated the minefield aggressively on his own terms: archi-idiosyncratic, uncompromising, avowedly atechical. The chief interest from there lies in tracing the carrying over of prior formation into a sphere of strangeness (it merely appeared familiar), a version of executing a task with tools not designed for the purpose. With the problem thus inverted and the mediating instance promoted from the shadows, investigation inclines towards a concern with how the baroque constituents of the mind—'baggage'—are unwittingly betrayed in collision with specificities and peculiarities of a province peripheral to established scholarship, or even to the popular paradigm of assumption.

Williams is a strange case. At every turn, we are confronted with the defining fact of his egregiousness: as villager, as artificer, as autodidact, as warrior—and as zealous mediator of residual music-making among the untutored working people of his

⁹ Francmanis's attempt to perform this exercise on the work of Frank Kidson succeeds merely in highlighting the difficulties entailed—by failing to identify them. The promising project of explaining the forms of intervention in song in terms of what went before ('baggage') reduces in practice to unilluminating circumstance: that Kidson inherited from his father an interest in music history, or that his painting expeditions had taught him to make contact with country people. There is no sense of the need to seek to enter the folds of the psyche through micro exegesis of linguistic texture. See John Francmanis, 'The Roving Artist: Frank Kidson, pioneer song collector', *Folk Music Journal*, 8, 1 (2001), pp. 41–66.

elective locale (which is only 'folk' by virtue of the determination of interlopers to valorize it as such). That individual, with that knowledge and that lack of knowledge, in that place at that time, who, in turning this musical object over in his artisan's hands, left his fingerprints all over it. The results, that is, are to a degree concomitantly egregious. These mediations turn not merely on the fact of being literate and curious, but on a rarified *lettering* acquired between c. 1900 and 1914, veritable *moyens du bord* when enlisted in groping negotiation of a mythologized 'folk song'.

All this is, by its nature, a linguistic problem in that the myriad encounters of self and world are manifested overwhelmingly, overtly or in the silences, in language. The records bind (access depends on what is recorded, but records can only be the outcome of a contingent act of creation) assumes a special kind of force in a province predominantly oral in its workings, that is, not self-documenting. The chroniclings of extra-tribal trespassers therefore become *sine qua non* at the same time as inherently transpository: how shall 'alteration' embodied in the records be gauged? This is the 'distorsion' shibboleth, a version of the hermeneutic circle (*Zirkel des Verstehens*).

§4 FOLK AS PATHOLOGICAL CONDITION? Instructive as the subject's folding back upon its own anxious workings, perfectly exemplified in the beguiling singularity of Williams's condition, proves, it is an emphasis conducive to a form of myopia. (What import should we expect to find in oblique self-exposures of a fugitive intruder at this atrophying musical feast?) In a corrective twist, therefore, investigation must at length return to the larger problem, 'folk' as engagingly marginal embodiment of a fascicle of questions. Alfredian egregiousness stands, paradoxically, as emblem of allegorical modulations set deep in the enterprise. If country song, in its profusion and sedimented enactment, finds Alfred Williams out, so too does it variously find out all those who pass this way, become a site of delusions and estrangements among presences alien to the ethnic sources, all the more telling for their ritualistic denial. *Les folkies, c'est les autres.*



PART II : METHOD

I : DATA

MATERIALS FOR THIS PROJECT, WHILE LESS THAN SUPER-ABUNDANT, LARGELY suffice to sustain the work of exegesis. A *tour d'horizon* will divide as what is already assembled and what remains to be uncovered. Discussion subsumes a survey of literature, primary and secondary, though the core of the latter—commentary on Williams as song collector—is deferred until Chapter IV. There has, hitherto, been no attempt at a compendious Williams bibliography, previous listings being largely limited to the published books. This represents a small part of the total corpus, both by Williams and about him. The bibliography appended here seeks to present the totality of what has been tracked down, not merely the folk song writings.

§I ARCHIVE MATERIALS: WILLIAMS COLLECTION

THE REMORSELESS SCRIBBLER The productive period of Alfred Williams's life as an author falls between 1909 and 1923, amounting to half a dozen volumes of poetry, an account of industrial conditions in the Great Western Railway works at Swindon, three paeans in prose to local country life, and a selection from his folk song collecting. In 1925 he prepared an epitome of his poetic output, published as *Selected Poems*. Finally, his translation from the Sanskrit, *Tales from the Panchatantra*, appeared shortly after his death in 1930. Copies of all these published works are held at Swindon Public Library, as well as in the British Library. In addition to these finished volumes, Williams composed a number of lengthy works for which he was unable to find a publisher (see bibliography). He also contributed articles to the parochial press, principally in the years 1925–29 (pp. 29–30 *infra*). Worthy of note here are the serializations of *Round About the Upper Thames* (*Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard*, January–August 1915)[©] and *The Banks of Isis*, published in 37 parts in the *North Berks Herald*, August 1925 to May 1926. Alongside the neat printed artefacts, this quarter century of heroic creation-in-adversity resulted in the dirtying of a large quantity

[©] This was reconstructed in notably corrupt form by Williams's supporters after his death and reprinted in the *North Wiltshire Herald* during January to May, 1935. A pasted-up copy is in the collections at the Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading.

of foolscap, a substantial *Nachlass* which now forms the core of the Alfred Williams Collection of manuscripts and other materials housed in the Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office (WSRO, at Trowbridge at the time of writing), catalogued as 2598. This corpus contains photographs, newspaper cuttings and personal documents, but principally writings in Williams's own hand, including some 400 letters. The collection has been roughly sorted—presumably at the time of acquisition—into 78 numbered fascicles (excluding books); it is in some need of more rigorous cataloguing.

There is some uncertainty over the initial movements of the papers. Williams died suddenly, his wife was terminally ill, outliving him by a matter of weeks, and there were no children. No formal arrangement having been made for disposal of effects, Mrs Williams was left conscientiously to perform the task, one final act of devotion in a lifetime of selflessness. According to the biographer Leonard Clark, her revised will specified that a decision on the fate of the literary materials should be left to “Lou” Robins, a local disciple of Williams, and the mysterious J H Morgan (see pp. 68-9 *infra*), the Swindon Education Committee being the ultimate recipient:

Many of the manuscripts were also accepted by the Education Committee and housed in the Technical College. Others were burned by those who thought they were merely useless scrap paper, not realising that Williams had often written new works on the backs of old ones because of his inability to buy clean paper.⁶⁷

Further additions to the collection may have resulted from Clark's appeal for material when writing his biography of Williams (c. 1938-1945). Some copying of letters into typescript certainly came about in this way, the original documents presumably (none of this is documented) being subsequently returned to their owners. Finally, the papers found their way into Swindon Public Library:

On consideration of a letter dated 7th October, 1952, from the Borough Education Officer. Resolved—That the offer of the Governors of the Swindon Secondary Schools to place on permanent loan a collection of manuscripts and books of Alfred Williams, be accepted.⁸

The collection was transferred from Swindon to WSRO in June 1990.†

⁶⁷ Some materials may have been deposited at Commonweal School, Swindon (built 1927), then the pride of the education committee: a letter to the head teacher (5 June 1998) went unanswered. See Clark pp. 19, 189, and Byett p. 11 on Latin and Greek Classic Primers housed at the school: ‘These books contain many written marginal annotations and bear evidence—by reason of their very dirty condition—of considerable use in the meal times amid the grime and dirt of the forge.’

† ‘The Alfred Williams Collection was transferred to the Record Office on 30 June 1990. The ‘process’ of transfer [my question] was in line with library policy within the county not to keep manuscript collections which would be appropriately stored in the Record Office. As we continue to provide an archive service for the Swindon Borough Council now that it is [a] unitary authority, that view still prevails.’ (Letter from Steven Hobbs, for WSRO, 6 May 2004.)

The other angle here is books owned by Williams. Henry Byett writes that at one point Williams possessed 500 volumes.⁹ Basil Blackwell, who visited Ranikhet immediately after Williams's death, observed:

eight or ten books, the nucleus of a Sanskrit scholar's working library. There were no other books to be seen; and it was manifest that to equip himself with these costly volumes he had sacrificed all his Greek and Latin and English books.¹⁰

It seems more likely that the books had been posthumously removed, given that a sizeable remnant of this library—in excess of 300 volumes once housed at Commonweal School—is preserved at Swindon Central Library (a typeset catalogue was created from the card index as part of this project).

THE SONG MANUSCRIPTS

At the hands of incurious posterity, Williams the song collector has tended to be the creature of publishing circumstance. The volume that, delayed by the war, was published in 1923 as *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* is in several respects misleading. Containing no more than a third of the texts (there is no music) he had gathered, the compilation is largely an exercise in (self)editing of the materials that had been serialized in the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* (Cirencester) while collecting was in progress during 1915–16: some 440 texts with headnotes in 41 instalments, framed by a two-part introduction and a brief conclusion (aggregated as the disquisition Williams termed his 'Folk Song Essay'). While cuttings of the serial in its entirety are not preserved in the collection, the pasted-up selection of around 250 which Williams used as copy text for *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* do survive. What appeared in 1923 marks thus not a new work but a reworking, of two orders: texts were selected (267 from c. 800), enacting a tacit judgement, while notes and essay were extensively pruned (rather than rewritten). The residue of this season of gathering and pondering forms batch 36 of the Williams Collection: manuscript fair copies of texts noted from singers, the solitary surviving field notebook (only partly used), a small sheaf of lecture notes, and sundry shards and lists.

Williams's idiosyncratic working methods are important in understanding the character of these materials. From the field notations he made in his notebook (of which the sole surviving instance affords merely a glimpse), he made a manuscript

fair copy (usually on foolscap) of title and text only, without attribution or annotation. Only when a song was selected for publication—initially in the *Standard* serial, subsequently in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* (1923)—did he add a headnote, interpolated *pêle-mêle* at the top of the sheet in red ink. These are non-uniform in length, routinely recording name of informant and location (though in a few cases only the latter), plus any further circumstance that fell, quirkily, to hand. Only exceptionally is an informant's age noted. None of the sheets is dated. It is this jejune annotation that offers scope for elaboration in the demographic sources (*infra*). Aside from publication, Williams made no attempt to number or otherwise order the scripts, which the suspension of fieldwork apparently consigned unceremoniously to a dusty domestic corner. (Importantly, this procedure is not merely unscientific: the linkage of provenance attribution to publication betrays both Williams's view of the manuscripts as private working materials rather than as an archive to be preserved for posterity, and his essential self-conception as *author*—the book was to be the monument. For these reasons, he had almost certainly not pondered how the documents were finally to be disposed of.)

In unhappy consequence, details of informant and location were not appended to any manuscript which remained unselected for publication—in the event, a third of the collection. This is the section catalogued as Miscellaneous. Thus the picture of the apportioning of materials is skewed, geographically but especially among the singers, the identities of 200 of whom survive in record: some unattributed texts must have been noted from singers otherwise represented, and conversely some must have come from singers not otherwise represented. Total of singers and scale of individual repertory are therefore partial, vitiating the pertinence of exercises involving any relation to person or place. All statements come with this qualification attached. A further proviso is that some of these unattributed texts are likely to have been copied from printed sources rather than noted in the field. Yet another complication is Williams's practice of assembling composite texts (see Appendix 1).

The surviving corpus stands at 755 numbered items (a figure which includes five mummers' plays—from Aston (Ox 191), Bampton (Ox 196), Elijah Iles (Wt 407), Liddiard (Wt 421) and South Marston (Wt 509)—and a number of fragments) from 200 identified singers. The exact number of texts is, as usual, subject to dispute.

THE MAKING OF THE SONG CATALOGUE The song manuscripts were rigorously sorted and numbered in the late 1960s by Ivor Clissold and C H Bathe, advised by Frank Purslow. The hierarchical principle adopted is a four-term alphabetical classification by county, location, singer and song—a system which thus subordinates singers and songs to topography—from which the sequence of numbers is generated, qualified by county prefixes. The resultant master index comprises six sections: texts attributed to singers in Berkshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire, texts unattributed ('Miscellaneous'), and a list of some 40 texts noted by Williams as having been copied from notebooks but for which no manuscript survives.⁹ Counterbalancing this topographical primacy, generative of random (in relation that is to textual content—or geographical spread, indeed) numbering, are separate alphabetical lists of songs by title and by first line. (Neglected, revealingly, is any discrete listing of the *singers*: this is corrected by the investigations of Chapter II.1.3.) Two orders of objection are raised by this document. On its own terms, the catalogue contains a number of flaws deriving from the fact that the cataloguers were working purely from details—sometimes partial, occasionally erroneous—supplied by Williams. Adjustments are required using information from independent sources (especially demographic records: as Chapter II). The more general issue is the relation of the Williams materials to other collections. Useful though it is locally, the catalogue tends to reinforce the main impediment to synthesis of national holdings: *de facto* balkanization. The sticking point here is less divergent cataloguing systems than non-standardization of titling, which dogs any attempt to codify matter recovered from oral tradition. Frank Purslow—who, picking up from Margaret Dean-Smith, entered the arena only to duck out—advised on 'master' titles for the Williams alphabetical title list, though the result has been found 'somewhat confusing'.¹¹

CORRESPONDENCE The only other manuscript category in the Collection bearing significantly on this project is the mass of Williams's letters. Work on these documents began in December 1998, with the two-fold aim (narrowly) of distilling out any references to the song collecting, and (broadly) of aggregating the elements

⁹ This list lends support to the view that some of the Williams materials have been lost (p. 23 *supra*). It has been possible to restore a handful of texts to the collection by cross-checking against the serialization in the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* (p. 29 *infra*). Clissold's gloss is: 'Most of the mss. were presented to the Swindon College, and later became the property of the Swindon Public Library. During the transits, many of the songs seem to have disappeared, probably due to Williams' penurious practice of using the backs of old drafts for copying out the songs.' (*Folk Music Journal* 1, 5 (1969), p. 299.)

of a credo. The corpus was exhaustively examined (as part of which a full transcript, available at WSRO, was brought to completion in August 2001), a trawl which turned up disappointingly little relating directly to song collecting.[□] Most usefully, a small number of letters from Williams to singers offers a rare glimpse of relations between collector and informant, as well as revealing that a very limited amount of collecting was carried out by proxy, with those singers comfortable on paper writing out their own texts and noting down songs from neighbours. The cardinal importance of the corpus of letters for this study lies in clues they provide to Williams's thought and belief (explored in Chapter III), which indirectly informs the song mediation.

§2 OTHER MANUSCRIPT SOURCES: CORRESPONDENCE

Research methods proper are only brought into play by document dispersal: the task of seeking to extend the principal collection, conveniently mustered in the public domain, by hunting down what lurks elsewhere. Manuscript sources held in other depositories reduce in practice to original letters. This is a promising province, both in that dispersal inheres in the medium, and in that the eminence of many of Williams's correspondents has ensured institutional preservation.

Working through the batches of letters to Williams raised the question of what had become of his end of these exchanges, essentially materials never surrendered to the collection and conceivably not identified by commentators such as Leonard Clark. The evident procedure here is to list those who wrote to Williams and trace the whereabouts of their papers. Batches 60 and 63 (miscellaneous correspondents) are unpromising, being largely private individuals of no particular eminence. There are, however, three exceptions. The most pertinent here—a letter from the folk song luminary Frank Kidson (WSRO 2598/60)—proved the most disappointing: Kidson's letter is clearly a reply, almost certainly following the *Standard* exchanges (*infra*), but extensive enquiries failed to locate Williams's original approach.[†] Secondly, the

□ Two of the letters had been transferred (quite properly) from an *ad hoc* binding at Swindon Reference Library to WSRO 2598, but (improperly) without updating a listing at Swindon, as well as mis-locating them within 2598. Chris Wildridge, addressing the resultant confusion for Wiltshire Libraries, declined to accept that the documents had been 'haplessly mislaid' (letter, 17 March 2000). As a result of errors by professionals ('hapless'), two letters were preserved but could not be located ('mislaid'): dismissal of this semantic precision exemplifies the reflex bullshit to which institutions give rise.

† Ivor Clissold, having found this letter in the 1960s, sought to pursue the matter with the Mitchell Library, Glasgow (reply 18 August 1967), to no avail. Nearly 20 years later (1984), the enquiry was hopefully extended for this study to sundry hyperborean repositories with a Kidson connection, but no trace was found of any such correspondence. Replies were received from: The Mitchell Library, Glasgow (14 May 1984); Leeds Central Library (31 May 1984); Brotherton Library, University of Leeds (2 July 1984); West Yorkshire Archive Service (4 July 1984); The Thoresby Society (5 July 1984); Leeds City Art Gallery (10 December 1984). The letter is reproduced *in toto* as Appendix 3.

survival of a letter of 3 October 1922 (WSRO 2598/60) from the Rev E H Goddard, Secretary of the Wiltshire Archæological and Natural History Society thanking Williams for a presentation copy of *Round About the Upper Thames*, suggested the Society might have materials. An enquiry to the WANHS library at Devizes Museum established that Williams had presented copies of most of his books, with accompanying letters. These are: 13 January 1910 (*Songs in Wiltshire*), 11 October 1912 (*Nature and Other Poems*), 17 November 1913 (*Villages of the White Horse*), 8 February 1916 (*War Sonnets and Songs*), 11 May 1923 (*Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*). Perversely, no letter survives with the copy of *Round About the Upper Thames*, to which Goddard is replying. This enquiry, fortuitously, also established 11 autograph letters and post-cards from Williams to Edgar J Trowbridge of Swindon, 1923–30 (WANHS Box 313 / MS 2751). The afternoon of 7 July 2000 was spent listing and epitomizing these additional 16 letters. Thirdly, a solitary letter from Alfred Zimmern (12 November 1915, WSRO 2598/63) takes matters into more rarified territory. Zimmern was one of a handful of men of national standing who corresponded with Williams, others being Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice (patron), John Cann Bailey (poetry critic), Robert Bridges (poet laureate) and Albert Mansbridge (founder of the WEA). Of these, substantial bundles survive at WSRO from the first two (Fitzmaurice 2598/58, Bailey 2598/57), and one letter from Bridges and one to him (2598/38/1 and 2598/56, the latter being a draft only). What, then, of Williams's letters to them?

Tracing the papers of these luminaries poses few difficulties: details were supplied by the National Register of Archives. The most promising deposits, Bridges and Zimmern, are to be found in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Four letters survive from Williams to Zimmern from the period of military service (1916–17), while Bridges yields a total of 21 letters: 12 from Williams to Bridges 1917–1929, and nine from Bridges to Williams 1917–1925. (Bodleian, Dep Bridges. The Bridges to Williams batch is marked MS Don d 163.)⁹

Most frustrating, conversely, was the case of Lord Fitzmaurice, from whom 41 letters covering the period 1909–1930 are preserved at WSRO 2598/58. Williams's end of the correspondence might be expected to survive among the family archive

⁹ MS Don d 163 was purchased from 'Rendell's' (taken to be a reference to US manuscript dealers David and Kenneth Rendell) on 13 October 1976 by Bodley's American Friends and donated to Oxford. How the letters to Williams came to be on the international market remains unexplained. (Replies from the Bodleian Library, 19 and 24 September 2001.)

at Bowood House. Dr Kate Fielden, curator at the Bowood Estate, announced (8 December 2000), however, that no such letters are extant: 'I am so sorry to be sending you disappointing news. It does look as though Lord Fitzmaurice's papers have been very heavily thinned, leaving mostly political correspondence on various topics.' The letters had been available to Clark in the 1940s: his extensive quotations from them in his life of Williams have been listed and appended to the transcript. The few public deposits of John Cann Bailey papers contain no reference to letters from Williams. Clark's acknowledgement of 'Sarah Bailey' suggests his access was private, now possibly lost. (One letter from Williams to Bailey, 25 October 1913, survives at WSRO 2598/38/1; there are 20 letters from Bailey.) Albert Mansbridge proves similarly elusive. No letters are at WSRO, though he and Williams certainly corresponded. Writing, for example, to his wife from India on 11 April 1918, Williams reported (WSRO 2598/64): 'I had a letter from Mr Mansbridge. He was so very pleased that I wrote to him from Roorkee. He says he has heard nothing of the Swindon people for ages. They appear to have forgotten him. He is a nice man, and I feel a great friendship for him.' Information from the British Library (6 April 2000) established that Williams does not figure in the Mansbridge catalogue but that 'the Mansbridge Papers are not fully indexed and it is possible that these papers are 'hidden' within the run of general correspondence'. A trawl of the fascicles in question (Add Mss 65264-65287) is an operose exercise yet to be conducted.

By these methods, 41 letters (32 from Williams, nine to him) have been added to the tally of correspondence preserved in the Williams Collection.

§3 PRINTED SOURCES: PRESS ARTICLES

Given that Williams's hard-won *œuvre* of published volumes is finite and listed, occasion for discovery of published matter is restricted to periodical pieces, in two phases. One is the *Standard* serial of song texts in 1915-16, a readily locatable source though one which previous commentators have failed to inspect.²⁹ A full listing and cross referencing of these materials to manuscripts and the song book identified

²⁹ Both Clissold and Purslow miscalculate the serialized total (440 texts) in their Symposium pieces, the former citing a figure of 'some 250', the latter 'about 500' (*Folk Music Journal*, 15 (1969), pp. 295 and 301). Clissold evidently mistook Williams's working method in compiling *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* (p. 24 *supra*) for the totality of the serial. How Purslow arrived at his over-estimate is unclear. What this exemplifies is a failure to check against the instalments as published, no more than a routine exercise.

six texts not extant in the collection. These are: 'Meet me by Moonlight Alone' (anon, Southrop); 'Pressed off to War' (Thomas King, Castle Eaton); 'Fanny Blair' and 'The Spider and the Fly' (Alfred Howse, Latton); 'Down in Moorfields' (David Sawyer, Ogbourne); and 'The Sailor Boy just come from Sea' (William Warren, South Marston). Yet more signal was the stumbling upon an especially revealing flyting with the Folk Song Society luminary Frank Kidson arising from the serial: Kidson, from his home in Leeds, volunteered critical commentary on the first six instalments, drawing three defences from Williams of increasing acerbity. The encounter, brief and ill-tempered, is of great interest in that most of the cardinal folk song questions are aired, including points which Williams otherwise skates round.

The second phase, less straightforwardly, is the batch of articles on local topics Williams placed during the 1920s, unsystematic allusions to which occur in Clark:

He was still trying his hand at occasional journalism. ... By October, working at high pressure, Williams had written twenty articles on a variety of topics, a bare threequarters of which were marketed.¹²

Following this lead, six weekly papers circulating in the Upper Thames were inspected for the period 1925–1929, a corpus sufficiently restricted to permit exhaustive trawling: *North Berks Herald* (Abingdon), *North Wilts Herald* (Swindon), *Oxford Times* (Oxford), *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* (Cirencester), *Wiltshire Gazette* (Devizes) and *Wiltshire Times* (Trowbridge). In a moment of inattention, one article was overlooked from the *Wiltshire Times* sequence ('Farm Wages and Vanished Privileges', *Wiltshire Times*, 7 May 1927, p. 10), later found by chance among a bundle of cuttings at the library of the Wiltshire Archæological and Natural History Society at Devizes as a spin-off from correspondence research. By systematically working through these newspaper titles, more than 50 items were added to the tally of Williams's publications (listed in bibliography). Six of this number bear specifically on song, with an equivalent number on customs such as wassailing and mumming. A further two song articles in specialist national journals were tracked down similarly using leads from Leonard Clark: in *The Highway* 1916 (organ of the WEA), and *Word-Lore* 1926 (which Clark has as 'Wood Lore').¹³ Although drafts are preserved in a small number of cases, the bulk of this material represents a significant body of previously unknown primary writings.

At this point, the totality of Williams's writings on song (discursive mediation, as distinct from the song manuscripts) can be inventoried, dividing unevenly into five kinds (plus, possibly, a handful of letters to informants): Essay, headnotes, Kidson polemic, press articles and lecture notes. The chronological schema is this:

THREE PHASES OF SONG COLLECTING, EDITING AND PUBLISHING	
I 1914-16 : FIELDWORK AND NEWSPAPER SERIALIZATION	
2 & 9 OCTOBER 1915	Two-part introduction to <i>Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard</i> serialization of 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames' (38 paragraphs)
16 OCTOBER 1915- 26 AUGUST 1916	Headnotes to 440 serialized texts
30 OCTOBER, 20 & 27 NOVEMBER 1915	Three responses to Frank Kidson's intervention in the <i>Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard</i> serial
JULY 1916	Article 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames' in <i>The Highway</i> (7 paragraphs)
2 SEPTEMBER 1916	Conclusion to <i>Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard</i> serialization of 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames' (7 paragraphs)
<p>.....</p> <p><i>INTERLUDE</i> Alfred Williams departed for military service in November 1916, returning in November 1919. He did not resume song collecting, partly because of uncertainties over employment and housing in the immediate post-war period. Acceptance for publication of <i>Folk Songs of the Upper Thames</i> in early 1923 apparently marks a return to the subject, but in fact preparation amounts to no more than arranging materials—texts and ideas—already to hand. The important point is that he did not seriously return to the subject until moved to submit a high-minded article to the <i>Wiltshire Gazette</i> in 1925.</p> <p>.....</p>	
2 1923 : PUBLICATION OF FOLK SONGS OF THE UPPER THAMES IN BOOK FORM	
MAY 1923	Publication of <i>Folk Songs of the Upper Thames</i> , including brief new preface; plus some 30 new headnotes to songs not featured in the <i>Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard</i> serial
3 1925-1929 : NEWSPAPER ARTICLES AND LECTURES	
6 AUGUST 1925-1929	Articles on folk song and tradition, mainly in the local press, but also in the first issue of <i>Word-Lore</i> (1926)
FROM 1923	Notes for local lectures (undated).

§4 AUGMENTATIONS TO INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY WILLIAMS
MELODICO-VERBAL ASCRIPTION | SINGER BIOGRAPHIES

Besides these primary Williams documents, scanty notations he supplies lend themselves to augmentation in two forms: what can be discovered about the composition of some of the songs; and how much biographically can be unearthed concerning the informants. Here, too, methods must be deployed for drawing together data scattered in their storage. Both realms represent an original contribution to the object of study: they effect extensions to the body of information available.

I : TRAINSPOTTING—SONGS FOR WHICH COMPOSITION CAN BE IDENTIFIED

This phase of the project, ostensibly banal, describes a methodological conundrum: lacking knowledge, you look things up; but how do you 'look things up' if no adequate reference work has yet been created? As if, in the lexical realm, OED had never been compiled. A disabling amalgam of (personal) ignorance of the musical territory involved⁹ and (institutional) insufficiency of apparatus rendered the exercise potentially absurd, certainly highly inefficient in terms of time. Even knowledgeable amateurs such as Kidson and Purslow did no more than prod at the problem.

Prey to what might be styled *Kilgarriff's Syndrome*—"Oh, if you want a book like that you'll have to do it for yourself"¹⁴—this corner of research became a project-specific version of writing the book. What should have been a perfunctory exercise in identification—checking off the Williams song list against a rigorous catalogue of popular compositions so as to establish composer and date—ended by taking the form of *bricolage*, a kind of scholarly Heath Robinson (operose piecings together from disparate sources). This aspect of the problem matters, however, in that it assumes an especial salience in the case of Williams, given the uniquely (in the proper sense) high proportion of such materials in his collection. Although this is, in consequence, an aspect to which those (few) who have reflected on his intervention have all drawn particular attention—contemporary commentators disparagingly, more recent writers approvingly (or at least not disapprovingly)—none has hitherto done more than randomly identify instances in exemplification (see Chapter IV.3).

⁹ Mainly nineteenth century mainstream urban commercial popular song. There is at root a difficulty of terminology almost as problematic as 'folk' (see Chapter IV.1). A rubric such as 'urban commercial popular song' would, as it stands, also embrace the broadside trade. The category in question is songs created by those who enjoyed prestige as authors and / or composers (in contrast to anonymous broadside hacks) and who wrote for a designated public (genteel parlour, music hall) via reputable music publishers (Chappell, Novello). Those, that is, whose condition is as much a matter of social intent as of sordid commerce, of which Thomas Haynes Bayly is an emblematic case. So what do you term that?

What thus suggested itself from an early stage was a systematic, tabulated cataloguing of all known compositions occurring in the Williams manuscript as providing a valuable means of adjusting the 'folk song' paradigm (see Chapter IV.2). Initially, two ready-to-hand kinds of source were used: commentary thrown up in the course of Williams investigations (the 'folk' context), and books on popular song generally (acquired at random).

COMMENTARY INCIDENTAL TO FOLK SONG

- Frank Kidson's six *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* interventions of October–November 1915. Kidson, immersed as he was in popular printed music, effortlessly spots the trains: if only these testy exchanges had evolved into full collaboration.

- *The Times (Literary Supplement)* review of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, 10 May 1923: an anonymous reviewer sneers by singling out songs that are not 'folk'.

- Frank Purslow in *Folk Music Journal* 1969 (mainly p. 303) cites more instances, unhelpfully inspecific: 'songs by Arne, Hook and Dibdin' [such as?] and 'compositions by Stephen Foster and nigger minstrel songs such as 'Early in the morning', 'Baltimore' and 'Old Bob Ridley' ' without offering precise attributions.

- Purslow master index to folk song collections. A copy of the A&B sections of this typescript (Hammond, Gardiner and Williams only: as far as Purslow got) is in the Ivor Clissold Papers.

BOOKS ON POPULAR SONG GENERALLY A selection of works may be found in the bibliography. Of these, Kilgarriff looks compendious but contains only a small part of the whole; Disher is urbane but non-scholarly; Turner useful but limited.

This *ad hoc* congeries of authorities—many of them non-scholarly in not citing references—yielded some 40 'hits'. The problem was how to penetrate further. One method was to work through the lengthy bibliography in Scott's *Singing Bourgeois*, inspecting each in turn. The yield from this in the event proved too scanty to justify the effort required. W L Hanchant, *Songs of the Affections by Thomas Haynes Bayly*, for example, delivered up a mere three identifications, one of which was already known. Steve Roud's electronic database of traditional song has also been trawled, but is not designed primarily for this purpose. An internet posting by Julia Bishop in July 2001

generated some useful snippets, but no more than that (symptomatic of the problem).

Further enquiry failed to locate any archive given over to material of this kind. Much may be in private hands—both Kilgarriff and Disher, for example, make mention of sizeable collections. All this contrasts with the broadside accumulations, deposited in prodigious quantities. Response from the National Register of Archives (13 August 2003) confirmed no known ‘archive repository dedicated exclusively to popular song’ but recommended *faute de mieux* the British Library music catalogue.

Here, finally, was a means extensively (though still not exhaustively) of checking off the Williams materials: the British Library 62-volume printed catalogue of music (to 1980). Inconveniently, the holdings are listed in a single sequence, Beethoven scores alongside Bayly. Each ‘search’ is double. Since catalogue details are arranged alphabetically by the confector of the music (not, in the case of vocal music, of the words), starting from a title, as with the Williams collection, yields a cross-reference to composer, from where the instance may be called up. The sheets of popular songs are stored in musty leather-bound volumes, redolent of the contents of your grandparents’ piano stool in the back bedroom. They customarily sport elaborate pictorial covers, frequently according a celebrity performer pride of place over composer or author. Few of the sheets are dated, which explains an element of uncertainty on this point in the catalogue. *It is essential to realise that dates given are of acquisition, not necessarily of original publication. This occasionally results in large disparities, as with ‘Auld Robin Gray’ generally dated to 1771, earliest BL copy (Novello, Erwer & Co) 1880.*

The approach has been to check off the Miscellaneous numbers in the Williams index *in extenso* as containing the highest concentration of such items, with the remainder sampled on a principle of likelihood (such as ‘The Seeds of Love’ have not been checked). The exercise has been impeded by the familiar problem of discrepant titling. The (Purslovian) ‘master’ titles employed in the Williams catalogue, though not systematically applied, have assisted identification in one or two cases. An example of this is the song Williams has as ‘The Warrior’s Grave’ (Mi 735), which was found by its master title (as first line) ‘I’ll hang my harp on a willow tree’, music by Wellington Guernsey, words by Thomas Haynes Bayly (BL earliest copy, H 1694 (18), 1845). A further complication is commonly used titles, further hampered by the BL catalogue not consistently citing first line: ‘Forget me not’ (‘Poor Betsy was a sailor’s

bride', Mi 575) throws up some 50 entries, though some of these will be duplicate copies. In such cases, the sheets must be called up and checked off against Williams. All songs included in the table in Chapter II have been verified in this way.

Beyond the identifications, this could also constitute a thesis in its own right by constructing a sort of *catalogue raisonné* with each item cross-referenced to manuscript and broadside collections and other information, and by fully exploring all further avenues, such as correlations to circumstances of singers from whom noted. Exercises of this kind are compromised by the fact that the printed sheets do not necessarily meet received canons of 'evidence'. A reflex clutching at documentary sources as conferring access, in contrast to the shifting sands of orality, to some fixed provenance (ascription to person(s) and date) may be frustrated by sheets which sometimes take their place in the creative hall of mirrors: reworkings, adaptations, publishers' recyclings for which no sovereign point of departure is recoverable.

Molly Mogg. To Clarinda's an Exquisite Creature 12

Says my Uncle I pray you disco-ver what has been the cause of your woes that
 whine and you pine like a Do-ver I've seen Molly Mogg of the Rose O Nephew you
 grief is but folly, in Town you may have better progg Half a Crown there will
 get you a Molly a Molly much better than Mogg

Example of an early printed sheet of 'Says my Uncle' (Molly Mogg), dated c. 1720, from the British Library collection

II : INFORMANTS

Researching singers' backgrounds involves a mixture of the (documentary) dead and the (residually) quick: what may be gleaned from demographic and printed sources, and receding opportunity for fieldwork proper. The latter has been an entertaining interlude, but only those fooled by the *leurre* of facile empiricism would regard the fruits as of any great moment. The former entails techniques of family history, much marketed but as yet only patchily applied in this domain. Edward D Ives has made studies of individuals (see bibliography). C J Bearman's laboured work on Cecil Sharp's Somerset singers falsely claims to be 'the first attempt at a systematic biographical survey of a large group of singers' (he means *first published*).¹⁵

(I) OFFICIAL RECORD

For all the world like losing a rat in a barley-mow
—he's lost, though you know where he is.

Hardy, *Two on a Tower*

The farmyard parallel may not entirely run: what if the rat never entered the barley mow? Census, in particular, proves much less comprehensive than it purports to be, a problem evidently not confined to the low-tech nineteenth century.¹⁶ The bulk of this research was carried out intermittently over perhaps 15 years from the mid-1980s. Sources of information on Williams's singers divide *grosso modo* into three groups: official records, details supplied by Williams himself, and other sources. Of these, the first is the most comprehensive (even here there are lacunæ), taking the form of statutory parish records of birth, marriage and death, and decadal census returns. The second is, typically, quirky: Williams in some cases dilates at length, in other cases offers no more than a name. The third group is the most patchy and heterogeneous, comprising such as occasional newspaper obituaries, meagre gleanings from fieldwork, and other oddments which, often surprisingly, come to light.

OFFICIAL RECORD Parish registers and census together form the skeleton of a life, recording the essentials age (baptism), literacy (marriages), occupation, mobility and decease, along with other clues such as kinship structure. (Had Williams followed customary practice and noted the age of his singers as a matter of course, establishing the first datum from the records would have been redundant.) Of these

¹⁶ 'The missing are a heterogenous [*sic*] population: asylum-seekers, anarchists, frightened Asian women, criminals, council tax evaders, sex workers. But the rank and file are young men. The 1991 census 'under-enumerated'—statistician-speak for missed—approximately a million people.' (*Observer*, 27 June 1999, p. 22.)

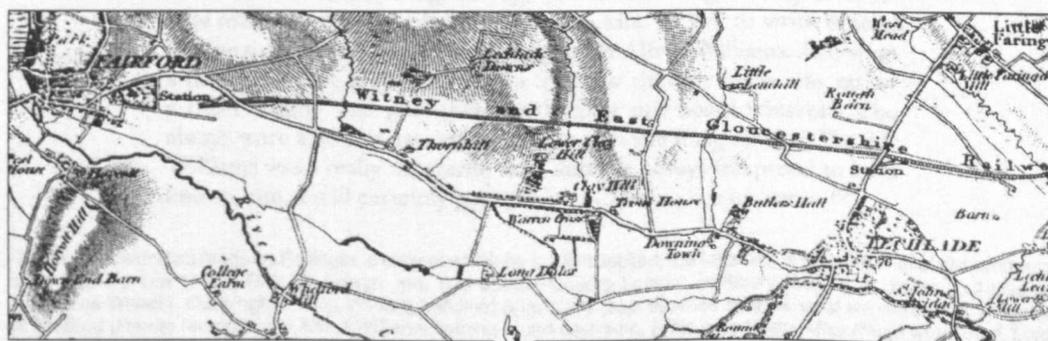
biographical bare bones, what is contained in parish registers is generally reliable, if exiguous and not always easily locatable. The pitfalls of census data, by contrast, are much rehearsed. There is often a lapse between birth and baptism; respondents might be unsure of their age ('many of the old men can only fix their age by events that happened when they were growing from boys into manhood');¹⁶ occupation cited might be temporary; migration is recorded without motive for moving or process by which it is effected; marriage entries are less than conclusive as a test of literacy. Examples of all these points arise within this small, rather off-beat, corpus.

METHOD Tracking Williams's informants through the official records frequently proves onerous, the consequence of greater mobility amongst this section of the population than we perhaps like to suppose. The starting point is Williams's partial attributions, confined to name of singer and place of collecting. (Only exceptionally does he cite an informant's age; and never a date of notation.) So enquiry proceeds backwards from these two notations, informed by the fact that Williams's information dates from 1914-16 and that the people in question are getting on in years, so that the third quarter of the nineteenth century is the main period of active adulthood. Informants who are life-long residents are straightforward for baptism, marriage and burial, but complications arise where a rite does not occur in the place of collecting. The extensively indexed 1881 census offers the best starting point, especially the National Surname Index: given chronology here, a case of starting in the middle and working backwards, enabling, for example, a place of birth to be located. More elusive is the case of marriage, it being unusual for a singer to have married in the parish of collecting (see p. 112). An important clue from census is the wife's place of birth. Many have been found by this means, such as Pillinger of Lechlade, who married in his wife's native parish of Kelmscot (adjoining). The further complication is that some marriages may be Nonconformist. The last resort is the General Register Office index, records for the whole country from 1837. This is, in principle, comprehensive, but operose, organized quarterly by registration district (an agglomeration of parishes). Knowing only roughly when a singer married, it may be necessary to trawl a ten-year span, at four searches per year. Resultant references only go so far. Thus, for instance, *March Quarter | 1850 | Faringdon* has the sense of some point between January and March 1850, in one of perhaps 15 parishes making up the

district. From there a copy of the certificate may be purchased (easy but expensive if more than one or two); or the parishes making up the district may be exhaustively trawled, a massively laborious task. A final impediment is created by Williams himself in usually not giving forenames for females, making them all but unfindable. Census, of course, is of no help in tracing burials, necessitating further GRO trawl.

A STUBBORN RESIDUE A definite law of diminishing returns is at work. The greatest frustration is the *residuum* of instances resistant to location, and which the 1901 census—holding out the prospect of a rapid ‘on-line’ mopping up, the whole country searchable at the touch of a button—has done surprisingly little to dispel. The advance over what had been established from previous census years amounts to no more than a handful of cases. As this record set is still 15 years away from the period of collecting, the document crucial to this project is the 1911 take.

AN INSTANCE OF DETECTIVE WORK One of Williams’s more cryptic headnotes reads: ‘Obtained of Shepherd Barrett, of Long Dolls, Lechlade’.¹⁷ This gives a working assumption that ‘Long Dolls’ was either a cottage or an enclave at Lechlade, but enquiry failed to uncover any such name, or indeed anyone named Barrett. A reference chanced upon in Smith¹⁸ to ‘Long Doles’ at neighbouring Fairford seemed merely coincidental, until a glance at the original OS map discovered a *Long Doles Farm* on the boundary of Fairford and Lechlade parishes. (The site appears to be the present Lechlade Sailing Club, amid lakes created by gravel extraction.) Thence, a trawl of 1891 census for Fairford yielded an entry for John Frank Barrett, aged 27, a shepherd born at Highworth.¹⁹ So a false trail had, unwittingly, been laid by Williams: he mistook the name of the enclave, and placed it as Lechlade rather than Fairford parish. The revised note would read: ‘John Barrett, of Long Doles Farm, Fairford.’



Long Doles Farm, on the boundary of Fairford and Lechlade, which Williams mistakenly rendered as ‘Long Dolls’

(2) FIELDWORK**IN THE CYCLETRACKS OF ALFRED WILLIAMS**

Statutorily, Alfred Williams construed his efforts in 1914–16 to recover popular song from the lips of the country people of the Upper Thames as a last-ditch operation to rescue a form of music that was even then on the point of extinction—indeed, he expresses the view that he was already to a great extent too late. Subsequent trawls, in this district and elsewhere, have shown this reflex to be unduly apocalyptic.

THE RESEARCHER'S WANING FIELD DAY Whereas our civilization of the archive conserves written records in perpetuity (this side, at least, of Armageddon) beyond their epoch, oral testimony, the concern of fieldwork proper, is signally a more fragile resource. A trail once blazed may be revisited, but any significant yield will diminish in proportion as the blazing recedes in time. In the case of Alfred Williams, a motley crew of enthusiasts has retraced his fading cycletracks down the years, though none with any notable rigour. The first was the Cotsall entertainer Bob Arnold, alerted by a sheaf of cuttings from the *Standard* (see Chapter VI.4). Brian Ballinger and associates conducted expeditions into Williams country on seven successive Saturday nights in October and November 1957, enquiring at pubs in villages immortalized by *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*.²⁰

Next to enter the fray were *aficionados* from Swindon Folksingers' Club (founded 1960). Frances Gay, Secretary of the Richard Jefferies Society, passed on to Ivor Clissold a letter from Edith Hitchman of Swindon:

With regards to the folk songs themselves you may care to be put in touch with a lady in Swindon whose uncle gave one of the songs to Williams. I believe she happened to call to see her uncle whilst Williams was actually there. [Name and address] I enclose a letter I received from her about her uncle's song, on Page 51 I think, though it may be P. 50. [The letter enclosed reads] It was extremely kind of you to write & send me the song which my old uncle sang to Mr Alfred Williams. And what a happy song! It may interest you to know that my uncle was rather a short "tubby" old gentleman, with curly side-board whiskers, who always wore a bowler hat rather jauntily. Can you imagine him? Yes, Mr Williams was a really wonderful man, and I've always felt proud to have known him. I will certainly pay a visit to Coate to see his room.²⁰

²⁰ From the fieldnotes made by Ballinger, a copy of which he kindly supplied, the following is the sum total of descendants traced: 'Sat 2 Nov [1957] Coin St Aldwyn. Inn. Told about—George Looker" of Bibury (usually at 'Swan', but also at 'Catherine Wheel'). Quenington—one Inn [sic] Landlord & landlady (esp. seemed to know what we were after. a) Sister of landlord (Harris) remembered Alfred Williams coming round collecting. [This may be the Miss Harris who noted 'Lord Thomas & Fair Eleanor' from her grandmother, GI 132.] 30 Nov Eastleach 3) Mrs Baxter: Old, crippled. Memory failing—probably knew songs & might be persuaded to sing them. Son lives with her. Remembered Cecil Sharpe [sic] collecting dances from her father. ... Tiltup [Southrop]: Albert Newman (in 50s) grand(?) father gave songs to Alfred Williams. Had music-hall songs written out.' Albert Newman was the husband of the informant Kathleen Newman, at p. 57 *infra*.

If Clissold followed up this prime lead, there is no record surviving. It was a squandering of opportunity to interview both an informant descendant and a witness to the collecting act. Even the identity of the singer is not exactly established. Purslow had earlier written to Clissold:

I must talk to you or Colin [Bathe] sometime seriously about the Williams stuff; also about your efforts in trying to trace people who might remember them [*sic?*]. (Why wasn't all this done 30 years ago??)²¹

The whole point is that it was not being done then, either. Enthusiasts from the Swindon Club, the energetic Mr Clissold to the forefront, were largely foaming at the mouth, as neophytes will. (The song catalogue marks the sole enduring documentary achievement from this period.) When the exercise set out in these pages was finally 'done', 30 years later, the eleventh hour had already struck.⁶

Concurrently, John Baldwin conducted the most purposive revisiting of Williams territory, recording in the late 1960s many local singers. Three only of this number, however, were descended from the original informants. (John Morgan, son of Daniel; R G Cook, son of Mrs Phillips; and 'Dusty' Dawes, nephew of Eli.)²² From a specifically Alfredian angle, the picture is skewed in all these retracings by confining the search to *singers*. Peter Kennedy, passing through the district in the 1950s for the BBC's Folk Music and Dialect Recording Scheme, did not use Williams as a guide:

For my part we only had a few days with a machine on the road and certainly did not have the opportunity to do preliminary research using Alfred Williams [*sic*] book and in the 1950s was [*sic*] unaware of the Mss.²³

None of the pilgrims thought to seek out *biographical* matter from descendants, then available in some abundance. An exception might have been Bob Copper's local commission of the early 1980s, abandoned in unfortunate circumstances (see Chapter IV.3). There is a sense in all this (Baldwin possibly excepted) of half-hearted prodding at the problem; of readily signing up to value but drawing back from uncompromising engagement. What lacks in the revisiting is the remorselessness that Williams himself had deployed in making these cycletracks in the first place.

⁶ Of her heroic efforts to trace and interview survivors for her series of books on the Great War, Lynn Macdonald writes: 'When the last one has gone, a great silence will fall. ... it is not so much the eleventh hour as two minutes to midnight.' (*Somme* (1983), pp. xiv and xvi.) It is always too late. What is scarcely surprising in the light of the developments of the past century or so—W H Hudson has: 'What a pity you did not come sooner,' they said. Alas! it is nearly always so; on first coming to stay at a village one is told that it has but just lost its oldest and most interesting inhabitant—a relic of olden time.' (*A Shepherd's Life* (1910), p. 136)—assumes more engaging form in Dr Johnson's Hebridean expedition: 'We [he and Boswell] came thither too late to see what we expected, a people of peculiar appearance, and a system of antiquated life.' The year was 1773. (*A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* [1775], Oxford (1924), p. 51.)

THE FINAL SWEEP—EVER? By the time this project was conceived in the mid-1990s, midnight was nigh. The inexorable march of time had, perhaps conveniently, narrowed the scope of ‘fieldwork’: the final expiry of oral tradition in the district—with the noble exception of Bampton—decreed that the focus would be historical-biographical rather than musical (precisely the dimension neglected by previous fieldworkers); and restriction to second and third generation descendants remaining within the locale (once the fourth generation is reached, testimony is no longer first-hand) rendered the corpus effectively self-selecting. Thus, the contours of fieldwork are: *tracing children and grandchildren of Williams’s informants still living within his zone of collecting*. The generational frame involved casts a stark historical perspective. The 200 singers from whom Williams collected span three generations, stretching from Thomas King of Castle Eaton, Wilts (1816–1915) to the generation of c. 1870–1950, with the bulk of the singers dating from 1840–50. As a working calculation, taking a generation to be 20–25 years, a grandchild of even the youngest of Williams’s informants (c. 1870), would be born c. 1910–1920, putting them by the mid-1990s well into their 70s and 80s. This broad schema reveals the slenderness of the thread by which even this form of fieldwork hung at this point. The communities involved, villages within the ‘Upper Thames’ as delimited by Williams for collecting purposes, remain small, often with a population of only a few hundreds, though accelerating mobility in recent decades means there is less family continuity than would have been the case in an earlier period. Description of research—largely a story of dead ends, blanks drawn, a last scramble to steal a march on the Fell Sergeant—is divided into three sections: a brief conspectus of sources and avenues of enquiry; the detail of research, largely chronologically; and the final yield (largely interviews).

GENEALOGY The readiest means of tracing descendants of indirect lineage, including those living beyond the district, is to tap into the extensive—and notably enthusiastic—network of county family history societies. A first section details this avenue of enquiry. Material derived in this way is difficult to classify: in so far as the sources are private and non-scholarly, data gleaned is not strictly archival; in so far as this approach has not led to oral testimony, it is not fieldwork proper. For the purposes of this study, quarrying family history is ‘fieldwork’ by intention—an attempt to trace less direct, more distant descendants—but proves non-oral by yield.

The local press reported the disturbing details of Mander's end:

On Thursday, April 27th, James Mander, who was attending a chaff cuffer, was fattally [sic] injured. The revolving spindle caught his jersey, and before the engine could be stopped, he was whirled round several times and received such severe injuries, that they proved fatal. (Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard, 6 May 1916)



JAMES MANDER OF ALDSWORTH, 1840–1916

James Mander was a native of Aldsworth (Glos), baptised there on 2 February 1840. He married, firstly, at Great Barrington on 12 November 1864, when he was unable to sign his name. By 1881, having remarried, he had returned to Aldsworth. He worked in agriculture, the ultimate cause of his horrific death. His burial took place on 1 May 1916.

From Mander Williams recovered the solitary text, 'Men, don't grumble at your wives', though he evidently possessed a store of songs. His involvement in music-making had extended to

morris, making his demise on the eve of collecting

doubly unfortunate:

"I would remark of Aldsworth that, like Bibury, it has been famed for its song. Here morris dancing, too, was practised, and much merry-making observed, in times gone by. All the old morris dancers are dead now, and the music is still. The last of the Aldsworth morris men, James Mander, aged 77, met his death by an unfortunate accident at the threshing machine but a few days ago. I was acquainted with the old man, and he was to have told me some songs on the very evening of his death." (Williams's headnote to the song 'Music and Wine')

METHOD I : FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETIES

Over the period 1996–1998, a year's membership of the four family history societies covering Williams's locality was taken out, principally to make use of the Members' Interests section of the quarterly journals to appeal for information on the singers. Much response was drawn at the time, with the insidious drip of the internet producing two more responses in 2004.



GEORGE ASH OF AMPNEY CRUCIS, 1845–1924

Baptised at Ampney St Mary (formerly Ashbrook), Glos, on 16 February 1845, son of James (a labourer) and Ellen, he continued to reside in the village until his marriage, on 26 October 1867, to Jane Telling. (He was unable to sign his name but his bride was literate.) By 1871 the ménage had removed to adjoining Ampney Crucis, where a statutorily large brood was reared. Though Mrs Ash sadly passed away in 1898 at the age of 49, Ash had become a venerable countryman of 70 by the time Alfred Williams arrived to note from his lips the words to 'Here's Away to the Downs'. Ash died on 24 March 1924, aged 79, and was buried four days later in the humble graveyard at Ampney Crucis (where his tombstone mistakenly records the date of decease as 1925).

BERKSHIRE

No responses received.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Interests were listed in issue 71 (December 1996) of the *Gloucestershire Family History Society Journal*.

Regarding **GEORGE ASH** (Ampney Crucis): two respondents proved to be cousins: WJ Bennett of Betchworth, Surrey (18 December 1996 and 2 January 1997) had a tree stretching back to the eighteenth century but knew of no pictures or surviving local descendants. MJ Larner of Badsey, Worcs (11 January 1997) wrote: 'There also exists (or did), which is probably more to your interest, a photo of George & his wife Jane Spring in their later years. I have written off today and hopefully will manage to get hold of it. George had to make his mark X when certifying his wife's death so probably never learnt to read or write. But I suppose he knew a lot of things that we would not.' Nudging him on the point, he reported (9 June 1998): 'Photo was of James Ash, not George. Sorry to arouse your hopes in vain!'

Regarding **ROBERT BAXTER** (Eastleach): Mr K Newcombe of Cheltenham (17 January 1997) had established a tree extending to 1627. He wrote: 'I contacted Robert's granddaughter to inquire whether she could remember her grandfather's musical and dancing talent, but regretablely [sic] not. ... The only photograph I have is of Robert's wife Harriet with their daughter Emily.'

Regarding **GEORGE HICKS** (Arlington): Miss Barbara Chambers of Droitwich had an article in issue 69 of the *Journal* (June 1996) touching on Hicks on his wife's side, but she had no significant information to impart.

Regarding **GEORGE HERBERT** (Poulton): Mr B C Thomas of Charlton Kings wrote (2 January 1997) that his great-great-grandmother was Alice Herbert 1808-1889 of Poulton, who married and moved to Charlton Abbots. There was no connection.

JAMES MIDWINTER OF ALDSWORTH, 1857-1939

Alfred Williams noted two texts from Midwinter, 'Music and Wine' and 'How happy is the Man', both of which the singer is said to have learnt from his grandfather, and both of which were selected for inclusion in Folk Songs of the Upper Thames. Midwinter was baptised at Aldsworth on 9 August 1857: he would have been in his late 50s when visited by Williams, probably in the spring of 1916. Evidently a bachelor, he is recorded in the 1891 census as a farm hand living with his ageing parents, Eli, a native of the village, and Ann, a native of Marston Meysey in Wiltshire. The household then included a brother John, 31, an imbecile. His sister also remained unmarried.

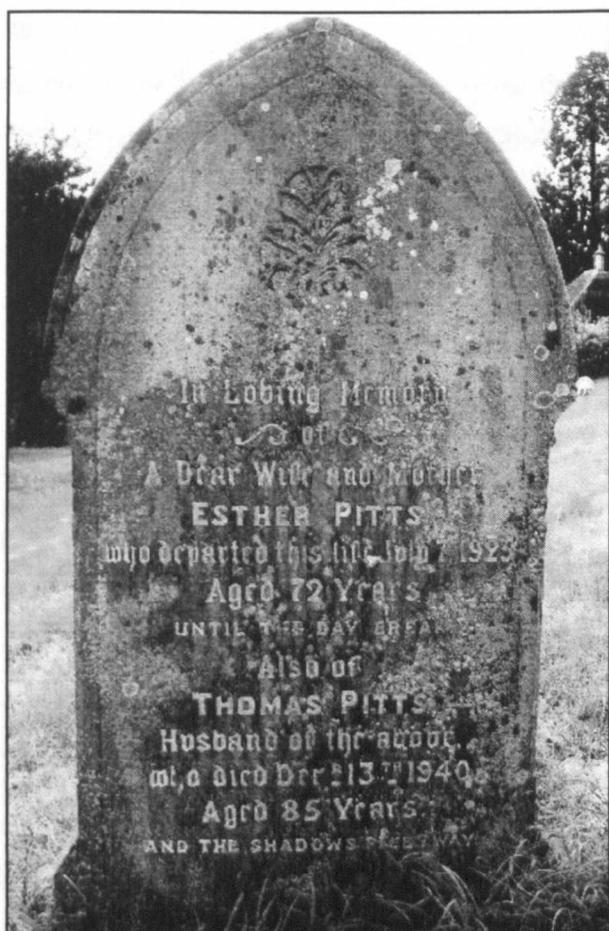
A perfectly baroque ménage.

An obituary notice reads: 'The death of Mr James Midwinter took place at his home on Thursday, January 12th, in his 81st year. James, [as] he was known to young and old, was much respected,

having spent the whole of his life in the village, working the greater part of his time on the Manor Farm and for 72 years he was a member of the Church Choir.'

(Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard, 21 January 1939)





ESTHER PITTS (NÉE JACKSON), 1852–1925

A native of Sherborne (Glos), where she was baptised on 25 July 1852, Esther Jackson married on 1 July 1876 Thomas Pitts, who had some involvement with morris and mummers at Sherborne. After peregrinations—Cold Aston, Coln St Aldwyns, Aldsworth, Shipton-under-Wychwood—the family settled at Eastleach Turville, where Williams noted from Esther (giving her name as ‘Pitt’) the text of ‘So early in the Morning’. She was buried at Eastleach on 10 July 1925, aged 72.

Regarding **CHARLES MESSENGER** (Cerney Wick): Mrs C Sollars of Wrexham (17 January 1997) despatched seven tightly printed pages on the Messengers but had nothing to add on the informant in question.

Regarding **HENRY COOK** (Bibury): Mrs P Wallington of Swindon (out of the blue, 21 February 2004) had picked up my enquiry from ‘the surnames list on the internet’ (a hang-over from the 1990s). She had several useful extra scraps, including record of a non-conformist marriage, so inconvenient to track down.

OXFORDSHIRE

Interests appeared in volume 11, number 2 (Summer 1997) of *Oxfordshire Family Historian*.

Regarding **FRANK COOK** (Burford): Robert Cooke of Diss (25 August 1997) had just enough to suggest that further

enquiries in the town might be fruitful. They proved not to be.

Regarding **HENRY LUCKETT** (Aston): Penny Daish of Warsash, Southampton (August 1997) had a distant Lockett connection but this produced no information germane to the subject in question.

WILTSHIRE

Interests appeared in issue 66 (July 1997) of the *Wiltshire Family History Society Journal*. Regarding **WASSAIL HARVEY** (Cricklade): Mrs Gail Lawes of Leighton Buzzard sent (12 and 19 July 1997) a Harvey tree back to the 1720s, and a similarly extensive Hughes tree—by which she proves to be distantly related to Williams himself!—without significantly clarifying the point at issue.

Regarding **SAMUEL BENNETT** (Ashton Keynes): Mrs G Edwards of Wivenhoe replied (17 July 1997), but her interests extend only as far as the eighteenth century.



MARY BOND (NÉE WILLIAMS), 1850–1935

Mary Williams was baptized at Coln St Aldwyns (Glos) on 18 August 1850. She married John Bond at Kempford on 17 October 1872. They then moved back to Coln St Aldwyns, where three children were born. The family moved to Quenington around 1900, where Alfred Williams noted four songs, including a version of 'Of all the Brave Birds', from 'Mrs Bond'. She was buried at Quenington on 3 July 1935, aged 84.

Regarding **JOHN JOHNSON** (of Hinton Parva): Eric Johnson of Wakefield knew of the Williams connection with his great-grandfather, and had previously submitted a short article to the WFHS Journal on the subject. In issue 65 (April 1997) he wrote: 'Unfortunately the smithy [*he was a blacksmith*] is no longer there but when we were in Hinton some years ago we met an old local who claimed to remember John very well. He was one of the schoolchildren that played round the smithy. Either this man had an exceptional memory or John was one of those people that you do not forget easily. He died in 1919.' In letters of 31 July 1997 and 11 February 1998, Mr Johnson supplied copies of two photographs of Williams's singer: 'The photos were given to me by my aunt, John's grand-daughter.'

Regarding **EDMUND JEFFERIES** (Highworth) Alan Voce of Halberton has (11 September 1997) a Jefferies link but not this branch (a common name hereabouts).

Regarding **WILLIAM MOULDEN** (Highworth) Brenda Purves of Kidlington supplied (24 July 1998) a date of baptism but had no more up-to-date information.

In conclusion, the final yield from this source was disappointingly small as a proportion of extensive correspondence generated. The two photographs of John Johnson via Eric Johnson represented the only obviously important find. Interestingly, a conflict of purposes was revealed in the process: whereas family historians seek to push back, and outwards, as far as possible in reconstructing a general genealogy, the aim for this study was to come forward in time to locate specific descendants in the present who might have some first-hand recollection of individuals collected by Williams. In the event, no informant was identified by this means, though detailed genealogical information gained in the process is of some use for another aspect of the thesis, namely mobility of singers and their families: some of the trees supplied show a rootedness in the district stretching well back into the eighteenth century.

2: FIELDWORK PROPER

The obvious first line of enquiry for descendants still living locally is the extensive network of Women's Institutes, especially strong in Gloucestershire. Several of the most rewarding finds were brought about by this means. Private museums and local historical societies are a further point of contact: such is now the vogue for local history that even village communities have such institutions, some of them of recent formation. There are history groups at Lechlade, Quenington and Southrop (Glos); Eynsham and Standlake (Oxon); Cricklade, Highworth and Purton (Wilts); and small museums at Cricklade and Filkins (Oxon). In some cases, prominent individuals are a convenient source of local knowledge. Further leads came through the network of village correspondents, or 'Newshounds', sponsored by the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* newspaper based in Cirencester, which circulates widely in the centre of Williams's collecting area. Village incumbents have been mobilized only as a last resort. A continuing trawl of the ever increasing body of local history publications has also yielded several references serendipitously, including the first descendant to be located. Searches of churchyards for tombstones has yielded very

meagre results: George Ash at Ampney Crucis, James Mander and James Midwinter at Aldsworth, Mrs Bond at Quenington, Mrs Pitts at Eastleach Turville, John Ockwell at Somerford Keynes, Herbert Gascoigne at Kemble (photographs *passim*).

In each case the approach was made in writing, either by letter or postcard, followed up with a telephone call where no written response was forthcoming. The least specific technique of all is what might be termed 'saturation postcards': starting from the surname of a given informant, cards are sent out to all instances in the current telephone directory. This operose procedure was employed sparingly, either where a case seems promising, or where no more economical approach is available. Finally, there is the simple expedient of keeping an ear to the ground during habitual peregrinations, one evident advantage of residing in the district under scrutiny.

Simple, brief wording was adopted for each approach, usually making reference inspecifically to 'a local history project'. Paradoxically, experience has shown that specifying 'folk song' in the approach is potentially counter-productive, in that it can create the impression that music is the exclusive object, sending correspondents off on a fruitless quest for survivals of song which do not exist to the exclusion of general information which may be available. A case of this is furnished by Mrs Ebsworth of Bibury (*qv*), who had obligingly, but misguidedly, performed just such a wild goose chase amongst elderly acquaintances in the village for the benefit of her enquirer.

CHRONOLOGY OF RESEARCH I: TO MAY 1996

Investigation falls roughly into two phases: desultory enquiries from the late 1980s directed at the area immediately surrounding the base of operations at Cirencester in south-east Gloucestershire; then, prompted by acceptance for research within the academy in the spring of 1996, extension on a more rigorous principle to the remainder of the Upper Thames as delimited by Williams—potentially an exhaustive sweep of the locations at which he collected. (Paradoxically, and quite by chance, the first, random phase of enquiry was to yield the most rewarding results.) This somewhat crabwise progress, a messy mixture of system and serendipity, represents in effect the gradual crystallization of interest: unfocused enthusiasm progressively filled in, becoming eventually comprehensive but 'systematic' only *post hoc*.

Oddly, serious pursuit was set in train by a chance stumbling, in the spring of 1994, on a photograph of the singer Alfred Howse of Latton, Wilts, reproduced in

Edwin Cuss and Stanley Gardiner, *Stroudwater and Thames and Severn Canals in Old Photographs* (Alan Sutton Publishing, 1993). Mr Cuss supplied (18 May 1994) the name of the owner of the picture, Mrs Josephine Steele, a granddaughter of Howse living on the fringe of Cirencester. She retained fond memories of her grandfather, which she readily shared by letter, and had a number of photographs she was happy to loan and allow to be copied once a visit had been set up. (It had taken a year to arrange a meeting. In retrospect, given the tenuousness of the circumstances, this seems horrifyingly dilatory.) This first fieldwork success suggested that further investigation might be fruitful, though the *coup* was only fitfully followed up.

One obvious possibility was the little private museum at Filkins, Oxon, established by the late George Swinford, then run by his son, George *filks* (known locally as 'young' George, despite being in his early 80s). A visit was made on Saturday, 3 June 1995, when Mr Swinford said he knew little of the three singers Williams had found at Filkins, except that the daughter of George Giles, Mrs Deaney, still lived in the village, aged 90. An interview was arranged through Mrs Deaney's daughter on 24 July 1995 (*qv*). The other private museum in the district, at Cricklade, Wilts, yielded no information on the classic singer "Wassail" Harvey. Honorary curator Tom Ramsden-Binks replied (29 October 1995): 'As far as I know the last Harvey in Cricklade was Mrs Kitty Harvey who lived at 78 High St. Her maiden name was Holloway and she came from Purton. Her husband was a seafarer and may not have belonged to Wassail's family.' An letter to East Hendred museum apropos the singer Mrs Sessions brought a reply (14 May 1996) from Cynthia Sessions, of no moment.

Some years previously, a piece had appeared in the local paper reporting a village survey carried out by the Southrop Wives. Co-ordinator Mrs Muriel Howarth at Southrop wrote (25 July 1994) that the group had copies of photographs of all four singers noted by Williams in the village. This led to interviews with granddaughters Mrs Kathleen Newman (Alfred Spiers) and Mrs Jacqueline Medley (Eli Dawes) on 7 and 17 August 1994 respectively (*qv*). There are no descendants of the other two informants, Robert and Sarah Godwin, living locally and Mrs Howarth was not prepared to allow the pictures to be copied without permission from the family.

The next step, rather more concerted, was to mobilise the local network of village Women's Institutes, on the assumption that these groups are all but omniscient

on their own patch. Postcard enquiries were sent out in two batches: to Fairford, Lechlade, South Cerney (Glos) and Ashton Keynes (Wilts) in November 1995; and to Bibury, Meysey Hampton, Poulton and Somerford Keynes (all Glos) in January 1996; to which responses were received as follows. Fairford WI passed the enquiry to local historian June Lewis, who wrote that she had no knowledge of the two singers involved (26 January 1996). Lechlade and Ashton Keynes drew blanks, as did Meysey Hampton and Poulton, despite follow-up telephone calls. Bibury WI, however, furnished one contact from the nine singers collected by Williams in the parish: 'Mrs Ebsworth of 20 The Square Bibury is a granddaughter of John Webley. Otherwise there are no descendants of anyone in your list in this parish as far as I can discover.' (Letter of 1 March 1996.) Disappointingly, a call to Mrs Ebsworth (26 March 1996) established that her birth in 1923 occurred five years after the old man's death, and that she had no information of any kind.

The significant yield from this batch came from WIs at South Cerney and Somerford Keynes. Mrs V L Fox on behalf of Somerford WI (23 February 1996) supplied the name of Mrs Judy Monger, a neighbour of Miss Marjorie Ockwell, nonagenarian daughter of the John Ockwell collected by Williams, still living in the family cottage in Mill Lane, Somerford Keynes. Mrs Monger acted as go-between for interviews with Miss Ockwell conducted on 21 March 1996 and 8 August 1996 (*qv*). At neighbouring South Cerney, an enquiry was passed by the WI to Mrs Kathleen Beard, a knowledgeable native of the village. Mrs Beard's reply (28 June 1996) furnished two promising contacts. The first proved to be a dead end: related to the singer Thomas Baugh(a)n was Mrs Baughn of Cirencester, whose late husband Maurice was a grandson of Williams's informant. A telephone call (2 July 1996) drew a blank, but led to a Mr Viner at Cheltenham, another grandson, who also had nothing to impart (telephone call 28 July 1996). The other contact, however, proved a significant find: Mrs Elsie Lockey (letter 4 July 1996) had a clear recollection of the singer Eli Jasper Price, her maternal grandfather. Interviews with Mrs Lockey were conducted at her home in South Cerney on 10 July 1996 and 22 June 1998 (*qv*). (The considerable time lapse between initial enquiry of 30 November 1995 and resultant interview of 10 July 1996 is indicative not of obstructionism—all the parties involved were unfailingly helpful—but of the pace at which country life still proceeds.)

Also in this period, an enquiry was also sent to the *Standard's* Newshound at Kemble (Glos), Mrs Pat Ayres, apropos Herbert Gascoigne. Mrs Ayres replied (28 November 1995) with a reference to Christian Brann's *Kemble, Erwen and Poole Keynes* (Kemble, 1992), which contains information on Gascoigne, the village blacksmith, as well as a photograph of him. Mr Brann wrote that the photograph had been returned to Gilbert Gascoigne, a grandson at Cheltenham. A letter of December 1995 drew a reply from Mrs Gascoigne beginning: 'I'm very sorry but my husband Gilbert passed away on Nov 30th.' She was unable to put her hand on the picture in question.

CHRONOLOGY OF RESEARCH II : FROM MAY 1996

A letter of May 1996 to the historical society at Purton, Wilts drew no reply; while a letter to Highworth Historical Society (10 May 1996) finally brought a response dated 5 March 1997 from Mrs P Elkington, Honorary Secretary: a putative descendant of the singer Edmund Jefferies proved to be mistaken (12 March 1997).

In April 1996, the *Standard's* Nostalgia feature carried an appeal for information from Janice Falvey of Plantsville, Connecticut, USA, researching her ancestors at Quenington, Glos. Mrs Falvey proved to be the great-granddaughter of John and Sarah Timbrell, the latter being Williams's informant. She wrote enthusiastically (16 May 1996) with documentary material and a photograph of her great-grandparents.

In the spring of 1996, the scope of enquiry was extended into West Oxfordshire by means of a batch of postcards sent out to the following Women's Institutes: Brize Norton, Ducklington & Hardwick, Eynsham, Shilton, Standlake and Stanton Harcourt. (There are no WIs at Alvescot, Black Bourton or Northmoor.) Of these, Ducklington, Eynsham, Standlake and Stanton Harcourt yielded no information at all, while the enquiries to Brize Norton and Shilton were passed on to established villagers believed to be connected. Fred Faulkner duly wrote from Brize Norton (30 July 1996): 'I have just lost my uncle aged 91, he was the last of that generation'. This was poignant, in that the Faulkners were once a predominant family here.[Ⓞ] Williams has the family, of which he collected four members, as 'Falconer'. At Shilton there was a similar disappointment regarding the Gardner family which had once been a large presence at Shilton. Mrs Hunt (born 1915) *née* Gardner replied (30 June 1996), but did not know if she was related to Job Gardner, Williams's informant.

[Ⓞ] Frank Purslow writes in the *Folk Music Journal* of 1969, p. 307: 'The Falconers [sic] were well known as singers in the area and are still remembered by the older inhabitants.'

Plucked from the telephone directory, Frank Eggleton of Blunsdon, Wilts (2 June 1996) believed a photograph survived in the family of the singer John Eggleton, but was unable to locate it. At Castle Eaton, Wilts, where Williams collected from the King family, a response (11 June 1996) from Mrs S Trinder of Castle Eaton Ladies' Club supplied a copy of Audrey Tomlin, *Castle Eaton's St Mary the Virgin Church* (1992), containing village background but nothing germane on the Kings. Mrs J Sutton, daughter of Reginald King, wrote (6 July 1996) from Swindon, but knew nothing of the Kings noted by Williams.

Back in Gloucestershire, the *Standard* had reported that the Quenington Society was developing a village archive, so Lucy Abel Smith was contacted at the Old Rectory, Quenington, who arranged a meeting on 25 July 1996 with a number of elderly female natives involved in the project. The company was helpful and enthusiastic, but sadly there were no direct connections to the seven singers Williams found here. Although the ladies had complete command of parochial affairs within their lifetime, stretching back to the 1920s, the period in question had passed just out of memory's reach, tantalizing in the proper sense. Their one suggested contact was Arthur Bond of Fairford, possibly a descendant of the singer Mary Bond. Mr Bond replied (6 August 1996): 'My grandfather, Frederick Bond, came from the Little Faringdon area and died when I was quite young. It might have been his mother, although I've never heard her mentioned.' A follow-up meeting at Quenington was organized on 21 September 1996, at which Mr Reuben Sims, a life-long resident of neighbouring Hatherop and esteemed figure, was also present. He recalled both singers collected by Williams at Hatherop, James Russell and Edward Griffin, the former only hazily. In his capacity as churchwarden, he kindly made available a copy of a 1931 photograph of the bellringers which hangs in the belfry at Hatherop, in which 'Ted' Griffin features prominently. Mrs Lucy Thomas, a native of Quenington removed to Fairford, had passing recollection of Griffin, captured by camcorder on 11 July 2005.

There was a return to Frank Couling at Kempford who, in a letter of November 1989, had said there were no photographs in existence, but during a telephone call of July 1995, was sure he had a photograph of Lot Couling—which he was proposing to donate!—but was unable to put his hand on it. In further calls, this was pressed as hard as possible within the limits of propriety, but without success.

At South Marston, Wilts, Mrs Lorraine Jones, the churchwarden, wrote (26 July 1996) identifying the informant Miss Cross as the village schoolmistress, and supplying the name of Mrs D Fisher, an elderly niece of the singer Mrs Lee still resident in the village. Mrs Fisher did not reply to a letter (27 July 1996). Mrs Angela Morris, a great-granddaughter of Ephraim Head living at Chiseldon, was researching her family but had no further information or pictures (1 August 1996).²⁴

At Winson, Glos, Mollie Davis, a local historian who lives in the village, wrote (19 July 1996): 'I ... can certainly identify Mrs W Field who must have been the wife of Walter Field, the Winson village postmaster.' Beyond that she had no knowledge. Dick Field did a local book *Up and Down the Valley* (1985) but he died in the early 1990s: the publisher supplied the address of his widow, but there was no reply.

Casual conversation in the Red Lion at Ampney St Peter near Cirencester revealed that a member of the Truman family, Tony, remains at Hillcot End, Ampney Crucis. He sent a postcard (5 August 1996): 'With reference to James Truman who lived in the Ampneys he was my great grandfather all I know he was a local stone mason who worked mostly locally in the surrounding villages sorry I cannot be more helpful.'

Oaksey (Wilts): a letter to Elspeth Huxley at Oaksey, Wilts, celebrated author of *Gallipot Eyes* and other works and a long-time resident of the village, drew a negative response (6 August 1996): 'No folk songs now I'm afraid, all pop and rock,' she wrote, effortlessly misconstruing the thrust of the enquiry. (She was then *aetat* 90, and died on 10 January 1997.) Two further WI enquiries, this time in Wiltshire, were sent out on 15 August 1996: Brinkworth WI replied with a date of burial for the singer Alan Cutts, but no knowledge of descendants; no reply was received from Highworth. (This batch also established that there is no WI at Crudwell or Marston Meysey.) There was some difficulty locating a point of contact at Aldsworth, Glos. From a chance telephone call (2 September 1996), the village postmistress proved to be an elderly native: some of the names involved were familiar to her, but she was adamant that no relatives remained in the village.

Mrs Nicholas, Secretary of Standlake Historical Society, acknowledged my enquiry (12 August 1996), which was passed to the Calcutts of Merton near Bicester, Oxon apropos Williams's singer Sarah Calcott of Northmoor. This finally proved a false trail (reply 8 February 1997). Returning early in 1997 to the WIs of Oxfordshire,

cards were sent to Aston and Cumnor. There was no reply from the latter, but Aston WI supplied (7 February 1997) the name of a great-grandson of Williams's informant David Ball, also David Ball. A series of telephone calls during March-May 1997 produced only sketchy details. He was sure the old man had died at Aston. He thought he was of Irish origin and had come to England at the time of the famine, initially to Devon. (This, however, does not tally with information in census, which lists him throughout as a native of Aston.) Mr Ball has a copy on his wall of a photograph of Aston bellringers, the original of which hangs in the belfry. It is dated Easter 1914 and features David Ball (back left) as an elderly man, along with his sons, including the informant's 'Grampy' Ball.

An enquiry in early 1997 to Shrivenham and Watchfield WI was passed on to local historian Mervyn Penny, who replied with the following information on the four singers in question: 'Thomas Larkin—you're in luck. He has descendants here, I'll get full details in due course. Alfred Smith—shepherd. I heard about him from a workmate who knew him as an old man when he was a boy. I wouldn't think there are many that remember him now. William Baxter—I'm sure the Baxters that are around now are related. Christopher Carter—There were two Carter Bros one was hung [*sic*] for murdering his wife in the 1890s. I have no recollection of Christopher being mentioned—he would have been about 50 yrs [*sic*]. William Jefferies (Longcot)—I think there are still Jefferies around.' This promising beginning was followed up with a telephone call (10 April 1997) in which Mr Penny proved impossible to pin down.

At Broadwell, Oxon, Mr Goodenough the churchwarden pointed out Jack Auger, son-in-law of the singer Fred Webb, now a widower, so the blood connection is gone. He had (telephone call May 1997) no pictures and little information: he had only been married to Webb's daughter about four weeks when the old man died in 1953.

An encounter in the lane with an established resident during peregrinations near Marston Meysey (9 September 1997) established that no descendants survive locally of the Barretts collected by Williams. Persevering at Cumnor (formerly Berks, now Oxon), a letter to the incumbent regarding Harry Bennett was passed on to Heather Adams, former postmistress, who replied (26 September 1997) with names and dates of birth of Bennett's children, though she had no further details on descendants.

At the end of 1997, information unexpectedly arrived by word of mouth. In the

course of pursuing his family history, Phil Webb of Swindon was led to Northmoor, Oxon, where he was given my name as a fellow researcher. By coincidence, his ancestor Ellen Trinder (née Webb) was one of Williams's informants here. Mr Webb was able to supply copies of family documents and a laser copy of a photograph of Mrs Trinder (31 January 1998).

CODA : SUMMER 1998 An unhelpful return to the fray turned up little of any consequence. The happy exception was Clanfield (Oxon), where a routine postcard to the WI made contact with Mrs Dorothy Wise, an archetypally accommodating and scatty intermediary. Her replies to questions concerning Williams's two Clanfield singers, Mr Clark and Mrs Brunsten (no forenames specified) were typewritten on the back of A5 sections of the OS map for East Hants. She reported that the WI had carried out a graveyard survey: 'First let me say that our survey *is still with the gentleman*, (a member of the Oxford Family History Society), who has promised to produce a written orderly list [*sic*] and also to produce a fiche for the Country [*sic*] Record Office etc. So I couldn't do otherwise than pop along to the churchyard.' (1 August 1998) This she followed, more fruitfully, with enquiries among the living:

This afternoon I went in search of a Mrs Mollie King, aged 83. I felt that she might know something of Mr Clark, but the only Clark she remembered was a George Clark, a 'shoemender' who was also 'leader of the bells in church' and in her opinion not a man for songs. However I was in luck with regard to Mrs Brunsten who turned out to be Mrs King's grandmother! 'She knew a lot of songs.' Mrs King called her 'Granny Brunsten' and she told me that she died in 1927 and is buried in our churchyard but has no headstone.

I have established that it *is* Priscilla Brunsten, Mrs King's "Granny Brunsten" and it was Mrs King's *mother* who 'knew a lot of songs' almost certainly passed on to her by her mother Priscilla. Mrs King told me yesterday that her mother had a good voice and was *always singing*. Mrs King sang in our church choir until recently. Mrs King also confirmed that her grandfather was Frederick and he was born in Shilton. Mrs King apologised for getting her Granny's year of death wrong. She was nine when her Granny died NOT twelve.

Ref a picture—one exists—Mrs King's daughter has it, that is—one of Granny Brunsten. I understand it is very fragile.²⁵

An address was supplied for Mrs King's daughter, Mrs Jane Sanderson (the great-granddaughter of Mrs Brunsten), who kindly supplied a copy of the photograph. Mrs Wise had other snippets to offer, but nothing of real moment.

From there, the trail—never exactly hot—finally went cold.

INTERVIEW PRELIMINARIES: LOGISTICS, TECHNOLOGY, TECHNIQUE

From this substantial endeavour, the final yield of interviewable descendants seems, in quantitative terms, minuscule. In relative calendrical terms, however, what follows is perhaps as much as could have been expected. The descent of interviewees proved (aside from Frank Couling of Kempsford, born 1906, who spoke at some length on the telephone) exclusively matrilineal, six elderly ladies, five if Mrs Newman is excluded on grounds of not having known her grandfather-in-law at first hand. The vintage of descendants in relation to that of the original informant is:

- ✦ Mrs Josephine Steele (granddaughter) 1903–1997 : Alfred Howse (1851–1937)
- ✦ Mrs M Deaney ([grand]daughter) 1905: George Giles (1858–1936/1880–1940)
- ✦ Miss Marjorie Ockwell (daughter) 1906–1998 : John Ockwell (1871–1944)
- ✦ [Mrs Kathleen Newman (granddaughter) elderly : Alfred Spiers 1844–1928]
- ✦ Mrs Elsie Lockey (granddaughter) 1922–2001 : Eli Jasper Price (1861–1952)
- ✦ Mrs Jacqueline Medley (granddaughter) elderly : Eli Dawes (1861–1951)

In terms of the working chronology, three of these survivors were of a period before the expected generational threshold, Mrs Steele representing a connection ultimately to 1851! Only Mrs Lockey and Mrs Medley conformed to expectation.

Although all locations involved lay within a few miles, lack of transport meant that visits had to be arranged around the vagaries of country bus services. In certain cases, such as Southrop, part of the journey had to be made on foot. No especial expertise in interviewing was brought to these encounters. In the event, highly developed technique was not to the point: the trio of nonagenarians had a fixed line on the subject and were largely impervious to further probing. Being significantly younger, Mrs Medley and Mrs Lockey were at once more *compos mentis* and all but unaware of their grandfathers' musical activities, so that persistent questioning was pointless. Effectively, these informants were self-interviewing. Given that no musical performance was involved, the inhibiting effects of a tape recorder were adjudged to outweigh any advantages; so notes were taken, immediately afterwards written up. In three cases the informants were photographed. Only Mrs Medley had a husband still living. While Mrs Newman was a widow living *en famille*, the remaining four were widows living alone, a fact which raised certain questions. For purposes practical as much as ethical, a relative or a neighbour was present at the meetings.

THE INTERVIEWS

SOUTHROP: *brief interviews with Mrs Jacqueline Medley (granddaughter of Eli Dawes 1861–1951) and Mrs Kathleen Newman (granddaughter-in-law of Alfred Spiers 1844–1928) at Southrop, Glos. In response to written enquiries, Mrs Medley replied on 7 August 1994 and Mrs Newman on 17 August 1994. Visits were made to both in the period immediately following.*

MRS KATHLEEN NEWMAN, an elderly widow perhaps approaching 80, lived with her family at Tiltup Farm on the edge of the village of Southrop. She was connected to Spiers only by marriage: his daughter Dolly married George Newman, and she married their son, so Spiers was her late husband's maternal grandfather. Mrs Newman had never known the old man, having married into the family after his death in 1928, and so what few details she knew had been acquired second-hand, some of them garbled. She believed Spiers was a native of Pershore (the records show he was born at Defford, mid-way between Pershore and Upton-on-Severn), and that he had moved from there to take the Crown Inn at Lechlade. She believed he also ran a coal business at Lechlade while landlord of the Crown. She did, however, know of his inclusion in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, as the result of a talk once given in the village. She possessed a notably fine photograph of Spiers (in the form of a postcard by Gardiner of Bampton), taken on the farm, which she readily lent.

MRS JACQUELINE MEDLEY, representing at least four generations of her family at Southrop, lived at 'Sunnyside', a new dwelling near to where her grandfather, Eli Dawes, had owned land. She recalled the old man quite clearly, though she had no knowledge of his singing activities. Her memory was principally of him pottering about on his garden in his dotage, and that "He was an awkward old cuss!"[Ⓢ] She knew that his wife was a Taylor and a native of Southrop, which is how he had come to settle in the village from his birthplace at nearby Kempsford. She also knew that two of his four sons had perished in the Great War. Another son, Albert, her father, had served in the war in Mesopotamia, working mainly with horses. He it was who remained in the village and cared for Dawes in his old age. Mrs Medley had two photographs of her grandfather: one with his wife, Jane, and the other, a poorly executed postcard, with his son Albert. The latter she loaned for copying.

[Ⓢ] A disregard for the obituarist's shibboleth *de mortuis nil nisi bonum* was an engaging trait of several of these forthright country people.

SIDDINGTON: *three interviews with Mrs Josephine Steele (1903–1997, granddaughter of Alfred Howse of Latton) at Wildwood Park, Siddington, Glos, 1995.*

A widow in her early nineties at the time of interviewing, Mrs Steele was still living a largely independent life in a mobile home at Wildwood Park, Siddington on the southern rim of Cirencester. Despite being a little deaf, she was otherwise remarkably *compos mentis* for a woman of her age. Her intonation was distinctly West Midlands, having passed the bulk of her adult life in that locality. What had brought her back to her native district in widowed retirement remained unclear,



Mrs Josephine Steele, granddaughter of Alfred Howse, Siddington, 1 October 1995.

though this decision can presumably be attributed—appropriately—to the lure of the Upper Thames. Comfortable with the written word, Mrs Steele composed a number of detailed and valuable letters about her grandfather and his home at Latton Basin. Much of this information was repeated during three visits.

Friday, 26 May 1995: Mrs Steele pointed out that her mother, the eldest of 11 Howse children, was Mary Anne, not ‘May’ as in the caption to the family picture reproduced in Eddie Cuss and Stanley Gardiner *Stroudwater and Thames and Severn Canals in Old Photographs—A Second Selection* (Alan Sutton Publishing, 1993). In addition to that picture, she also had a photograph of Alfred Howse and some of his children at work in the back yard of the lock-house at Latton Basin. Mrs Steele was at that time the oldest surviving grandchild of Alfred Howse. She had spent her childhood at the lock-house at Latton Basin (‘the

Basin', as she referred to it), and had attended the little school in Latton village. The family broke up following the death of her grandmother, who expired of grief when her eldest son Frank died of pneumonia at Catterick Camp in 1918 before he could be demobilized. Mrs Steele was therefore recalling a period just before, and during, the First World War, some 80 years previously. She remembered Alfred Howse as a martinet with a heart of gold, whose enthusiasm for song and dance ensured that musical gatherings were a routine part of life at the Basin. (She specified that much activity at the messuage revolved around the 'hogtub house', one of a number of out-buildings.) She was unable to recall much musical detail, but with prompting knew of 'The Struggle for the Breeches' (letter, 31 July 1994), remembering it, significantly, as being *recited* rather than sung.

Friday, 9 June 1995: Mrs Steele was asked if she could provide further details of the broom dance to which she had referred (letter, 25 June 1994). Across 80 years her recollection was necessarily rather dim, but from the two figures she was able to describe, the dance had much in common with instances found all over the British Isles. The dancer would start by stepping over the broom laid on the floor; then pick up the end of the handle and pass it criss-cross under the legs. It had been *her* dance particularly, taught her by the old man and called into performance by him.⁹

Sunday, 1 October 1995: In further reflections on life at the Basin, Mrs Steele described a largely self-sufficient *ménage*. There had been a big cellar used for wine-making, and a 'backhouse' hung with bacon flitches. The only items she recalled being bought in were bread and candles. Traffic on the canal had by then all but ceased, though the family had a barge for their own use, employed *entre autres* for conveying hay at haymaking time, such as from North Meadow at adjoining Cricklade. Howse would drive fish down the canal and into a net stretched across the lock.

Throughout these conversations, and in her letters, Mrs Steele conveyed a moving sense of concord and felicity in family life at the Basin. It was evident that she held her grandfather in great affection. *Mrs Steele died on 2 January 1997, aged 93. On 14 January, she joined her grandfather in the bucolic churchyard at Latton.*

⁹ Local instances of a broom dance occur at Sapperton, to the west of Cirencester (see John Baldwin, 'Song in the Upper Thames Valley 1966-1969', *Folk Music Journal* 1, 5 (1969), p. 337); and at Bampton, where a version danced to the tune of 'The Keel Row' was known to Arnold Woodley (1925-1995), the first two figures corresponding to those described by Mrs Steele. A photograph exists (see *ED&S* 45, 3 (1983), p. 31) of Sam Bennett performing the dance at Stratford Festival in 1946, and it is possible that it was introduced to Bampton by Bennett. The dance also crops up in Co Cavan, Eire. It was performed, somewhat chaotically, at house parties *chez* Langan in Swindon in the 1980s. Mrs Kathleen Langan, née Smith, of near Ballyjamesduff, would fetch in a broom from the garage and, sometimes in company with her aunt, Mrs Eily Brooks, perform the dance while her husband Jim, a fiddle player from Sligo, played 'The Keel Row'.

FILKINS: *interview with Mrs M Deaney, born 1905 (granddaughter of George Giles père 1858-1936, daughter of George Giles fils 1880-1940) at her home at Filkins, Oxon, 24 July 1995.*

The interview was arranged by Mrs Deaney's daughter, Mrs Constable, who lived nearby in the village. Mrs Deaney's son travelled over from Witney to be present at the interview. She was forthcoming, though somewhat muddled—she had recently celebrated her 90th birthday—dilating readily on distant memories of village life. Her father, George Giles *fils*, was one of ten.⁹ He was apprenticed as a stone mason, as his father before him and his brothers, reflecting the quarry-working which was once an established feature of the economy at Filkins. Giles received instruction at Swindon, from where he would visit at the weekend on foot. Giles was later engaged much on work on the celebrated Arlington Row at Bibury, possibly restoration following acquisition by the National Trust. Mrs Deaney's mother was a native of nearby Burford: she had been in service at Broughton (she pronounced 'Bruton') Poggs big house. Of her father's singing there was little specific to be gleaned. In his day he had been known as the best singer in the village, a reputation proudly retailed; he had been a pillar of the church choir, a strong voice detectable from outside the church. (His children were also required to sing in the choir: one of Mrs Deaney's dominant memories was of being away blackberrying up the Burford road when summoned by the bells.) Mrs Deaney also recalled that her father had taken a regular part in village 'concerts', often dressed as a tramp. This—unimpeachably respectable—information was offered unsolicited for the benefit of her guest. She had, however, to be prompted by her daughter to mention customary Saturday night drinking sessions in the Lamb Inn, following which her father could be clearly heard singing all the way home. On being asked how her father had learnt his songs, she was unable to say, but volunteered that his mother (her grandmother) had been a noted singer, confirming the family as a key *sic* mechanism of rural music-making.

In retrospect, ambiguity obtains over the identity of the George Giles collected by Williams. Conversation focused naturally on Mrs Deaney's father, but given Williams's set to antiquity the informant in question may have been her grandfather. Mrs Deaney's memories are still valuable as evidence of continued singing by a younger generation, generally neglected by Williams.

⁹ Two photographs survive: a snapshot of father and son outside the Five Ails pub in the village; and a studio portrait of George *fils* as a young man, taken in Swindon. Mrs Constable was not prepared to allow the pictures to be copied.

SOMERFORD KEYNES: *interview with Miss Marjorie Ockwell, 1906–98 (daughter of John Ockwell 1871–1944) at her home at Somerford Keynes, Glos, Thursday, 21 March 1996.*

Miss Ockwell was diminutive, very deaf, an unsprightly nonagenarian sustaining, thanks to a solicitous neighbour, her independence in the old family cottage in which



Miss Marjorie Ockwell, daughter of John Ockwell, Somerford Keynes, 8 August 1996.

she was born and had always resided. It was therefore the domicile which Williams had visited to collect 'The Bunch of Nuts' from John Ockwell in c. 1915, when Miss Ockwell, who would have been nine at the time, must have been present.

The parlour was somewhat spartan and, with the exception of a few items of furniture, unaltered since Williams had called nearly a century beforehand. In one corner stood a very fine working long case clock; there was no sign of a wireless, much less a television. You could not help wondering how the days had passed since the death of her mother 30 years earlier. And yet she was curiously preoccupied with the passage of time, fretting over the accurate running of the clock and opening the front of it to poke about inside. Her face was flaccid and corrugated with age, her eyes tired and vacant. In speech she was broad but not so broad as some of her generation. She employed, entirely without affectation, an archaic compound perfect with 'do' (*did go* for *went*), and formed that peculiar flat 'a' sound encountered elsewhere in the Upper Thames over the years, which Barnes seeks to render in print as 'eä' (Jeäne for Jane).

Intriguingly, her consciousness had withered to a handful of quirks of memory, the stubborn residuum of a life lived out beyond its Biblical span; though she could still manage an engaging turn of wit. Of her father, a parish councillor, Miss Ockwell discreetly intimated, tempering impishness with due filial piety, that he had been of distinctly gladiatorial disposition, evident from his part in the democratic process:

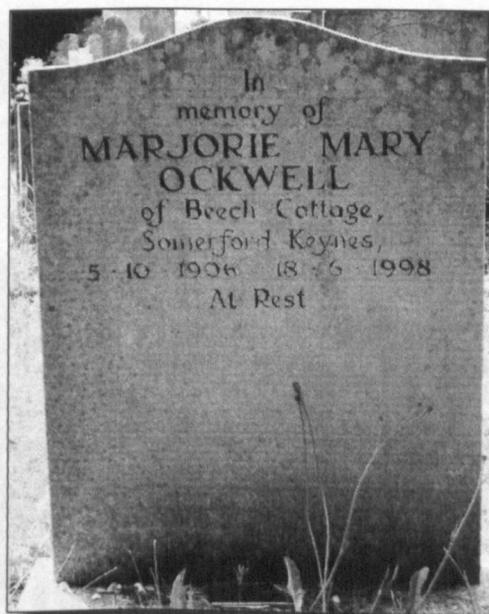
When my Father did go to a parish council meeting, Captain Foyle Fawcett [she pronounced it *Fossit*] would ask at the end of the meeting: 'Now, John, is there anything *more* you wish to say?'

Memories came readily but could not be elaborated upon. She was conscious of herself as a relic, *the last of the Ockwells of Somerford Keynes*. "Oive bin t'bed too many noights!" An irreversible socio-economic tide had lapped around her, sweeping away the sedimented agrestic community of her youth. It was all very poignant.

She had photographs of her father and grandfather, the latter mentioned by Williams as having been a noted singer, which were loaned for copying.

A second visit was made on Thursday, 8 August 1996 to take Miss Ockwell's picture, for which she becomingly discarded her—otherwise indispensable—zimmer frame. She did not recall the visit of a few months previously.

Miss Ockwell died on 18 June 1998, aged 91.



Last of their line: graves of John Ockwell and his daughter in the churchyard at Somerford Keynes



BEECH COTTAGE, MILL LANE, SOMERFORD KEYNES, GLOS
Above: the fireside where John Ockwell would sit and sing to himself
Below: Miss Ockwell during the last years of occupancy



SOUTH CERNEY: two interviews with Mrs Elsie Lockey (née Davis, 1922–2001, granddaughter of Eli Jasper Price 1861–1952) at 18 Boxbush Road, South Cerney, Glos, July 1996 and June 1998



Mrs Elsie Lockey, granddaughter of Eli Price, South Cerney, 22 June 1998.

Wednesday, 10 July 1996: a native and life-long resident of South Cerney, Mrs Lockey was still, in her mid-seventies, very active in village life. She recalled her grandfather—‘Old Jeppy’—quite distinctly. She recalled that he lived initially in a cottage, now demolished, near the Royal Oak at South Cerney. He fathered 16 children, of whom nine lived, six boys and three girls. His wife, a South Cerney Baughn, died in 1908 aged 43, doubtless worn out by childbirth. As a result, his daughter Louise (Mrs Lockey’s mother), then aged 11, was accorded a dispensation from school to run the household. Price later moved within the village to a cottage in The Langet (she pronounced it ‘Lannit’) at Upper Up, where he was to remain until his death in November 1952, attended by the faithful Louise and, latterly, by Mrs Lockey herself. Mrs Lockey’s earliest recollection was that her grandfather had worked for the council in Cirencester, walking in and back every day from Cerney. But mostly he was remembered as the lone employee at the sewage works in the Ewen Road. (She has a postcard photograph of him engaged in this occupation.) A little dog was his constant companion in later years.

An inveterate gardener, he had an allotment bench beneath an old apple tree where he would sit and pull at his beloved pipe. (In illustration of a certain characteristic stinginess, relatives from Kent were once famously offered an apple from the tree—only to be presented with a windfall.) Of his singing, needless to say Mrs Lockey knew nothing, save that ‘he was always singing something when he was by himself.’ (Letter of 4 July 1996.) She had a professional quality photograph of Price, his son Frank and daughter Louise taken by A J Roberts of Barnsley outside their cottage. From context, the picture could be c. 1908. This she kindly allowed to be copied.

Coda: Monday, 22 June 1998 Mrs Lockey’s photograph was taken, and memories further explored. She was, however, able to add little to what she had already imparted. She mentioned that by the time of his death Price owned three cottages in South Cerney, further evidence of the thriftiness previously intimated.

Mrs Lockey died on 13 September 2001, in her 79th year.



SERENDIPITOUS SPIN-OFFS A pair of happy discoveries, both bearing on the broadside trade in Williams’s locality, were incidental to this biographical quest. The *Wiltshire Family History Society Journal* for July 1997 contains an article ‘Villages of Wiltshire: Castle Eaton’ mentioning one Joseph Ricketts, later a printer in Highworth, by John Chandler, who kindly supplied a full reference (letter, 16 July 1997). Secondly, the approach to the museum at Cricklade (*supra*) in connection with the singer “Wassail” Harvey resulted in the unearthing of a rare cache of broadsides, some of them locally printed. Appended to the curator’s reply (Tom Ramsden-Binks, 29 October 1995) was an incidental remark: ‘The Museum recently acquired a bundle of ballad-sheets, some of which were printed by W Clift of Cirencester. Do you happen to know when and where he flourished?’ Additionally, Judy Monger, the go-between at Somerford Keynes, volunteered a bundle of popular printed music found in Miss Ockwell’s cottage following her death in 1998, originally owned by her father, Williams’s informant John Ockwell.

All these materials are drawn upon in Chapter II, including the most rewarding yield from this last-ditch fieldwork, the dozen photographs of Williams’s singers:

PHOTOGRAPHS OF WILLIAMS'S SINGERS LOCATED FROM FIELDWORK

TABLE SHOWS SINGER, LOCATION AND SOURCE OF THE PHOTOGRAPH

BERKSHIRE – *no descendants of singers and no photographs have been located in this county*

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

1	Edwin Griffin 1878 – 1952	Hatherop	Reuben Sims (churchwarden)
2	Sarah Timbrel 1865 – 1950	Quenington	Janice Falvey (descendant)
3	Thomas Ockwell 1823 – 1912	Somerford Keynes	Miss Ockwell (granddaughter)
4	John Ockwell 1870 – 1944	Somerford Keynes	Miss Ockwell (daughter)
5	Eli Price 1861 – 1952	South Cerney	Mrs Lockey (granddaughter)
6	Eli Dawes 1861 – 1951	Southrop	Mrs Medley (granddaughter)
7	Alfred Spiers 1844 – 1928	Southrop	Mrs Newman (granddaughter)

OXFORDSHIRE

8	Mrs Brunsdon 1847 – 1924	Clanfield	Mrs King (granddaughter)
9	Ellen Trinder 1857 – 1923	Northmoor	Phil Webb (descendant)

WILTSHIRE

10	William King 1843 – 1930	Castle Eaton	<i>North Wilts Herald</i>
11	John Johnson 1849 – 1919	Hinton Parva	Eric Johnson (descendant)
12	Alfred Howse 1851 – 1937	Latton	Mrs Steele (granddaughter)

At Bampton (Oxon), Shadrach Haydon and Henry Radband were photographed by Cecil Sharp in the early 1900s, and Charles Tanner was photographed by Sharp and, a little earlier, by Henry Taunt of Oxford.

WILLIAMS FAMILY

In all this, 'fieldwork' is taken to mean tracing descendants of singers, but what of Williams's descendants? There were no offspring, so that the few relatives remaining, in the district or further afield, are great-nephews and nieces, the most prominent of whom is Allen Williams, who still occupies part of the family holding at the centre of South Marston where he tends the sacred memory. True to a certain reputation for prickliness, he was unhelpful, ignoring a request to meet. His response

reads, *literatim* (in contrast to his great-uncle, he is not the most literate of people):

Alma Cottage, Sth Marston, 18 Oct 1997

Dear Andrew

The letter came to me several weeks ago. I was a little apprehensive, however, after seeing your interests in the WFHS Journal of July 1997 has softened me a little. I'm no 3868.

Where do your interests lie with Alfred Williams you could well be a family historian like myself!!

I am dealing with NORTH WALES and its a long way off, trying to put right the biography of Alfred By Leonard Clark 1945.

Sincerely Allen Williams

Then, belatedly, Doris Ellen Claridge (a niece, *aetat* 90) was located in Dorset who had first-hand recollection of her uncle. An interview was conducted on 18 October 2004, resulting in a half-hour sound recording. A second visit was made on 7 September 2005, during which Mrs Claridge repeated her memories on digital video. This is extremely rare testimony on Williams in the 1920s and the family background generally, though Mrs Claridge knew nothing of the song collecting.



Mrs Doris Ellen Claridge (born 1915), niece of Alfred Williams, pictured at her home at Long Burton, Dorset, 18 October 2004.

2 SECONDARY LITERATURE

Just as no rigorous bibliography of Williams's own writings has hitherto existed, so no extensive listing of the literature about him has yet been compiled (the corpus is not massive). This brief conspectus omits the body of folk song commentary, separately explored as Chapter IV.3.

THE BIOGRAPHERS 'At one time, it seemed as if the writing of Williams biographies might become a local pastime. The three mentioned below [Byett, Jones and Clark]'.²⁶ This, alas, is Clissoldian hyperbole (Jones is not *stricto sensu* biographical, Clark was not local—see *infra*). More noteworthy is the *dearth* of serious attention in the locality. Of the trinity of biographers, two were acquaintances of Williams in Swindon: Henry Byett and J[oseph] B[arnard] Jones. Byett was a clerk in the railway works at Swindon who, veritable *fidus Achates*, had extensive personal contact with Williams from the late 1890s. Struck *ab initio* by his friend's bearing, Byett studiously cast himself in the role of amateur Boswell, making jottings at the time of conversations and carefully preserving letters. His proto-life appeared serially in the *Swindon Evening Advertiser* immediately following Williams's demise; the book *Alfred Williams: Ploughboy, Hammerman, Poet & Author* was made up from the typeset columns (Swindon, 1933). To say that this modest—and now, of course, *rarissime*—volume is maladroit is not to impugn the quality of Byett's intentions: his idiom is self-deprecatory—'I have ... since his [Williams's] passing made earnest endeavours to induce more capable pens than my own to accept my material and write the biography indicated.'—his testimony valuable.²⁷ J B Jones ('BA', as he was determined to be styled) was a Swindon headmaster whose tireless efforts to preserve the Alfredian memory involved a 'long press campaign from 1930 to 1942',²⁸ a series of self-contained articles progressively aggregated in book form: *Wiltshire's Crime* (1932) expanded to *Williams of Swindon* (1950). Less inferior than Byett, his line is *prophet without honour*—adamant that Williams was a lyric poet to rank with Keats—his idiom fulsome-impressionistic. (See Præludium, *supra*.) Jones's books do not form a biography in the received sense, being bundles of press articles intent upon promoting reputation rather than upon reconstructing a life; almost a private crusade.

A presence eminent but shadowy among the biographers is Brigadier J[ohn] H[artman] Morgan KC, resident at Wootton Bassett by the 1920s. (Morgan was

less than the Renaissance Man his array of titles might suggest: he held the rank of Brigadier by virtue of wartime service on the Adjutant-General's staff.)²⁹ Having portentously announced his appointment as official biographer by Mrs Williams on her death bed, and appealed for information,³⁰ Morgan proceeded to disappear from view. What deterred him remains an enigma. Was there merely loss of interest? Or did the learned Brigadier—who, with at least nine volumes to his name, scarcely lacked literary credentials—find the prospect uniquely daunting?³¹

Jones reports that Leonard Clark stepped in where Morgan declined to tread:

He [Clark] had been chosen by Dr Mansbridge in 1937 for this task since the official biographer, General Morgan, KC, had made no move in the seven years following Williams's death.†³¹

Writing from Plymstock, Clark put out a request for material in the press in 1937. (Much of what now makes up the Williams Collection at Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office must have derived in this way, though this is not recorded.) The book Clark finally produced—*Alfred Williams: His Life and Work* (Bristol, 1945; reprinted Newton Abbot, 1969)—is consummately constructed and exudes sympathy for its subject, but is unscholarly in its eschewing of reference and littered with small errors, as well as being anodyne in idiom. Quasi-Boswellized, over-lauded and unthinkingly traduced, this remarkable life and work yet awaits its full scholarly biography. Most pertinent to the purposes at issue here, none of these authors had any significant grasp of the folk song problem.

OCCASIONAL PIECES As these biographies are readily available at Swindon, no 'method' is entailed in their excavating, unlike articles in periodicals. As with the primary matter, these have here been stitched together from a mixture of archive holdings, mentions in Clark's biography and private contacts. Swindon Reference Library retains a box of Williams miscellanea, mainly copies of articles which would

□ 'Mallet, I believe, never wrote a single line of his projected life of the Duke of Marlborough. He groped for materials; and thought of it, till he had exhausted his mind. Thus it sometimes happens that men entangle themselves in their own schemes.' Quite. (Johnson cited in Boswell, 16 April 1779.)

† How did Clark—still a young man—come to be nominated by Mansbridge (founder of the WEA)? As a hopeful youth, Clark had applied for teacher training funding in 1927-8 to the Wall Educational Trust, whose chairman chanced to be Mansbridge, as he recounts in his autobiography: 'He, and his wife, received me most warmly, gave me a magnificent tea, and then questioned me for the best part of an hour about the state of the mining industry in the Forest of Dean.' (*Grateful Caliban*, London (1967), p. 68.) He thus presumably counts as a protégé? Although Clark had not known Williams personally—a recommendation perhaps in a biographer—their circumstances were not dissimilar: West Country men of literary ability who battled humble origins, their fathers absent from the *ménage*.

otherwise not have been located, such as the piece by Victor Bonham-Carter which appeared in *The Sphere* in 1955. These are listed in the bibliography. As with pieces by Williams, Leonard Clark's mentioning of articles written on Williams is quirky, offered up without full details. His assertion, in particular, that an early write-up in the *Millgate Monthly* had appeared 'at the end of 1907'³² proved a false lead: the article, by Frederick Rockell, was actually published in January 1909, the period when Williams came to attention as a proletarian poet. A couple of more recent pieces were kindly supplied by Chris Bowles, Secretary of the Friends of Alfred Williams.

WIRELESS Alongside the printed word, some oral testimony survives thanks entirely to the BBC. Interviews were conducted variously with Williams's sisters, with a neighbour, and with Byett and Jones in their dotage.³³ A small amount on the Williams family may be gleaned from official records such as census.

IN CONCLUSION Expectations cranked up by invocations of 'method', not to say 'methodology', are scarcely met in this quarter of the project. The few additions, archival and oral, it has been possible to make to what is already assembled have been as much the product of serendipity as the result of rigorous application of precept. Enquiry has taken the form of a messy mixture of following up random references and tapping into existing networks: just about as *unmethodical* as can be. If there is a thread running through this research it is the imperative of always following up, involving a preparedness to take the pains. Banal as this may sound, Williams studies (*sic?*) are littered with instances of failure to observe the principle—the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* serials are a case in point—generally not difficult though occasionally requiring a modicum of detective work. We never proceed *ab ovo*: the printed word creates deposits, leads of one sort and another to pursue.

Beyond the banalities of the hunt, interpretation-evaluation of materials gathered is altogether more treacherous, and more alluring, territory. The *tour d'horizon* conducted here establishes that little in what has gone before—grandiose schemes, frothy correspondence, half-hearted investigations—has had the effect of advancing understanding of Williams's work. Intermittent flurries of interest notwithstanding, Alfred Williams remains in scholarly terms largely virgin territory.



2 : ANALYSIS?

The prescription that methods of analysis engaged should be set out in detail is, in a word, bunkum. Analytical particularity lies in the extensive weave of exposition. Method(ology) is, *stricto sensu*, a province of theory, all that pitches at a level of abstraction beyond the trivialities of empirical accumulation. Method: *meta* + *hodos*, picking a path through a problem—but what equips us to achieve this? Analysis: ANA(*lusis* from *luō*, set free), resolution into simpler elements—but what permits us to enact this exhilarating emancipation of constituents? Interpretation: INTER*pres*, *pretis*, one who explains ... but why does an object, especially a discursive confection, need ‘interpreting’? Language use is by its very nature partial: inaugural (‘primary’) verbalization calls forth in-fill, setting off a play of reverbalization *à n'en plus finir*. To state is to omit, to imply. We are left to get inside the silences, to develop an ear for minute inflection. Split and lump, induce and deduce, sort, sift, compare, contrast, probe for disparities and ‘motivate’ them (recognition and reduction of *impertinence* in the proper sense: what offends against received canons of pertinence), jugglery embodied, supremely, in the microscopic inspections of *explication de texte*. Various ingenious explanatory constructions may be put into place, endless variants on supplying what seems to lack, conjuring a semblance of coherence where none appears to obtain (and its radical obverse: celebrating the dishevelment). Dissonance discovered through a re(con)figuring of constituents invites harmonization around an imported ensemble of elective concepts—*negotiation*, *improvisation*, *allegory*. A whole baroque hermeneutic competence thus unfolds, its wielding resistant to clarification. Such ways and means we intuit, up to a point, but at every turn scrutiny of these procedures *as such* leads forward to a theoretical nexus, and exposes the poverty of our capacity (our inclination, indeed) to rationalize prowess. Understanding, ultimately, resides in a rarified bringing-to-expression of what we contrive to perform, more or less readily. These are matters of greater moment, and higher degree of difficulty, than anything set forth here, elucidation of which might occupy many absorbing theses.



3 : PROLEPSIS

Exposition articulates as two groups of chapters, corresponding to the axis upon which the thesis turns: components (object / subject), and 'folk' song problematics.

PART I : CONTEXTS Chapter II explores what can be known of the 200 country singers and their world duly memorialized as *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*. Parish registers, census returns, local newspapers, and fragments, notably photographs, gleaned from descendants are used to augment information supplied by Williams. The modulation is then made to song, essentially the *transmission* issue, in an attempt to illuminate the workings of a practice of music-making as it obtained in a particular district through a particular period by correlating to social conditions: census offers clues to mobility, the circulation of bodies increasing opportunity for acquiring and passing on song; a survey of jobbing printers within the district is designed to connect to a pioneering examination of literacy levels (from marriage registers), bearing potentially on the question of the extent to which words could have been taken in from print. Chapter III introduces the questing subject: Alfred Williams in his manifold personæ, his exceptional endeavours, his singular consciousness. For nigh on 40 years, he accumulated moral and mental baggage upon which he would, *extempore*, draw in striving to negotiate a province largely foreign to his cast of mind.

PART II : CONCEPTS Chapter IV reflects on the problematics of 'folk' song, extending into the dominant paradigm established by the early luminaries, and tied into a survey of literature on Williams the collector, collectively forming a conceptual frame within which to situate the principal exposition of Williams's performance as song mediator. Chapter V reconstructs the fieldwork of 1914-16 in its geographical extent, methods employed and results achieved. As culmination, Chapter VI dissects the hermeneutico-evaluative construction he places on his quarry in terms of the background inspected in Chapter III, turning on the postulate that the unique conjunction of conditions shaping his thinking gives rise to certain ambivalences, which find expression, *volens volens*, in the diverse facets of his *œuvre*, especially in the song collecting. Far from being blemishes to be dismissed, uncertainties and paradoxes embodied in the account he gives of song are a means of purchase both on the peculiarities of his condition and on the larger problem: it finds him (us) out.



NOTES TO CHAPTER I

- 1 Frank Howes, review of Leonard Clark's biography of Williams in *Journal of the English Folk Dance & Song Society* IV, 6 (1945), p. 255.
- 2 T E Hulme, *Speculations* (1924), quoted in J F C Harrison, *Late Victorian Britain* (London, 1990), p. 95.
- 3 Umberto Eco, *Serendipities: Language and Lunacy* (1999), pp. 54-5.
- 4 *Ibid*, p. 7.
- 5 A L Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* (London, 1967), p. 50.
- 6 Dave Harker, *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British 'folksong' 1700 to the present day* (Stony Stratford, 1985), p. xiii.
- 7 Clark, p. 189.
- 8 Minutes of Swindon Libraries Committee, 1953. (Copy from Roger Trayhurn.)
- 9 Byett, p. 9.
- 10 Basil Blackwell, 'Life and Letters', in *Augury: An Oxford Miscellany of Verse and Prose*, edited by A M Hardie and K C Douglas (Oxford, 1940), p. 61.
- 11 *Fakesong*, p. 271 (comment in note 21 to Chapter 10).
- 12 Clark, p. 177.
- 13 Clark, pp. 93 and 177.
- 14 Michael Kilgarriff, 'Sing us one of the Old Songs': *A Guide to Popular Song, 1860-1920* (Oxford, 1998), p. v.
- 15 C J Bearman, 'Who were the folk? The demography of Cecil Sharp's Somerset folk singers', *The Historical Journal* 43, 3 (2000), p. 757.
- 16 Richard Jefferies, *Hodge and his Masters* (London, 1979 [1880]), p. 306.
- 17 Headnote to the text of 'Sheep Crook and Black Dog' (Gl 98).
- 18 A H Smith, *The Placenames of Gloucestershire* (Cambridge, 1964), Part 1, p. 35. The entry reads: 'Longedole 1314, 1349 Ipm [*Calendar of Inquisitions post mortem*], *vide* lang [long, tall], dāl 'share of land'.'
- 19 1891 census for Fairford, §II, schedule 67.
- 20 Frances Gay (then Secretary of the Richard Jefferies Society) to Ivor Clissold, 1 January 1969, enclosing Hitchman to Gay, 20 March 1965 (Clissold Papers). Taking up Mrs Gay's page references: p.50 is 'Come, Landlord, fill the Flowing Bowl' from Elijah Iles and Charles Bond of Shaw, Swindon; p. 51 is 'Now we've met let's Merry, Merry be' from W Mills of South Cerney. 'Coate' refers to the Richard Jefferies Museum at Swindon.

- 21 Purslow to Clissold, 4 July 1966 (Clissold Papers).
- 22 John Baldwin, 'Song in the Upper Thames Valley: 1966-1969', *Folk Music Journal* I, 5 (1969), pp. 315-6.
- 23 Private letter, 19 November 2000. The collector Mike Yates has a similar account of his fieldwork in the locale (1970s): 'I did not do any research into Alfred Williams. I obviously knew of him, but didn't have the time to do anything, unlike, say, John Baldwin.' (Private letter, 20 July 1997.)
- 24 This resulted in Angela Morris and John Keene, *Nelus* (1999), a life of Cornelius Head, son of Williams's singer Ephraim Head.
- 25 Private letters from Mrs Wise, 19 and 25 August 1998.
- 26 Ivor Clissold, 'Alfred Williams, Song Collector', *Folk Music Journal* I, 5 (1969), p. 300.
- 27 Byett, p. 7.
- 28 Jones, p. 4.
- 29 *Dictionary of National Biography, 1951-60* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 749-50.
- 30 *Wiltshire Gazette*, 15 May 1930, p. 7.
- 31 Jones, p. 88.
- 32 Clark, p. 24.
- 33 Broadcast in Victor Bonham-Carter, 'Alfred Williams', BBC West of England Home Service, 3 July 1949 (script in Wiltshire Libraries collections).



CHAPTER II

UPPERTHAMES VALLEY

Place | People | Pastime



ELEPHANT & CASTLE, BRIDGE STREET, BAMPTON
(POSTCARD BY MARTIN OF BAMPTON, DETAIL)



PART I : LIFE

REGION | CONGRESS | BIOGRAPHY

§I 'UPPER THAMES' (I) : CAMPANILISMO^o

THE HIGHER REACHES OF THE THAMES GIVE ONTO A PATCHWORK OF LANDSCAPES: broad flatlands of the river valley in Oxfordshire, rolling Cotswold uplands of Gloucestershire, swirling wooded hills of north-west Berkshire, sparsely populated downs of north-east Wiltshire. Enfolded in these variegated contours are the ekistic-tectonic works of man, most prominently a grid of historic towers and spires, resonant *points de repère* watching over hill and vale. Standing sentinel at the western rim is the mighty tower of St John the Baptist, Cirencester, greatest of all Cotswold wool works, in whose imperious shadow the good burghers of the town have for centuries dwelt. In the vale proper, sleek spires rise up at Bampton (St Mary the Virgin), and at Lechlade (St Lawrence): 'The tower has three stages with deep diagonal buttresses, embattled parapet, angle pinnacles, and various sculptured heads on the string-course, hood-mould stops, pinnacles, and a spire with rolls up the edges.'¹ Alfred Williams has his own slant on the monuments he deems cardinal:

There are five conspicuous landmarks in the locality. First is the splendid tower of St Sampson's at Cricklade; next is that of Kempford church, on the Gloucestershire side of the river; then Highworth tower, perched high upon the hill, and visible for many miles distant. After this comes Lechlade steeple, rising like a needle from the river's side, and, last of all, and higher than any, though not as permanent as the rest, is Faringdon Folly, a lofty clump of trees upon a high mound outside the Berkshire town, where, as tradition says, King Alfred laid down the crushing burden of life eleven centuries ago.²

And of what drama do these canonical campaniles speak? Most shrouded in sorrow is Kempford (St Mary), reaching up 100 feet at the river's side: 'the tower, by an Oxford mason, is mid-late C15, the great period of Perp building in the Cotswolds.'³ Williams recounts the story he had from Elijah Iles—whose cot at Inglesham aligned on the church three miles away—of the heedless lad who plunged to his death while jackdawing atop the tower: *campanilismo*?

^o Or: the Latins have a word for it. Michael Pickering employs the term to characterise assimilative devices designed to create 'a sense of place or an *esprit de clocher*' (*Village Song and Culture* (1982), p. 25). The gallic resonances, however, may be less than entirely meliorative. For *clocher* *Petit Robert* 1 gives: '2° Paroisse, commune où se trouve le clocher. N'avoir jamais quitté son clocher. Querelles, compétitions, rivalités de clocher, purement locales, insignifiantes. *Esprit de clocher*. V Chauvinisme.' This gloss implies small(minded)ness, lacking a connection to the wider world. Does the Italian, by contrast, resonate more positively, conveying a warm sense of belonging, of identity with a distinct(ive) locality?

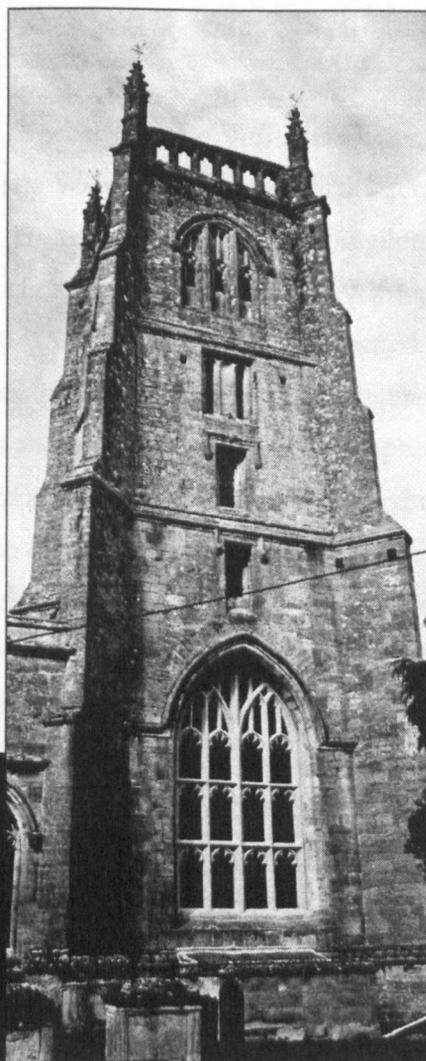
Gramp [Elijah Iles], though admiring the outlook as well as any, has his appreciation of it marred by the remembrance of something that happened when he was a boy. "I allus thenks o' the jackdaas when I ketches zight o' that owl' tower," says he. Then he goes on to relate how two farm boys climbed to the top of Kempford tower in search of young jackdaws. When they reached the top—a hundred feet high—they looked over and discovered a nest in one of the gargoyles. Being unable to reach it by leaning over, one boy took the other's hand and supported him while he got through the battlement and stepped down to the nest, which contained six young birds. Then, in that perilous position, they began to argue over the division of the spoils.

"'Aaf an 'em be mine. I shall have 'aaf an 'em," said the one above.

"I knows tha ootn't have 'aaf an 'em, neether," the other replied.

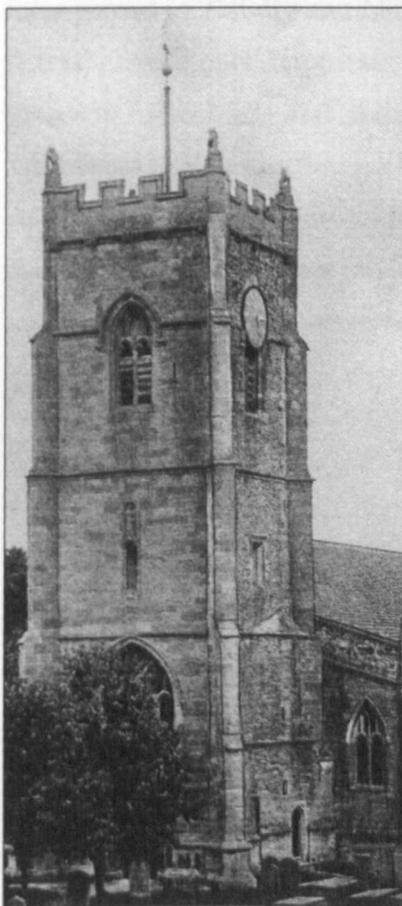
"If I don't have 'aaf an 'em I'll let tha down," said the first.

"Let ma down, then, if thas likes, but tha ootn't have 'aaf an 'em," answered the other, and his crazy mate, not realising his crime, loosed his hand and he fell and was dashed to pieces on the hard stones beneath.⁴



ST MARY'S CHURCH,
KEMPFORD, GLOS

ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH,
HIGHWORTH, WILTS
(postcard by Wilkinson)



Standing proudly prominent on the hills at the vale's southern end, Highworth (Wiltshire), boasts battle scars on its venerable fabric:

In the stonework of the tower is a round hole, caused by a shot from the cannon of Oliver Cromwell, when he besieged the church after the battle of Naseby. Here he was defied by a garrison of troops, under one Major Hen, for three hours, at the expiration of which time the gallant defender "took down his bloody colours," and surrendered, handing over prisoners and arms. The missile that struck the tower is preserved, hanging in chains within the church. The common report is that the shot was fired from Blunsdon Hill, three miles off, but Cromwell's cannon were not sufficiently powerful to inflict damage at such a distance.⁵

§2 CIRCULATION | LOCI | LUDENS

THE MEANS OF CIRCULATION

ROADS The principal towns at the periphery of what became Williams's Upper Thames are (anti-clockwise from the north-east): Witney, Burford, Northleach, Cirencester, Tetbury, Malmesbury, Marlborough, Hungerford, Wantage, Abingdon, with the eastern edge vaguely defined (that is, the chord joining Abingdon to Witney, stopping short of Oxford). The significant interior sites are: Cricklade, Highworth, Lechlade, (possibly Fairford), and Faringdon, plus (possibly) Wootton Bassett and High Swindon. The network of inter-connections among these locations is comprehensive (the modern trunk roads): Witney, Burford and Northleach are linked in the north (the modern A40). Four arteries radiate from the east side of Cirencester, joining to Northleach (A429, the Foss(e) Way); to Burford via Bibury (A433); to Lechlade via Fairford and thence on to Faringdon and Wantage (A417); and to Cricklade, past Swindon and on across the downs (A419, Ermin Street). To westward, thoroughfares extend to Tetbury and Malmesbury. At the interior, Faringdon and Highworth (laterally) were once important staging points on a coaching route, while Burford connects to Lechlade and points south (vertically, A361). In the south, the Great West Road (A4) passes through Hungerford and Marlborough. All these tentacles, of course, reach out to the world beyond as well as yoking internally. Within the tracts marked out by these axes (mainly triangles of varying form and extent), a host of smaller settlements are linked by minor roads and lanes.



The Swan Inn at Bibury, where the Cirencester to Burford road crosses the river Coln (postcard by Dennis Moss)

WATERWAYS Since Roman times (at least), water-borne traffic from London and points intermediate had penetrated the region by means of the Thames, originally as far upstream as Cricklade but from 1830 stopping at Lechlade. This natural waterway was eventually supplemented by man-made connections. The Thames and Severn Canal finally reached the river at Inglesham in 1789; the Wilts and Berks Canal, running through Wootton Bassett, Swindon and the Vale of White Horse, was in place by 1812; and the North Wilts Canal which linked the two between Swindon and Latton Basin was opened on 2 April 1819.⁶

RAILWAYS The third mode of transport is railways, the advent of which is late within the frame of this study. Some six lines were eventually driven through Williams's Upper Thames between 1840 and 1889. Inaugurally, the Great Western Railway's London-Bristol line passed through Swindon at the end of 1840, Shrivenham having a station *ab initio*, with Uffington following in 1864; a branch reaching Cirencester in 1841 eventually became the line to Gloucester; Fairford became the terminus for the Witney and East Glos Railway in 1873; the line that became the Midland and South Western Junction Railway reached Cricklade and Cirencester (Watermoor) in 1883; a branch linking Highworth to Swindon opened in the same year; and a spur to Tetbury was created in 1889. Of these, only the M&SWJR can be said to have snaked its way through the centre of the district, conjoining country communities.



The Round House, Lechlade. (postcard by Dennis Moss, postmarked 1912)

COUNTRY CONGRESS : INNS | MARKETS | FAIRS | FESTIVALS

The settlements, nodal or otherwise, forming this network also served as sites of commercial and social congress: inns, markets and fairs, and other rustic occasions.

INNS The locale was, of course, dotted with hostelries of varying vintage and magnitude. Williams refers to many of these in passing, in a variety of connections. The Trout at Lechlade draws forth genial reminiscence, including musical interest:

The ancient inn, with old-fashioned rooms and worm-eaten settees, is an ideal resort for anglers. Here they assemble to talk over the day's sport and while away the long winter's night with tales and gossip, while the wind rages and roars through the tops of the firs and poplars and drowns the melodious noise of water pouring over the paddles of the weir. The landlord, too, is an interesting figure and is well able to entertain the company with the relation of his experiences. He is ninety-five years of age and has been at the inn for nearly half a century. His health and faculties are good; he can eat, sleep, read and walk with ease, and he does a little angling from time to time. His chief delight, however, is to sit in the old armchair, drawn close up to the fire, and to entertain his customers and visitors with tales of long ago ... The inn-keeper's old grandfather was a rustic and a vigorous songster. One feat of his was to sing a song of his own making, the rendering of which took him no less than two hours and three quarters. The rooms of the inn are well furnished with rare old books and valuable papers, which the aged host delights to bring forth and read to the company, holding them rapt with tales of Trafalgar and Waterloo, the valorous deeds of Nelson, Collingwood, Wellington and Bonaparte.⁷



The Trout Inn at Lechlade, which stands at a historic crossing of the Thames (postcard by Dennis Moss, detail)

Most appositely here are those venues cited for the notoriety they acquired as parochial nests of unlicensed (*sic*) activity. Two instances of public houses which enjoyed repute as sites of robust congress are at Swanborough's Corner and Castle Eaton:

There was furthermore the half-way house at Swanborough's Corner [*the present Freke Arms*], mid-way between Stanton, Hannington and Highworth, the scene of many wild games and unlawful deeds in times gone by. Here it was—as I have heard, when a boy from my old grandmother—that, following a hot quarrel, a murder was committed and the culprit was tried, gibbeted and buried on the road-side, and a sharp stake driven into the earth through his body. The news of the gibbeting travelled far and wide and attracted a big crowd. One venerable dame, whose boast it was that she had witnessed every public execution in the locality for three-quarters of a century, tramped a distance of twenty-four miles to see it, and made the forward and return journey each last two days, coming equipped with money and food to supply her on the way.⁸

Rampant free-for-all outside the imposing Red Lion at Castle Eaton:

[the villagers] adopted the form of recreation common to that time and to the tract of country south of the river to Wroughton and Uffington, and became experts in backswording, boxing and wrestling. Assembling in front of the inn, underneath the shadow of the big signboard, with the raging lion crouched down, the ferocious aspect of the beast no doubt giving spirit and impetus to the combatants, they slashed away at the men of Cricklade, Purton, Stratton St Margaret or Highworth and worsted them in the games, and often visited them in their own strongholds and vanquished them there also. When the great canal was being made the army of workmen employed upon it needed entertainment. In the evenings and at weekends they trooped over to the inn and either took part in the boisterous games or ranged themselves on the sides of the combatants and encouraged them with shouts and cries.⁹

Examples of enforced closure occur at Hay Lane (near Old Swindon), the 'Blowing Stone' at Kingston Lisle, and *louche* hostelrys at Highworth:

Near the [canal] wharf an inn formerly stood, a noted rendezvous of poachers and gamesters and the scene of much backswording, wrestling, and cock-fighting; but the poachers brought the place into ill-repute, and after an affair with firearms at the inn, in which the grandfather's clock was shot full in the face—though the contents of the piece were intended for another—the licence was withdrawn and the house closed.

The Blowing Stone Inn has been done away with in late years, and the building turned into cottages because it was thought to be a stronghold for poachers, and the landlord was furthermore accredited with selling his beer during prohibited hours; at any rate, the house fell into disrepute, and the order was given to close it forthwith.

Besides the posting houses there are other inns of less importance, and several of the most famous, such as the Bull, the Bell and Shoulder, and the Malt Shovel, were closed half a century ago by reason of the extraordinary and unlawful games and practices carried on inside them.¹⁰

MARKETS AND FAIRS

Weekly markets but, more especially, the annual fairs of the countryside provided more formalized opportunity for these robust pastimes. The former prevalence of these occasions in the locality can be established *in abstracto* from commercial guides of one sort or another. In Gloucestershire (Cotswolds) alone, Roy Palmer cites 'an almanac' (unspecified) of 1794 listing 93 fairs in 38 towns, a number which had dropped considerably by 1888.¹¹ Synthetic sections in the *Victoria County History* series provide the most ready source of detail for these events. The extracts employed here bear mainly on the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, the period most pertinent to the song activity documented by Williams. Two important volumes in the series have yet to appear: in Oxfordshire, Bampton Hundred West, embracing the market towns of Witney and Burford; and in Wiltshire, Highworth Cricklade and Staple Hundred, the very heart of the Alfredian Upper Thames.

In Berkshire, **WANTAGE** boasted a market and three fairs:

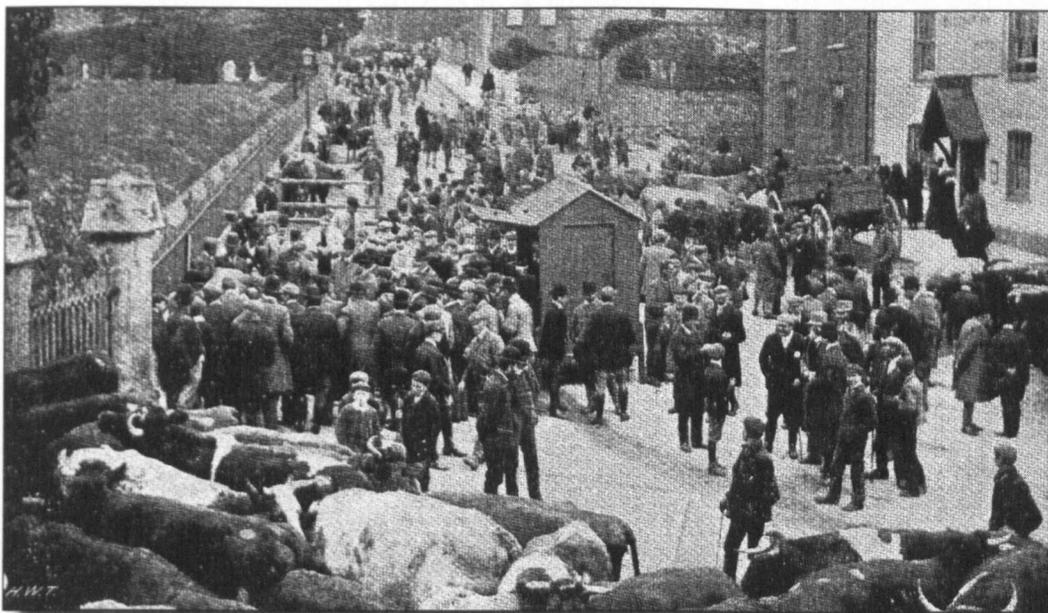
The market has lately been altered from Saturday, its old day, to Wednesday. The fairs were originally held on the feasts of the Translation of St Thomas the Martyr (7 July) and St Faith (6 October). There are now fairs on the first Saturday in March, the first Saturday in May, and the first Saturday after 11 October.¹²

Beyond the eastern edge of Williams's district proper, there were the vaunted sheep fairs at **EAST ILSLEY**, among the largest in England:

The markets are held by arrangement once or twice a month on Wednesdays from January to September. They increased rapidly until the middle of the 18th century, no less [*sic*] than 80,000 sheep being penned in one day and 55,000 sold, the yearly average amounting to 400,000. In addition to the markets there are numerous fairs, the two largest being on 1 August and 26 August, while those at Easter, Whitsuntide, in September, October and at Hallowtide (on Wednesday after 12 November) draw dealers and graziers from all parts of the county. There is also a hiring fair in October.¹³

Within the district, **FARINGDON** had a Tuesday market and three fairs:

A fair was obtained in 1227 for the vigil and feast of St Luke the Evangelist; no charter has been found for the fair which in 1260 was held on the vigil of Trinity Sunday ... and it seems possible that this fair was prescriptive. Queen Elizabeth added fairs on the feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin and on St Bartholomew's Day. In 1806 these fairs were kept on 2 February, Whit-Tuesday and 18 October.¹⁴



The cattle market at Faringdon, once held in the street opposite the church (postcard by Taunt, Oxford, postmarked 1905)

In Gloucestershire, **FAIRFORD** had an intermittent market and fairs on 14 May and 12 November which continued until the 1930s.¹⁵ **LECHLADE** had an intermittent market and two fairs, St Lawrence (10 August, old style)—‘still held in the late 18th century, when it dealt mainly in horses and cattle, but it is not recorded later’—and St John’s Bridge fair (moved to 9 September): ‘Interference to the fair by flooding caused it to be moved from the meadow by the bridge to the streets of the town in 1776. It still dealt in large quantities of cheese though the volume was declining. It continued in the 19th century, apparently mainly as a horse-fair, and after the early 1920s was merely a pleasure-fair.’¹⁶

Further west, **TETBURY** is complex, but the nineteenth century upshot is:

By 1775 an October hiring fair, or mop, was being held, and another mop, on the Wednesday before 5 April, was held from 1802. By the late 19th century cheap post and newspaper advertizing had much reduced the role of the mops, and in 1878 it was said that the better class of employer no longer hired at them; by 1904 they were largely pleasure fairs.¹⁷

In Oxfordshire, **BAMPTON** was an early focal point, but gradually declined:

The fair was still held on 15 August in 1592, when the tolls, as later, were let; it was moved to 26 August (15 August old style) in 1756. In 1793 it was primarily a ‘good horse fair’ and so continued, though toys were mentioned in 1819 and 1830 and cattle in 1852. By the mid 19th

century it lasted usually from 25 to 27 August, and included a pleasure fair described as 'a sort of carnival to all the neighbouring villages', well attended by children, servants, and others; in 1871 there were stalls, exhibitions, and shooting galleries. ... An annual Michaelmas ox-roast, later a cattle and cheese fair also, was held by 1798 on the Wednesday before Old Michaelmas (10 October), suggesting that it predated the abandonment of the Julian calendar in 1752; it was last mentioned in 1804. A new, toll-free horse and cattle fair, held annually on 26 March, was instituted in 1803 but was 'nearly obsolete' in 1847.¹⁸

NORTHMOOR, an obscure Thames-side enclave, boasted fairs at 20 March and 20 August at Newbridge on the Thames:

From the later 18th century tolls were collected apparently by the lord's bailiff, but profits fell from c. £13 in 1780 to 9s in 1798, when there may have been only one fair, and no income was recorded from 1799 to 1803. In 1806 the tolls were let for 30s to the tenant of the Rose and Crown, but though the fair house was mentioned in 1816 the fair itself had lapsed possibly by 1819 and certainly by the later 1840s.¹⁹

In Wiltshire, **ALDBOURNE** once enjoyed a market and fairs, all apparently over by the late eighteenth century.²⁰ **MALMESBURY** has a long history of gatherings:

In the late 18th century and the early 19th there were three fairs, and between 1842 and 1867 yearly fairs, at which horses, cattle, and sheep were sold, were held on 28 March, 28 April, 5 June, and 15 December. By 1875 the fairs had ceased.²¹

MARLBOROUGH had two markets and a multiplicity of fairs: 'Hiring or mop fairs were held in the early nineteenth century.'²²

RAMSBURY, though no more than a large village, had fairs at one time:

The fairs at the Invention and Exaltation were held in the 17th and 18th centuries. In 1830 a cattle fair was held on 14 May and a hiring fair on 11 October.²³

Old or 'High' **SWINDON** (that is, pre-railway) enjoyed greater prominence as a local centre servicing the agricultural community than might be supposed:

In 1775 four fairs were being held, on the Monday before 5 April, the second Monday after 11 May, the second Monday after 11 September, and the second Monday in December. All were said to be for cattle, pigs, and sheep, and the last for fat cattle as well. These dates were regularly mentioned with minor variation from then on. In the earlier 19th century the first fair was famous 'the country over' for the sale of in-calf heifers, and the second supplied them to those who had mistakenly bought barreners. The last was of great repute for fat cattle, while the March and September ones were hiring fairs which were well-attended.²⁴

At nearby **WOOTTON BASSETT**: 'In 1792 there were three fairs: on 4 May, 13 November, and 19 December.'²⁵

Williams himself presents orally-derived information on many of these fairs in his prose works, typically making the connection to customary activity but (equally typically) furnishing few specifics. *Round About the Upper Thames* makes mention of fairs at Highworth, Shrivenham, Lechlade, Fairford and Cricklade, most of which make the connection to junketing. On Fairford he has:

There were formerly two fairs held annually in the square before the inns ... After the business had been transacted amusements were indulged in. They included circus games, fiddling and dancing, boxing wrestling and back-sword play. The last named was not practised much locally but was introduced at fair-times by outsiders from Cricklade, Highworth and Langford. The old rule of ducking pick-pockets, cheats and all sharpers in the mill-pond was faithfully observed.²⁶

At Highworth (Wilts), Williams found that, 'The town possessed its market-house, and it also retained its "Jury" and public Ale-taster down to the year 1850, or thereabout.'²⁷ The established market struggled to survive during the nineteenth century, despite 'at least four' attempts to revitalize it.²⁸ The Michaelmas Fair was still in operation in the late 1880s, but had by then largely shed its hiring role.²⁹



Nomen est omen: postcard of Sheep Street, Highworth by Tomkins & Barrett. 'The Sheep Markets are kept along the Sheep Street from the sign of the royal baker (a shop under the market house) to the lower part of the Butchers Row along the South Side.' (from *Survey of the Profits Tolls &c of the Markets and Fairs of Highworth*, 1725)

The history of markets at Cricklade, also in Wiltshire, was similarly chequered:

By 1720 there was a weekly market on Saturdays and four additional fairs during the year one of which was special to the goods of the chapmen ... The weekly markets lapsed once again (probably following a severe smallpox outbreak in 1783) but in 1837 a Market Committee was formed to revive them on a monthly basis ... Horse sales had been conducted in Horsefair Lane for centuries.³⁰

Lingering testimony of more obscure occasions was recorded by Williams, such as the 'Autumn Fair and Market' at Wanborough:

held under an ancient Charter granted by King Stephen, in the year 1252, when the booths for contests and amusements extended for a mile along the roadsides; and afterwards the Feast, or "Revels," at which the inevitable back-swording and wrestling took first place.³¹

Alongside the civic cast of weekly market and statute fair were junketings attaching more specifically to the agricultural round, occasions turned in upon the group.

The toilers on the farms—not only on the Cotswolds but throughout the Thames Valley—had four feasts a year, namely, after sowing, shearing, hay-making, and harvest ... [*of shearing*] A select body of shearers was chosen from a village. They took the farms around, one by one, and when they had finished all the flocks they were entertained at a public feast provided by the farmers collectively, who invited as many others as they thought fit. Games and songs followed the feast.³²

The passage continues with memories of harvest home, an occasion embracing craftsmen (blacksmiths and wheelwrights) and parson as well as farm employees, at which toasts of loyalty were proposed to master and mistress. Significantly, Williams makes the connection to revels, including music, in most of these instances. This role of parochial festivities in promoting social congress is most clearly expressed in the case of Cherry Feast Sunday, apparently unique to his native South Marston:

The majority of the villagers betake them to the vicinity of the inn, where the "Feast" is held, and buy the rich, red cherries, washing them down with ale or ginger pop, and see no harm in the matter. ... These village festivals served at least one good purpose, that of bringing folk together, and promoting friendliness and sociability.³³

³⁰ These fond Alfredian gatherings are closer in character to the often quirky particularity of local press reports than to the cold judicious syntheses of the *Victoria County History*. The *Witney Express*, for example, carried many such reports of fairs in the town. 'The Canadian marvel, or man without arms, did most of the things claimed for him, such as ... playing an accordeon &c ... doing it all, of course, with his feet.' (16 September 1886) 'There was the usual collection of stalls, swings and roundabouts, the latter including Wilson's "galoping horses," and visitors who were fond of a step had the opportunity given them in the well-known Butler's dancing booth, and also at the Plough Inn, where dancing was indulged in till closing time.' (13 October 1887) References supplied by Keith Chandler.

HOMO LUDENS : MUSIC AND CUSTOM

What kinds of activity, more specifically, were carried on at this type of event? An intimate association of the rude bucolic *foyers* of festival and hostelry with robust contest is evident throughout Williams's writings on country life:

It is frankly admitted that Ashton Keynes has been a "rough old place." It was long noted for the boisterousness of its sports and games and it is associated with Cricklade in the riotous outbursts of its inhabitants at election times in bygone days.³⁴

Notable among the forms of legitimated violence was backwording (as at the Red Lion at Castle Eaton, *supra*), famously a speciality of such pitiless pugilists of the north Wiltshire downland as Jonathan Keen of Wanborough, a gnarled survivor whose graphic memories (and proud stigmata) stretch back into the mid-1800s:

His old head is covered with scars—several of five inches in length—which he received at play with the single-sticks, but these are his marks of honour; he feels no disgrace in the possession of them. His legs, too, are covered with marks of the wrestlers boots; but he is not ashamed of them, either. The wrestlers were forbidden to have iron tips on their boots, so a great many used to soak them for a month in horse urine; this made the leather very hard, and they were enabled to kick their opponents black and blue.³⁵

In contrast to this ludic brutality stood (ostensibly) gentler genres of calendar custom, including mumming and wassailing, but also Plough Monday, Shrove Tuesday, and the less prominent occasions of Bark Harvest (Cricklade), Clerk's Ale, Word Ale, Hocktide (Bishopstone) and Lot Mead, and dance in the form of step-dancing and morris. Williams dwells on the resonances of this apparent dichotomy:

I have always thought it strange that the Morris-dance should have been so popular in Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire. Because, though it was more vigorous than the step-dance, in other respects the people were not as tough and hardy as they were south of the Thames. The local pastimes abundantly prove this. Thick-skinned and hard-headed were the dwellers upon, and beneath, these open stretches of downs, rolling, wave-like, east and west, and ending abruptly in the heights overlooking Swindon and the Vale. For what were those pastimes? Wrestling and "leg-kicking," back-sword play, bull-baiting and cock-fighting. Strenuous sports, the most of them! Brutal, too, perhaps. Yet for another pastime they chose the step-dance, which seems quite out of keeping with their general characteristics.³⁶

Finally, he furnishes some valuable fragments on instrumental music, solo and ensemble, in the district. Of the church of St Andrew at Wanborough (Wilts):



The rare surviving west gallery at the church of St George, Kencot, at the western border of Oxfordshire (1999)

Then the old village band turned out, with their quaint instruments, the chief of which was one called the “serpent,” being in fact, a brazen serpent in a coil, into whose mouth the player blew; and, besides this, the “horse’s leg,” so-called from its resemblance to the limb of that animal. The rest of the band was made up of fiddles, piccolos, and clarionets—“clarnets,” as the rustics call them. On Sundays the serpent went to church, and was played from the old gallery, to the great admiration of the smock-frocked farm labourers.³⁷

At Hannington (Wilts) an impostor is introduced which will become a culprit:

The old building contained a very high wooden gallery in which sat the village band of musicians. On the restoration of the church this was demolished and the fiddle and clarionet gave place to the loud-pealing organ—the divine gift of Saint Cecilia to mortals.³⁸

A BUCOLIC CONTRACT? This picture of a labouring countryside seasonally *en fête* points to a *de facto* bucolic *contract*, by the terms of which, for example, largesse marked the nodal points of agriculture (master-man relations), labouring men (they were in this instance males) eagerly sought to break each other’s head at single-stick, and activities of a more performative and ceremonial nature (mumming, morris) were integral to a way of life. *Unselfconscious in cast, this functioning ensemble of practices and relations—and by extension, the song belonging to it—can perfectly usefully be characterized as “folk”: what grows up uncontrivedly among a demotic population segment.*

§3 DEMOGRAPHIC DIMENSIONS

I : 200 RUSTIC SINGERS IN SEARCH OF A COLLECTOR

As the opening section indicated, Alfred Williams collected from approximately 200 singers in the Upper Thames district. In such attention as his work has thus far been accorded, these tradition bearers have been passed over in favour of scrutiny of the song texts *in vacuo*, a slant common to discussion of all the early collectors. Only in recent years has this considerable lacuna been addressed, though not in any concerted manner. What can we know of these rustic toilers of the 'Upper Thames'? Kinds of information recoverable and their sources are described at Chapter I.2.4. Along with snippets gathered from fieldwork described in Chapter I, this material can be used to augment the background details Williams in typically quirky fashion furnishes.

THE TABLE OF SINGERS

The table, containing the 147 singers who have been identified with any degree of confidence, offers a comprehensive schematic presentation of this considerable corpus of demographical data, an integrated listing avoiding the need for a separate table for each form of analysis. The primary principle of organization is chronologically by birth, rather than alphabetically by surname. The advantage of arrangement by age is automatically, and thus economically, to show generational distribution, though individuals are harder to find by name. The significant heads identified are:

- 1° **NUMBER OF SONGS NOTED** shows scale of repertory (though not song *type*);
- 2° **GENDER** is of moment in relation to Williams's own comments (p. 415 *infra*);
- 3° **DATE OF BAPTISM** has no particular significance, but confirms chronology;
- 4° **OCCUPATION** is of sociological interest;
- 5° **LITERACY** potentially connects to transmission of song (broadside trade);
- 6° **AGE AT TIME OF COLLECTING** takes 1914 as a notional point;
- 7° **BURIAL** shows longevity in relation to point of collecting.

The evident drawback of this mode of presentation is that, as the informants did not die in order of age, a separate list by **DATE OF DECEASE** is still required. Separate listing of place of birth and place of collecting has the merit of showing how many were (not) resident in their native parish in 1914-16, but is clearly insufficient as an indicator of extent of mobility. Finally, in a small number of cases, notably Shadrach Haydon (p. 126 *infra*), it has been possible to revise the tally of songs noted by Williams.

SINGER	SONGS	PLACE OF COLLECTING	PLACE OF BIRTH	M/F	BAPTISM	OCCUPATION	LIT	1914	BURIAL
1810s & 1820s									
Thomas King	3	Castle Eaton (Wt)	Idem	M	13 Oct 1816	Ag labourer	X	98	31 Mar 1915
Elijah Iles	31	Inglesham (Wt)	Lechlade (Gl)	M	c. 1822	Ag labourer	✓	92	15 Mar 1917
Richard Harris	2	Oaksey (Wt)	Idem	M	29 Dec 1822	Railway lab	X	92	—
'Wassair' Harvey	21	Cricklade (Wt)	Idem	M	25 Jun 1826	Ag labourer	X	88	27 Aug 1915
Jonathan Keene	1	Wanborough (Wt)	Idem	M	c. 1827	Ag labourer	X	87	19 Feb 1914
George Hicks	1	Aldsworth (Gl)	Chedworth (Gl)	M	24 Jun 1827	Ag labourer	X	n/a	8 Oct 1900
John Eggleton	1	Blunsdon (Wt)	Idem	M	12 Aug 1827	Ag labourer	✓	86	21 Feb 1918
Shadrach Haydon	31	Bampton (Ox)	Lyford (Bk)	M	18 Jan 1829	Shepherd	X	85	20 Dec 1916
Thomas Webb	2	Broadwell (Ox)	Kencot (Ox)	M	7 Jun 1829	Ag labourer	X	84	18 July 1921
1830s									
James Shilton	1	Lechlade (Gl)	Idem	M	19 Sept 1830	Ag labourer	✓	84	12 Mar 1919
Henry Cook	3	Arlington (Gl)	Miserden (Gl)	M	20 Mar 1831	Ag labourer	X	83	16 Oct 1919
Edward Archer	1	Coleshill (Bk)	Gt Coxwell (Bk)	M	29 Jan 1832	Ag labourer	✓	82	26 Apr 1920
John Pillingier	10	Lechlade (Gl)	Idem	M	30 Sept 1832	Ag labourer	✓	82	20 Sept 1924
David Sawyer	47	Stratton St Margaret (Wt)	Ogbourne St Andrew (Wt)	M	11 Nov 1832	Shepherd	✓	82	1918 (3rd qtr)
Matilda Harris	1	Quenington (Gl)	Not local	F	c. 1833	—	—	81	19 Apr 1924

SINGER	SONGS	PLACE OF COLLECTING	PLACE OF BIRTH	M/F	BAPTISM	OCCUPATION	LIT	1914	BURIAL
Robert King	3	Castle Eaton (Wt)	Idem	M	10 Mar 1833	Ag labourer	✓	81	19 Jan 1927
Henry Leech	1	Eynsham (Ox)	Idem	M	13 July 1833	Ag labourer	X	81	9 May 1920
Job Gardner	2	Shilton (Ox)	Idem	M	19 Oct 1834	Ag labourer	—	80	15 Dec 1925
Mrs [Emma] Hancock	2	Blunsdon (Wt)	Idem	F	c. 1835	—	✓	79	7 Feb 1917
Richard Gardner	3	Hardwick (Ox)	Shilton (Ox)	M	1 Mar 1835	Ag labourer	X	79	26 Jun 1916
Henry Radband	1	Bampton (Ox)	Idem	M	11 Sept 1836	Ag labourer	✓	78	29 Nov 1915
Joseph Bartlett	2	Down Ampney (Gl)	Latton (Wt)	M	c. 1837	Ag labourer	✓	77	28 Mar 1919
George Herbert	2	Poulton (Gl)	Cirencester (Gl)	M	c. 1837	Blacksmith	✓	77	—
John Taylor	1	Poulton (Gl)	Meysey Hampton (Gl)	M	c. 1837	Postman	✓	77	20 Sept 1920
Ephraim Head	1	South Marston (Wt)	Idem	M	c. 1838	Shoemaker	✓	n/a	24 May 1906
James Collins	1	Lechlade (Gl)	Bladon (Ox)	M	28 Jan 1838	Ag labourer	✓	76	2 Jun 1920
James Barnes	1	Quenington (Gl)	Kempford (Gl)	M	1 Apr 1838	Shepherd	✓	76	2 Apr 1921
James Harris	1	South Leigh (Ox)	Idem	M	10 Jun 1838	Ag labourer	X	76	1 Mar 1921
Thomas Larkin	1	Shrivenham (Bk)	Northam (Sx)	M	10 Jun 1838	Gamekeeper	✓	76	24 Nov 1924
Robert Baxter	1	Eastleach (Gl)	Idem	M	17 Jun 1838	Ag labourer	X	76	18 July 1923
James Falconer	5	Brize Norton (Ox)	Idem	M	22 July 1838	Ag labourer	✓	76	24 Mar 1923
Thomas Smart	4	Stratton St Margaret (Wt)	Blunsdon (Wt)	M	5 Aug 1838	Ag labourer	✓	76	31 Jan 1919

SINGER	SONGS	PLACE OF COLLECTING	PLACE OF BIRTH	M/F	BAPTISM	OCCUPATION	LIT	1914	BURIAL
William Warren	1	South Marston (Wt)	Bourton (Bk)	M	c. 1839	Thatcher	✓	n/a	21 Aug 1909
Mrs [Mary] Gosling	1	Lechlade (Gl)	Idem	F	c. 1839	—	—	75	28 Feb 1929
William Brown	1	Driffield (Gl)	Idem	M	20 Jan 1839	Shepherd	✓	75	16 Feb 1922
Jonathan Cole	4	Brinkworth (Wt)	Christian Malford (Wt)	M	24 Feb 1839	Farmer	X	75	—
1840s									
James Mander	1	Aldsworth (Gl)	Idem	M	2 Feb 1840	Ag labourer	X	74	1 May 1916
E[dwin] Smart	1	Oaksey (Wt)	Idem	M	20 Sept 1840	Ag labourer	X	74	5 Feb 1923
Edmund Jefferies	3	Highbworth (Wt)	Idem	M	c. 1840	Mkt Gardener	✓	74	—
George Grubb	5	Ewen (Gl)	South Marston (Wt)	M	10 Jan 1841	Shepherd	X	73	20 May 1916
Alfred Russell	1	Stanton Harcourt (Ox)	Idem	M	9 Aug 1841	Ag labourer	X	73	9 May 1917
Emily Freeman	1	Ampney Crucis (Gl)	Cirencester (Gl)	F	c. 1841	—	—	73	24 Apr 1938
Joseph Kite	2	Curbridge (Ox)	Idem	M	c. 1841	Ag labourer	X	73	12 Apr 1919
Frederick Falconer	2	Black Bourton (Ox)	Brize Norton (Ox)	M	c. 1841	Ag labourer	X	73	14 July 1917
Charles Messenger	7	Cerney Wick (Gl)	Idem	M	9 Jan 1842	Ag labourer	✓	72	16 Feb 1924
John Puffet	5	Lechlade (Gl)	Aldsworth (Gl)	M	9 Jan 1842	Groom	—	72	18 Jan 1929
William Jefferies	7	Longcot (Bk)	Idem	M	19 Jun 1842	Ag labourer	X	72	22 Jan 1916
William Bradshaw	6	Bibury (Gl)	Idem	M	9 Oct 1842	Servant	—	72	—

SINGER	SONGS	PLACE OF COLLECTING	PLACE OF BIRTH	M/F	BAPTISM	OCCUPATION	LIT	1914	BURIAL
Mary Sessions	2	East Hendred (Bk)	Oddingley (Wc)	F	c. 1843	—	—	71	2 May 1919
Sarah Calcott	1	Northmoor (Ox)	Cassington (Ox)	F	14 May 1843	—	✓	72	—
Alice Barnett	1	Quenington (Gl)	Siddington (Gl)	F	23 July 1843	—	✓	71	1 Feb 1932
William King	2	Highworth (Wt)	Castle Eaton (Wt)	M	29 Oct 1843	Ag labourer	X	71	23 May 1930
John Sutton	2	Arlington (Gl)	Down Ampney (Gl)	M	13 Feb 1844	Ag labourer	—	70	—
Thomas Holmes	1	Coleshill (Bk)	Highworth (Wt)	M	7 July 1844	Sawyer	✓	70	6 Apr 1931
Alfred Spiers	1	Southrop (Gl)	Deford (Wc)	M	c. 1844	(various)	✓	70	8 Sept 1928
George Ash	1	Ampney Crucis (Gl)	Ampney St Mary (Gl)	M	16 Feb 1845	Shepherd	X	69	28 Mar 1924
John Falconer	1	Black Bourton (Ox)	Brize Norton (Ox)	M	2 Mar 1845	Ag labourer	✓	69	—
George Hicks	2	Arlington (Gl)	Cricklade (Wt)	M	14 Sept 1845	Ag labourer	✓	68	18 Jun 1924
Charles Tanner	22	Bampton (Ox)	Idem	M	16 Nov 1845	Ag labourer	✓	69	10 Nov 1922
Henry Sirman	2	Stanton Harcourt (Ox)	Idem	M	16 Nov 1845	Ag labourer	✓	69	1 Apr 1919
'Shepherd' Banting	1	Quenington (Gl)	Filkins (Ox)	M	c. 1845	Shepherd	✓	69	27 Aug 1919
Mrs [?Ann] Moss	1	Driffield (Gl)	—	F	c. 1845	—	✓	69	2 Feb 1933
Charles Hope	4	Filkins (Ox)	Upper Swell (Gl)	M	8 Feb 1846	Roadman	✓	68	—
William Preston	2	Grafton (Ox)	Swinbrook (Ox)	M	19 Apr 1846	Ag labourer	—	68	—
Christopher Carter	1	[Not Watchfield]	Watchfield (Bk)	M	3 Jan 1847	Ag labourer	X	67	22 Oct 1927

SINGER	SONGS	PLACE OF COLLECTING	PLACE OF BIRTH	M/F	BAPTISM	OCCUPATION	LIT	1914	BURIAL
Mrs [Priscilla] Brunson	1	Clanfield (Ox)	Shilton (Ox)	F	7 Mar 1847	—	✓	67	16 Feb 1924
Joseph Iles	1	Pouiton (Gl)	Southrop (Gl)	M	19 Dec 1847	Ag labourer	X	70	29 Nov 1926
Jane Ockwell	1	Pouiton (Gl)	—	F	c. 1847	—	—	67	23 Dec 1935
James Mills	5	South Cerney (Gl)	—	M	c. 1847	—	—	67	22 Apr 1920
Henry Lockett	1	Aston (Ox)	Idem	M	7 May 1848	Ag labourer	✓	66	27 Nov 1923
W (William) Baxter	1	Watchfield (Bk)	Idem	M	27 Aug 1848	Ag labourer	—	66	—
William Mills	3	Ablington (Gl)	Chedworth (Gl)	M	14 Dec 1848	Corn dealer	✓	66	29 Jan 1920
'Tibby' [Alfred] Barrett	2	Highworth (Wt)	Sevenhampton (Wt)	M	c. 1848	Mat maker	—	66	—
Elizabeth Webb	2	Alvescot (Ox)	Bampton (Ox)	F	2 Jan 1849	Cook	✓	65	11 Feb 1927
Job Phipps	1	Brize Norton (Ox)	South Leigh (Ox)	M	30 July 1849	Railway lab	✓	65	30 Apr 1931
John Johnson	1	Hinton Parva (Wt)	Idem	M	16 Sept 1849	Blacksmith	✓	65	9 Apr 1919
Jesse Eldridge	2	Highworth (Wt)	Idem	M	c. 1849	Ag labourer	—	65	—
John Webley	2	Arlington (Gl)	uncertain	M	c. 1849	Ag labourer	✓	65	19 Jan 1918
1850s									
William Flux	1	Alvescot (Ox)	Langford (Ox)	M	3 Mar 1850	Railway lab	✓	64	16 Feb 1929
Alan Cutts	2	Brinkworth (Wt)	Idem	M	16 Jun 1850	Ag labourer	—	64	19 Jan 1935
Mary Bond	4	Quenington (Gl)	Coln St Aldwyns (Gl)	F	18 Aug 1850	—	✓	64	3 July 1935

SINGER	SONGS	PLACE OF COLLECTING	PLACE OF BIRTH	M/F	BAPTISM	OCCUPATION	LIT	1914	BURIAL
Robert Carpenter	1	Cerney Field (G)	Duntisbourne (G)	M	22 Dec 1850	Shepherd	—	64	31 Dec 1920
[James] Russell	1	Hatherop (G)	—	M	c. 1850	—	X	64	13 Feb 1937
Mrs C Thomson	1	Northmoor (Ox)	Stanton Harcourt (Ox)	F	c. 1850	—	—	64	30 Jan 1923
Richard May	1	Fairford (G)	Idem	M	4 Jun 1851	Ag labourer	X	63	8 Aug 1928
Alfred Howse	4	Latton (Wt)	Idem	M	24 Aug 1851	Lock-keeper	✓	63	29 July 1937
Mrs [Eliz Harriet] Mackie	2	Lechlade (G)	Idem	F	7 Sept 1851	—	—	62	8 Jan 1921
Mrs Goodfield	3	Crudwell (Wt)	Idem	F	16 Nov 1851	—	✓	63	7 July 1941
David Ball	7	Aston (Ox)	Idem	M	2 May 1852	Ag labourer	✓	62	1 Jan 1922
Mark Hamlet	1	Ducklington (Ox)	Idem	M	16 May 1852	Woodman	✓	62	11 Oct 1917
Elizabeth Weaver	1	Ashton Keynes (Wt)	Idem	F	20 Jun 1852	—	✓	62	1 Aug 1927
Esther Pitts	1	Eastleach (G)	Sherborne (G)	F	25 July 1852	—	✓	62	10 July 1925
Robert Little	1	South Marston (Wt)	Wroughton (Wt)	M	7 Nov 1852	Gen labourer	✓	62	2 Jan 1934
William Wise	4	Alvescot (Ox)	Weston-on-the-Green (Ox)	M	22 May 1853	Ag labourer	—	61	15 Nov 1929
William Avery	1	Aldsworth (G)	Idem	M	31 July 1853	Ag labourer	✓	61	29 Dec 1917
Walter Poole	1	Minety (Wt)	Crudwell (Wt)	M	9 Oct 1853	Carpenter	✓	60	25 Feb 1931
Tim Fox	1	Bampton (Ox)	Aston (Ox)	M	c. 1853	Ag labourer	X	61	2 Dec 1923
James Truman	1	Ampney St Mary (G)	Ampney St Peter (G)	M	c. 1854	Mason	✓	60	24 Mar 1924

SINGER	SONGS	PLACE OF COLLECTING	PLACE OF BIRTH	M/F	BAPTISM	OCCUPATION	LIT	1914	BURIAL
Jane Wall	2	Driffeld (Gl)	—	F	c. 1854	—	—	60	25 Sept 1929
Edward Roberts	1	Siddington (Gl)	Deerhurst (Gl)	M	c. 1854	Platelayer	✓	60	17 July 1918
Solomon Ayres	1	Standlake (Ox)	South Leigh (Ox)	M	29 Apr 1855	Ag labourer	—	59	—
Samuel Bennett	1	Ashton Keynes (Wt)	South Cerney (Gl)	M	1 July 1855	Groom	✓	59	18 Nov 1925
John Flux	1	Filkins (Ox)	Langford (Ox)	M	c. 1855	Ag labourer	✓	59	10 Dec 1928
Daniel Morgan	11	Braydon Wood (Wt)	—	M	c. 1855	Hawker/dealer	—	59	—
Mrs Phillips	6	Purton (Wt)	Idem	F	3 Feb 1856	—	✓	58	10 Sept 1931
Arthur Hawkins	1	Abington (Gl)	Kempford (Gl)	M	24 Aug 1856	Ag labourer	✓	58	3 Nov 1931
Robert Godwin	1	Southrop (Gl)	Langford (Ox)	M	c. 1856	Ag labourer	—	58	3 Apr 1943
Charles Hambridge	2	Buscot (Bk)	Idem	M	5 July 1857	Ag labourer	—	57	16 Mar 1946
James Midwinter	2	Aldsworth (Gl)	Idem	M	9 Aug 1857	Ag labourer	—	57	14 Jan 1939
Jonas Wheeler	2	Buscot (Bk)	Idem	M	13 Sept 1857	Ag labourer	✓	57	16 Mar 1939
Ellen Trinder	3	Northmoor (Ox)	Idem	F	23 Nov 1857	—	X	57	17 Dec 1923
George Giles	1	Filkins (Ox)	Langford (Ox)	M	c. 1858	Mason	✓	56	9 Jan 1936
William Faulkner	2	Taynton (Ox)	Brize Norton (Ox)	M	5 Sept 1858	Ag labourer	✓	56	29 Mar 1944
L[ot] Couling	2	Kempford (Gl)	Idem	M	28 Sept 1858	Tailor	✓	56	25 Mar 1943
G[eorge] Couling	1	Kempford (Gl)	Idem	M	24 Jan 1859	Carpenter	—	55	9 Oct 1933

SINGER	SONGS	PLACE OF COLLECTING	PLACE OF BIRTH	M/F	BAPTISM	OCCUPATION	LIT	1914	BURIAL
John Kimber	1	Aston (Ox)	Idem	M	18 Mar 1859	Blacksmith	✓	55	23 Nov 1939
1860s									
Tom Trinder	1	Howell (Ox)	Shilton (Ox)	M	c. 1860	Ag labourer	✓	54	18 Jan 1934
Eli Dawes	3	Southrop (Gl)	Kempford (Gl)	M	27 Jan 1861	Ag labourer	X	53	13 Mar 1951
Eli Jasper Price	1	South Cerney (Gl)	Idem	M	31 Mar 1861	Ag labourer	✓	53	24 Nov 1952
Leah Sirman	2	Stanton Harcourt (Ox)	Idem	F	7 Apr 1861	Dressmaker	—	53	27 Jan 1931
George Barrett	4	Marston Meysey (Wt)	Eastleach (Gl)	M	3 Jan 1862	Ag labourer	✓	52	9 Nov 1929
Charles Accott	2	Meysey Hampton (Gl)	Idem	M	9 Mar 1862	Ag labourer	—	52	25 May 1938
Raymond Smith	1	Bibury (Gl)	Barnsley (Gl)	M	23 Mar 1862	Gamekeeper	—	52	—
Henry Potter	5	Standlake (Ox)	Idem	M	11 May 1862	Ag labourer	✓	52	23 Dec 1936
James Thorne	1	Langford (Ox)	Idem	M	c. 1862	Various	✓	52	—
Edward Warren	7	South Marston (Wt)	Idem	M	12 May 1863	GWR worker	✓	51	13 Apr 1933
James Beckett	1	Eaton Hastings (Bk)	Ashbury (Bk)	M	26 Feb 1864	Carter/ag lab	—	50	—
[Frank] Barrett	1	Fairford (Gl)	Highworth (Wt)	M	3 Apr 1864	Shepherd	✓	50	14 May 1931
Harry Bennett	1	Cumnor (Bk)	Idem	M	12 Mar 1865	Ag labourer	✓	49	12 Sept 1931
Sarah Timbrell	2	Quenington (Gl)	Eastleach (Gl)	F	12 Mar 1865	—	✓	49	21 Jan 1950
W[illiam] Ostley	1	Southmoor (Bk)	—	M	c. 1865	—	—	49	24 May 1939

SINGER	SONGS	PLACE OF COLLECTING	PLACE OF BIRTH	M/F	BAPTISM	OCCUPATION	LIT	1914	BURIAL
John Goddard	1	Stratton St Margaret (Wt)	Burford (Ox)	M	c. 1865	Labourer	✓	49	9 May 1925
Frank Cook	6	Burford (Ox)	Filkins (Ox)	M	c. 1866	Carter	✓	48	—
Jane Looker	1	Arlington (Gl)	—	F	c. 1868	—	—	46	10 Mar 1930
James West	3	Quenington (Gl)	Coln St Aldwyns (Gl)	M	c. 1868	Carpenter	✓	46	8 Jan 1917
Alfred Smith	4	Watchfield (Bk)	Idem	M	16 May 1869	Dealer/shep	✓	45	—
1870s									
Thomas Baughan	3	South Cerney (Gl)	Idem	M	5 Apr 1870	Ag labourer	✓	44	23 Nov 1920
Herbert Gascoigne	1	Kemble (Gl)	Bath (Som)	M	c. 1870	Blacksmith	✓	44	10 Apr 1925
John Ockwell	1	Somerford Keynes (Gl)	Idem	M	19 Feb 1871	Farmer	✓	43	18 Apr 1944
Frederick Lake	1	Black Bourton (Ox)	Farmington (Gl)	M	28 Apr 1871	Ag labourer	—	43	21 Dec 1955
Mrs [Minnie] Rowles	4	Witney (Ox)	Holwell (Ox)	F	11 June 1872	—	✓	42	—
Mrs George Lee	2	South Marston (Wt)	Idem	F	c. 1873	—	✓	41	—
Fred Webb	1	Broadwell (Ox)	Idem	M	c. 1876	Ag labourer	—	38	19 Feb 1953
Sarah Godwin	1	Southrop (Gl)	Langford (Ox)	F	c. 1877	—	—	37	4 Jan 1953
Edward Griffin	1	Hatherop (Gl)	Idem	M	c. 1878	Ag labourer	✓	36	16 Feb 1952
Albert Spackman	1	South Marston (Wt)	Idem	M	c. 1879	Plasterer	✓	35	21 Apr 1950
Mrs W Field	2	Winson (Gl)	Theale (Bk)	F	c. 1880	—	✓	34	9 Feb 1951

CONVERSION TO MEANING

Can this clutch of nugatory biographemes convert to anything like knowledge? However absorbing this material may be as social history, the interest here lies not in working country people as such (of whom there were many millions at this period) but in pertinence to the subject at issue: the conditions of vocal music-making and its mediation by Alfred Williams. Ideally, each biographical aspect should in some way connect to this entangled concern.

Of the four principal data types identified above, **LITERACY** and **MOBILITY** bear on mechanics of **TRANSMISSION** (literacy connects to the printed word—essentially the broadside trade—while mobility bears on the opportunity for personal contact) and are discussed in Part 2. The other two heads, **AGE** (including **DECEASE**) and **OCCUPATION** can be brought to bear on the mediation side of the coin: adduced to qualify, if not actually correct, the impression created by Williams. **AGE** in two (related) respects. 1° He distinctly creates the impression that his informants were uniformly archaic; or, at least, he does *not* draw attention to the fact that his singers ranged from extreme geriatricity down to striplings in middle years. Establishing the full generational spread serves to correct this. 2° He perpetrates the collector's cliché about condition of decay of the music, announcing its imminent or actual demise. This statutory slant can be adjusted by setting out the full chronology of decease of informants. Finally **OCCUPATION**: Williams's highly selective noting of this biographeme can be placed in perspective by listing all occupations (from census): it emphasizes that he tended to mention those *other than* simple labourer.

(1) GENERATIONAL SPREAD

In only nine cases does Williams bother to specify a singer's age, though in a further dozen he invokes antiquity. See the table below, all information in which is derived from headnotes to individual texts. Against this may be set the range of ages given in the main singer table, *supra*. These are (from a working total of 146): 1816 to 1829 – 9 | 1830 to 1839 – 27 | 1840 to 1849 – 41 | 1850 to 1859 – 39 | 1860 to 1869 – 18 | 1870 to 1879 – 12. This shows that 80 of those found, well over half of the total, belong to the period 1840 to 1859 (aged mid 70s to mid 50s). (Interestingly, the last two in the table are younger than Williams himself.)

AGES OF SINGERS SPECIFIED BY WILLIAMS AND THOSE MERELY INTIMATED

AGE SPECIFIED (9)

<i>aetat</i> 99	Thomas King	Castle Eaton, Wilts	Wt 344
94	Elijah Iles	Inglesham, Wilts	Wt 388
<i>aetat</i> 90	"Wassail" Harvey	Cricklade, Wilts	Wt 353*
<i>aetat</i> 90	James Shilton†	Lechlade, Glos	Gl 117*
<i>aetat</i> 90	John Eggleton	Blunsdon, Wilts	Wt 313
84	Henry Cook	Arlington, Glos	Gl 43
84	David Sawyer	'Ogbourne', Wilts	Wt 455*
83	Richard Gardner	Hardwick, Oxon	Ox 271*
70	Jane Ockwell	Poulton, Glos	Gl 124*

† Example of a disparity: Shilton was baptized at Lechlade on 19 September 1830 and so would have been in his mid-eighties in 1914. Also, the burial register gives his age as 91 in March 1919.

PRECISE AGE UNSPECIFIED (13) : AGE SUPPLIED FROM OFFICIAL RECORD

'considerably over 80'	[??]	Mrs Bond	Faringdon, Berks	Bk 12
'considerably over 80'	[??]	[Mrs] Dickson	Brinkworth, Wilts	Wt 317
'very aged and feeble'	84	T[homas] Webb	Broadwell, Oxon	Ox 244
'very aged'	81	[Matilda] Harris	Quenington, Glos	Gl 132
'aged'	77	George Herbert	Poulton, Glos	Gl 122*
'aged'	89	Shadrach Haydon	Bampton, Oxon	Ox 199*
'aged'	69	Charles Tanner	Bampton, Oxon	Ox 212
'aged'	75	Jonathan Cole	Brinkworth, Wilts	Wt 331
'old man'	73	Joseph Kite	Curbridge, Oxon	Ox 253
'old woman'	72	Sarah Calcott	Northmoor, Oxon	Ox 282*
'elderly'	60	Jane Wall	Driffield, Glos	Gl 80*
'old'	75	William Warren	Sth Marston, Wilts	Wt 508*
'old'	79	Mrs Hancock	Blunsdon, Wilts	Wt 317

* denotes text not included in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*

(2) OCCUPATIONAL SPREAD

Williams shows himself alive to the sociological import of occupation in passages of the introduction to *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* (see Chapter VI.2.2). Specifically, he states a singer's occupation in some 26 cases, on no apparent principle, the only possible motivation being those occupations which are out of the ordinary; and he felt an evident affinity for smiths, having himself toiled at the forge in a different context. (Source and key are as for the age table, *supra*.)

OCCUPATIONS OF SINGERS SPECIFIED BY WILLIAMS IN HEADNOTES

SHEPHERDS (7)	George Ash	Ampney Crucis, Glos	Gl 39
	'Shepherd' Banting	Quenington, Glos	Gl 126
	[John] Barrett	Fairford, Glos	Gl 98*
	George Grubb	Ewen, Glos	Gl 85*
	Shadrach Haydon	Bampton, Oxon	Ox 195
	David Sawyer	'Ogbourne', Wilts	Wt 432
	Alfred Smith	Watchfield, Berks	Bk 26
BLACKSMITHS (6)	Charles Barrett	Sevenhampton, Wilts	Wt 492
	Herbert Gascoigne	Kemble, Glos	Gl 94
	George Herbert	Poulton, Glos	Gl 122
	Sam Hinder	Crudwell, Wilts	Wt 373
	John Johnson	Hinton Parva, Wilts	"
	John Kimber	Aston, Oxon	Ox 188
MAT-MAKER	"Tibby" Barrett	Highworth, Wilts	Wt 378
SHOEMAKER	Ephraim Head	South Marston, Wilts	Wt 494
THATCHER	William Warren	South Marston, Wilts	Wt 508
PLATELAYER†	William Flux	Alvescot, Oxon	Ox 172*
ROAD-MENDER	Charles Hope	Filkins, Oxon	Ox 264
ROADMAN	George Keen	Cogges, Oxon	Ox 274*
TRAVELLER & DEALER	Daniel Morgan	Braydon Wood, Wilts	Wt 322
FARM HAND	Henry Serman	Stanton Harcourt, Oxon	Ox 300
GAMEKEEPERS (2)	Raymond Smith	Bibury, Glos	Gl 60*
	Jonathan Cole	Brinkworth, Wilts	Wt 331
GARDENER/GRAVEDIGGER	George Hicks	Arlington, Glos	Gl 45
EARTH-STOPPER	William Preston	Grafton, Oxon	Ox 268
CARTER	Richard Gardner	Hardwick, Oxon	Ox 271*

† Williams has this to say of the impact of the railway on village life: 'Most of the men who work on the railway—platelayers and others—belong to the village. These are somewhat superior to the agricultural population, or at least a few of them—the gangers and signalmen. The labourers can scarcely claim to be better off, except in the matter of hours; they have a little more leisure than the farm-hands, that is all. The platelayers' wages range from sixteen to eighteen shillings a week, and many of the agricultural labourers obtain as much, though they have Sunday work to perform. There is a gang on the railway to every two and half miles. Formerly this was of eight men; now it is reduced to six.' (*A Wiltshire Village*, pp. 214-5.)

Most of these are borne out by census. Exceptions are Jonathan Cole, given in census as 'gamekeeper' rather than farmer, and the last three in the list, all given in census as 'agricultural labourer'. Jonas Wheeler of Buscot, Berks, is said to have worked on the barges as a boy (in the note to 'False-hearted William', Bk 4) but is given in census as 'agricultural labourer'. This usefully makes the point, in passing, about the glibness of this enumerator's convenience: Williams's versions are more specific, not to say colourful.

Mainly, census is a means of filling in all the occupations not mentioned by Williams. From this source there are a further three shepherds—James Barnes of Quenington, William Brown of Driffield, and Robert Carpenter of Cerney Field (all Glos)—to add to Williams's seven, bringing the tally to ten. The census tally of blacksmiths (six) are all in Williams, who has two more yet to be located in census. Five were engaged in some form of railway work. (Williams has one, the others being: Richard Harris of Oaksey, Wilts; Job Phipps of Brize Norton, Oxon; Edward Roberts of Siddington, Glos; and Edward Warren of South Marston, Wilts. To this number should perhaps be added Alfred Spiers, once a GWR agent.)

Further specific occupations, in addition to those noted by Williams, are these: three farmers (Jonathan Cole of Brinkworth, Wilts, who is given as 'gamekeeper' by Williams; Frederick Newman of Cold Aston, Glos, who was a correspondent; the third is John Ockwell of Somerford Keynes); two carpenters (Walter Poole of Minety, Wilts, and James West of Quenington, Glos); two grooms (John Puffet of Lechlade, Glos, and Samuel Bennett of Ashton Keynes, Wilts); two masons (James Truman of Ampney St Mary, Glos, and George Giles of Filkins, Oxon); a further gamekeeper (Thomas Larkin of Shrivenham, Berks); a tailor (Lot Couling of Kempsford, Glos); a postman (John Taylor of Poulton, Glos); a sawyer (Thomas "Wooden-Legged" Holmes of Coleshill, Berks); a woodman (Mark Hamlet of Ducklington, Oxon); a corn dealer (William Mills of Ablington, Glos); a cook (Elizabeth Webb of Alvescot, Oxon); a servant (William Bradshaw of Bibury, Glos); a lock-keeper (Alfred Howse of Latton, Wilts); a general labourer (Robert Little of South Marston, Wilts); a plasterer (Albert Spackman of South Marston, Wilts)—and a schoolmistress (Miss A Cross of South Marston, Wilts).

But the overwhelming bulk fall into the catch-all category 'agricultural labourer', something like 65 cases. (This rather dismissive condition invites further qualification: Charles Messenger was also the parish clerk; John Pillinger was a Crimea veteran; and Eli Price was employed in later years at a sewage works—but the general picture stands.) These are indeed the rustic 'rank and file' referred to by Williams.³⁹ The important corrective here concerns Harker, who seeks to test Williams's claims in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, but only in relation to biographical snippets in head-notes provided by Williams himself in the book, as set out in the table above:

When we examine what Williams recorded of his chief sources, we find that it is precisely from this class fraction that he collected most of his songs. Carters, waggoners, shepherds, cowmen and stablemen—the skilled, relatively mobile and independent workers—had more opportunity for song acquisition and performance than the lesser skilled farm workers, no doubt. A mat-maker, blacksmiths, gypsies, retired soldiers and sailors [*sic?*], a gardener-cum-gravedigger, a shoemaker and a thatcher provided more pieces.⁴⁰

Harker concludes this passage with: ‘Only Henry Serman appears to have been a life-long agricultural labourer.’ For a historian operating within a hermeneutics of suspicion, this is an oddly acquiescent statement, naively conflating what is (not) stated and what obtains. This is confirmation, if such were needed, of the usefulness of setting Williams’s writings in the perspective of independently derived data.

(3) POPULAR LITERACY IN THE UPPER THAMES

Literacy, manifestly, is a large subject spawning a vast literature, problematic especially in the case of working people because of a lack of rigorous record. It is also, in the folk song context, oddly neglected. Michael Pickering is, mistakenly, dismissive of any real pertinence to vernacular singing.⁴¹ Studies of the broadside trade barely mention the matter—as if a capacity to *read* the sheets can be taken as given⁴²—and it remains an undeveloped corner of the battleground into which Cecil Sharp’s song collecting, in particular, has been turned. Richard Sykes’s very useful conspectus of the nineteenth century evidence, slanted specifically to test Sharp’s clichés about an illiterate peasantry, is pitched in aggregated terms rather than engaging with the particularity of a fieldwork corpus.⁴³ Bearman, *lui*, grinds the demographic details on Sharp’s singers but blithely skates round the issue of literacy, perhaps in part because the marriage registers are too much trouble, in part because of his anti-print prejudices.⁴⁴ The primacy David Vincent’s magisterial study of popular literacy accords to use(s) does not extend to the role of cheap print in stimulating vernacular singing.⁴⁵ Accordingly, the Alfredian corpus may be mobilized to address this lacuna: what were levels of ‘literacy’ among country singers in the Upper Thames, and by extension to what degree might they have learnt the words of songs from print? The principal sources, sufficiently jejune, are (as general condition) provision of schools, and (specific to individuals) entries in marriage registers, signature or mark. Information presented in this chapter from the latter source represents a pioneering attempt to assess the condition of literacy among a discrete set of singers.

CONDITION OF 'EDUCATION' IN THE UPPER THAMES

The most convenient—in many cases only—scholarly survey of schools in small towns and villages is to be found in the *Victoria County History* volumes (qualified in this context, as with markets and fairs, by one glaring gap in the series: the hundred of Highworth, Cricklade and Staple). Amateur local histories often contain alluring examples, selected with an eye more to entertainment than to knowledge.

At Winstone, between Cirencester and Gloucester, the school was under the charge of a shepherd who, at the venerable age of eighty, was deemed too old and infirm to tend his sheep, so had undertaken the education of the village children, to whom he taught 'very elementary writing'.⁴⁶

The following selective survey is based on the separate section on education contained in each parish entry in the *Victoria County History*.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE:⁴⁷ **ALDSWORTH** had a school from 1821, and a Sunday School from 1825; **BARNSELY** first reference to a school 1767, Sunday School from 1824; **BIBURY** school from an early stage—'In 1568 a school was being held without licence by John Stone of Bibury. About 1640 Thomas Tryon attended a school in the village'—including **WINSON** (school by 1847), and a Sunday School at Arlington in 1833; **COLN ST ALDWYNS** Sunday School in 1818; **EASTLEACH** school by 1818, including Sunday School; **FAIRFORD** provision for the poor from an early stage (much documented); **HATHEROP** school by 1825, Sunday School 1833, teaching 50 children in 1846; **KEMPSFORD** school from 1693 (detailed *infra*); **LECHLADE** school during the eighteenth century, charity school by 1818; **QUENINGTON** first reference to a school 1616 but not certain until the 1830s, including a Sunday School; **SOUTHROP** school by 1827, Sunday School in 1830, 39 pupils in 1847.

OXFORDSHIRE:⁴⁸ **ASTON & COTE** a school recorded from 1709 (see detail *infra*); **BAMPTON** is a complex case: first reference 1653, then many others including a National School 1812; **DUCKLINGTON** an isolated reference to a school 1759, resumption from 1808; **NORTHMOOR** first reference to a (church) school in the seventeenth century, lapses in the eighteenth century, resumes 1815 and 1829; **STANDLAKE** first reference to a school 1672, then from the early eighteenth century onwards.

WILTSHIRE:⁴⁹ **BRINKWORTH** school possibly from the late seventeenth century, certainly during the eighteenth century, reaching an attendance of 40 in 1818;

CRUDWELL school from the mid-seventeenth century but was poorly attended; **OAKSEY** school by 1818, poorly attended; (**ALDBOURNE** is an interesting case, though Williams did not collect here); **OGBOURNE ST ANDREW** school by 1818 but by 1833 had mostly transferred to Marlborough; **WANBOROUGH** intermittent provision during the eighteenth century, well provided for by the nineteenth century; **HINTON PARVA** school from 1777, only ten attending in 1818.

TWO INSTANCES: KEMPSFORD (GLOS), ASTON & COTE (OXON)

Kempsford is an interesting case in that, though an unexceptional Thames-side village, it was unusually well appointed:

In 1693 Lord Weymouth was paying a schoolmaster £5 a year to teach children at Kempsford, and a building called the school house, though possibly not then used for that purpose, was mentioned in 1706. In 1709 Lord Weymouth settled £10 a year, payable out of estates in Ross-on-Wye and Weobley (both Herefs), to pay a schoolmaster. The master recorded at Kempsford in 1715 was presumably employed by the charity, which in 1735 was teaching poor children to read free of charge and to write for a payment of 2d a week, while the children from wealthier families paid 1d for reading and 4d for writing. In 1750 a new building for the school, paid for by a subscription among the inhabitants, was put up on the south side of the village street on land given by Lord Weymouth. In 1787 the school was said to be supported by Lord Coleraine, who was presumably meeting the costs not covered by the endowment and pence. ... By 1818 60-70 children, all the poor children of the parish, were attending the charity school, and a Sunday school supported by the vicar Thomas Huntingford had been started in a cottage adjoining the vicarage.⁵⁰

The last sentence is notable: as early as 1818, all poor children were provided for. A spin-off here is that one Joseph Ricketts attended school in Kempsford from adjoining Castle Eaton: he later set up as a printer in Highworth. (See section on the broadside trade, p. 180 *infra*.) Similarly, Aston, a not especially prominent enclave, was well served from an early stage, including this baroque arrangement:

A private day school, opened in 1826, supported from voluntary contributions and pence, continued in 1835, and a private day and night school, run, according to the curate, by 'a dwarf of bad character', was mentioned in the 1860s but had closed by 1872.⁵¹

(From which we gather that what passed for 'education' was subject to hijacking by freaks of one sort or another: *plus ça change?*)

What do these records tell us? Qualifications to evidence of this order are much rehearsed. Existence of a school does not guarantee attendance; and attendance does

not guarantee learning, still less use (Historian's Myopia, an incurable condition, comes into play). Of the National School at ASTON (Oxon), 'By 1866 accommodation had been increased from 72 to 95, and by 1868 there were 42 boys and 56 girls on the roll from Aston, Cote, Chimney, and Shifford. Many parents saw little advantage, however, and attendance was usually lower. About 17 children were employed in farm and other work almost continuously, and 24 temporarily paid for by the curate were removed as soon as he withdrew support.'⁵² To seek to measure literacy levels by the (mere) existence of schools, furthermore, is to suppose that these skills are exclusively propagated by such institutions—the family may have been as significant an agent in the period.

LECTO-LITERACY AND GRAPHO-LITERACY 'Literacy' is invoked as monolithic, reading and writing axiomatically bound up together, but a significant thread running through these *Victoria County History* synopses is an embedded (pre-1870) distinction between the teaching of reading and of writing, the latter generally less common than the former. Instances of examples of reading only from *Victoria County History* include: **BARNSELY** (Glos), 'From the beginning of his incumbency in 1767 the rector Charles Coxwell paid women to teach poor children to read';⁵³ **BIBURY** (Glos), 'Charles Coxwell, during his incumbency 1806–9, paid four women, two in Bibury, one in Arlington, and one in Ablington, to teach children to read and in 1807 he reported that reading was adequately taught but not writing';⁵⁴ **FAIRFORD** (Glos), 'There was an unlicensed teacher in Fairford in 1619. By 1705 a Mr Smith of London had given a rent-charge of 30s in Fairford for teaching poor children to read';⁵⁵ **KEMPSFORD** (Glos), 'The master recorded at Kempsford in 1715 was presumably employed by the charity, which in 1735 was teaching poor children to read free of charge and to write for a payment of 2d a week, while the children from wealthier families paid 1d for reading and 4d for writing';⁵⁶ **ASTON** (Oxon), 'By deeds of 1709 and 1713 ratified under his will Thomas Horde (d. 1715) charged lands in Aston manor with £6 a year to teach 20 poor children of Aston and Cote to read the Bible';⁵⁷ **BAMPTON** (Oxon), Susannah Frederick (d. 1798) 'invested £100 left by her aunt Mary Croft (d. 1719) to teach 12 poor boys and girls of Bampton to read the bible' and 'In 1808 three small schools funded by voluntary payments taught reading, arithmetic, and needlework';⁵⁸ **DUCKLINGTON** (Oxon), 'Another small school, remembered for teaching reading and

arithmetic but not writing, was held in a cottage west of the Strickland Arms in the 1830s or 1840s';⁵⁹ **STANDLAKE** (Oxon), 'William Plasterer of Stanton Harcourt, by will proved 1711, left £30 to be invested for educating poor children of Standlake, and the rector John Chambers, by will proved 1721, left c. 12 a. towards teaching them to read. In 1738 fifteen children were taught reading and writing under the endowment, and five more at the rector's expense ... In 1808 the endowed pupils learned reading only, but 33 others, supported from parental contributions, learned writing and accounts also';⁶⁰ **HINTON PARVA** (Wilts), 'In 1834 the children, who entered at four, were all taught reading and the girls also did needlework.'⁶¹

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACQUISITION In summary, most of the Upper Thames market towns (such as Lechlade, Bampton, Faringdon) had some arrangement from an early date (possibly the seventeenth century), though not necessarily for the poor. Provision in the villages, by contrast, was patchy in this period, dependent largely on the parochial vagaries of patronage: various endowments (*passim*), support from the local landowner (Kempsford had Lords Weymouth and Coleraine, Crudwell had Lord Lucas), and—importantly—the zealotry of incumbents (Reverends Charles Coxwell at Barnsley and later Bibury, and Thomas Coker at Hinton Parva). A holy (*sic*) alliance of gentry and clergy, plus progressive (*sic*) state encroachment. From this potted record, it is possible to say that schools in some form were widespread in the district by the early nineteenth century. *There is potentially an irony in the connection to popular song: rudimentary literacy made possible by philanthropy of the local great and good may have been used by rustics to acquire words of songs frowned upon by those very forces.*

LITERACY LEVELS AMONG WILLIAMS'S INFORMANTS

How many of Williams's informants attended one of these village schools is impossible to know. What may, in crude form, be established is outcomes. The principal source here is the parish marriage registers, which record whether a party could sign or merely make a mark. The yes / no results of this operose exercise appear in the main table. Of the 147 singers (from c. 200) included in the table, literacy has been established in 112 cases, of whom 83 are deemed literate and 29 not, equating to approximately 74% literacy. The figure of 112 includes a small number from sources other than the marriage registers: Lot Couling, a bachelor, submitted articles to

the local press; John Ockwell served in local government; Alfred Spiers worked as a GWR agent; Mrs Field was the village postmistress; and Mrs Phillips corresponded with Williams. There is also a potential link to those texts which were submitted—manuscripts not in Williams's hand—though there is no guarantee these were written out by the singer. (Mrs Brown, (?Mr) Long and Frederick Newman, who all dwelt outside the fieldwork zone and sent in their texts, and Miss A[nnie] Cross, the village schoolmistress at South Marston, are excluded from the table.)

The *grosso modo* percentage as it stands raises, of course, all sorts of questions. Many other factors have to be taken into account to make these figures meaningful. The obvious qualification, mentioned above, is that this 'evidence' is asymmetrical: grapho-literacy can be taken to entail ability to read, but not necessarily the reverse.[⊙] From here, there are two orders of correlation: to generation spans—do older informants exhibit lower literacy?—and to occupation. (The integrated table of informants is set out so as to facilitate these exercises.) **CORRELATION TO AGE** Of nine informants in the period 1816–1829, two were literate and six made a mark (one is not yet found). Thereafter marks are intermittent, though there is a concentration at the start of the 1840s. The latest mark found is Eli Dawes, born 1861. **CORRELATION TO OCCUPATION** Craftsmen—smiths, carpenters, tailor, masons—are all literate (James Truman, one of the masons, had a fine copperplate hand). The shepherds divide roughly half and half. The 'agricultural labourers', however, are far from universally illiterate: *this, surely, is the important correction to the received view*. Further analysis beckons, such as correlation to gender. Ultimately the corpus, its only significance *musical*, is too narrow and too quirky to permit useful generalization. The 'evidence' as it stands, however lacunary and unsatisfactory, is surely sufficient for the purpose at hand, namely to establish a general picture of popular literacy in the period.

Perhaps more pertinently, there is the development question: rather than viewing rustic (il)literacy absolutely, we can ask whether it ran in the family, or whether there are significant detectable shifts (gains) between generations. This connects to the main issue: was there a substantial *increase* in literacy in the early nineteenth century, which is one implication underlying the final burgeoning of the broadside trade? This exercise would involve comparing levels of literacy amongst the informants with

[⊙] David Vincent deals with objections to this assumption: 'Although there is the possibility that a bride or groom may have acquired the meaningless trick of drawing two words on a special occasion, in practice the quality of writing indicates a more substantial command of the skill.' (*Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750–1914* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 17.)

those of their parents (preceding generation). Two cases. The Coulings of Kempford were a family of craftsmen and literate across the generations. Conversely, Elijah Iles (born c. 1822) could write his name unlike his father (born 1799), which implies a gain of one generation over the previous. The case of John Pillinger of Lechlade (biography *infra*), which appears to be similar, illustrates the pitfalls of this type of investigation. His father (born in 1800 as Pellenger *sic*) was illiterate but John (born 1832) signed his name on marrying in 1857. Against this needs to be set, however, the fact that Pillinger's siblings shared their father's condition of illiteracy, all making a mark on marrying (Caroline 6 November 1850, Thomas 13 May 1854, Joseph 12 June 1865—all Lechlade). How then did John acquire his (in context) exceptional literacy? The obvious explanation is as a result of his military service in the Crimea.

On the whole, this restricted, superficial investigation tends to confirm the view of significant gains in literacy among working country people in the early nineteenth century (that is, before the advent of universal schooling after 1870), especially in the ability to *read*. The sketchy body of record—specifying the teaching of reading, the fact that marriage registers tend to underplay lecto-literacy—points this way. At issue, finally, is less possession than *use*. In the context of a practice of singing, the full trajectory becomes: existence of a school ✂ attendance at school ✂ literacy possession ✂ literacy use(s) ✂ making out simple words of a song from a flimsy sheet. The evidential chain, more than usually fraught, holds out a connection to the great broadside revival. Importantly, the 'literacy' gained was of a rudimentary order. (Texts written out by singers, a further instance of use, reveals an engagingly naive grapholect.) The gulf between collector (here, Williams) and informant was not one of absolute literacy / illiteracy, but rather of *lettered / unlettered*: this collector could not just read and write—he was versed in Shakespeare, not to say Virgil & Co.

1864 Marriage solemnized in the Parish Church in the Parish of Hankerton in the County of Wilt

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
74	Nov 28 1864	William King	21	Single	Labourer	Hankerton	Joseph King	Labourer
		Marianne Sparrow	24	Spinster		Hankerton	William Sparrow	Carpenter

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, after solemnizing me,

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Rose Honey Sparrow in the Presence of us, Richard Annum William Buckland
Mary Jane Sparrow

The marriage of William King, of Castle Eaton, at Hankerton on 28 November 1864, showing the mark he made

(4) MOBILITY

What, then, are the modalities and motor forces of circulation? The lottery of employment, manifestly, is central, the biggest single cause of rural depopulation. Williams himself touches on this issue, picking out the salient circumstance of village girls leaving to enter service,⁶² in some cases a substantial distance. Parochially, the annual Lady Day upheaval becomes a country life ritual. Williams suggests this may have been as much itchy feet as economic necessity:

Many farm labourers have a natural inclination to rove from place to place, and cannot be cured of the propensity. The old system of fairs encouraged this tendency; the habit of going to be hired became ingrained in the men and youths. As the time came round they began to grow restless, as do birds at the season of migration; they were bound to obey the innate prompting and look about for new quarters.⁶³

I: INSTANCES OF SINGER MOBILITY NOTED BY WILLIAMS⁶⁴ With characteristic quirkiness, Williams's headnotes to individual texts acknowledge in a small number of instances that a singer is 'late of' a place—in relation, that is, to the locus of collecting—sometimes not troubling to specify the place of collecting itself.

Cases in which both locations are given: **ALICE BARNETT** collected at Quenington, formerly at Ablington; **SHADRACH HAYDON** collected at Bampton, variously just 'of Bampton', (Ox 199) 'of [Lyford and] Hatford', or (Ox 197) 'late of Hatford and Lyford'; **MRS RUSSELL** collected at Tetbury, late of Crudwell; **'G' GILES** collected at Blunsdon, 'late Aston' (Wt 315); **WILLIAM FALCONER** collected at Taynton, late of Brize Norton (Ox 237); **GEORGE GRUBB** collected at Ewen, late of South Marston.

Cases in which place of collecting is not given: **CHRISTOPHER CARTER** 'late of Watchfield' (Bk 23); **THOMAS SMART**, 'late of Broad Blunsdon' (Wt 320); **DAVID SAWYER**, 'late of Ogbourne' (Wt 453); **RICHARD HARRIS**, 'late of Oaksey' (Wt 430). Of these, the place of collecting can be identified in three cases: Carter died in Faringdon Workhouse and was buried at nearby Longworth, suggesting that that was where he had moved to,⁶⁴ while both Smart and Sawyer were at Stratton St Margaret,⁶⁵ which just leaves Harris to locate. (To compound this imprecision, Williams sometimes suppresses the qualifier 'late of' between the original form of

⁶⁴ By definition, mobility here only applies to local movements, or those gravitating *into* the district, excluding the important case of any who may have sung but who took their music away with them to some grimy conurbation—such as railway Swindon—though in one case exceptionally, chasing a text from several sources, Williams 'waited some months for a communication from Kent, whither a singer had removed' ('Will the Weaver', Bk 27).

the note and the version appearing in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*: thus with Smart and Sawyer, cited, we find the amendments '~~late of~~ Broad Blunsdon' (Wt 320) and '~~late of~~ Ogbourne' (Wt 433) respectively, creating the misleading impression that they were still in residence at those places at the point of collecting. (See Sawyer biography *infra*.)

2: SINGER MOBILITY FROM INDEPENDENT SOURCES Source, principally, is census in this case. Conveniently, the time-frame of Williams's chronicling means that many of his informants were in middle age during the census years of the nineteenth century: the common fact of large families provides a fuller picture of movement than the decadal span of the census promises, since place of birth of children is recorded. In some cases, this means quite detailed itineraries can be established.⁹

Of those who originated from without the Alfredian Upper Thames, five moved a substantial distance. The greatest migratory leap was made by **THOMAS LARKIN**, a native of Northiam in Sussex who, after a move to neighbouring Brede, travelled to Shrivenham (Berks), a distance of over 100 miles. **HERBERT GASCOIGNE** moved from Kilmington (Somerset) to Kemble (Glos). **EDWARD ROBERTS** travelled from Deerhurst (north of Gloucester) to Shepton Malet in Somerset, before moving to Siddington (near Cirencester, c. 50 miles). **MRS SESSIONS** moved from Oddingley (Worcs) to East Hendred (Berks), some 55 miles. **ALFRED SPIERS** migrated from Defford (Worcs) to Lechlade (Glos) in several stages totalling more than 30 miles.

Four more originated closer to Williams's boundaries: **WILLIAM WISE** migrated from Weston-on-the-Green (between Oxford and Bicester) the 18 miles to Alvescot (Oxon); **JAMES COLLINS** moved from Bladon (Oxon) to Lechlade (Glos), some 17 miles; **SARAH CALCOTT** moved from Cassington (Oxon, barely beyond the pale) to Northmoor (Oxon), no more than 6 miles; and **CHARLES HOPE** started from Upper Swell (Glos) and ended at Filkins via Shipton (both Oxon), a total of 17 miles.

Then there is the category of those who, starting within the district, moved beyond its confines but finally gravitated back. Two remarkable instances of this: **MRS MACKIE** (née Shilton) of Lechlade who lived and married in Brixton, south London; and **DAVID SAWYER** who drifted from his native Ogbourne St Andrew

⁹ At least one historian misses this point, averring that the returns 'do not ... throw any light on the intervening stages of migration.' W A Armstrong, 'The Flight from the Land' in *The Victorian Countryside*, edited G E Mingay (London, 1981), Volume 1, p. 118.

(Wilts) the eight downland miles northwards to Bishopstone, thence to Lyncombe on the southern fringes of Bath (then Somerset) and back to Stratton St Margaret (Wilts) where he was found by Williams: a total of more than 70 miles (biography *infra*). More usually, those who circled out and back did so within the district: Mrs Goodfield of Crudwell (Wilts) lived briefly at Foxley, a few miles to the south west; John Johnson of Hinton Parva (Wilts) moved a few miles west along the downside then returned to Hinton; two of the Kings of Castle Eaton (Wilts) lived briefly at adjoining Kempford (Glos); Alfred Russell of Stanton Harcourt (Oxon) lived at nearby Eynsham and Northmoor then gravitated back. Other instances fit less obviously to a pattern. William King of Castle Eaton (Wilts) migrated westward to Hankerton, where he married (1864), returning *en famille* to Castle Eaton by 1869, before moving on to neighbouring Inglesham (by 1878), Buscot (Berks, by 1880) and, after a further stage (1891 not found, but not either Buscot or Highworth), Highworth (Wilts), where he was collected by Williams. Examples of multiple movement include:

ROBERT CARPENTER (a shepherd): Duntisbourne Rous (born 1850) ✂ Coates (child bn 1877) ✂ Clapton (child bn 1878) ✂ Farmington (child bn 1880) ✂ Coln St Dennis (census 1881) ✂ Preston (child bn 1882) ✂ Sapperton (child bn 1887) ✂ Kemble (census 1891) ✂ 'Cerney Field', an enclave in South Cerney parish (collected by Williams *c.* 1915). Eight moves totalling some 50 miles, but within a small compass (all Glos).

ALICE BARNETT: Siddington (born 1843) ✂ Preston (married 1862) ✂ Shorncote (child bn 1868) ✂ Poulton (child bn 1873) ✂ Ablington (child bn 1876) ✂ Baunton (child bn 1882) ✂ Ablington (census 1891) ✂ Quenington (collected by Williams *c.* 1915). At least seven moves (all Glos), perhaps in all 25 miles.

WILLIAM FAULKNER: Brize Norton (born 1858) ✂ Kingham (child bn 1885) ✂ Sherborne (child bn 1889) ✂ Taynton (census 1891): a total of 23 miles in three stages (Sherborne is Gloucestershire, but otherwise Oxfordshire).

More instances might be cited. The point is that no one working exclusively from notations supplied by Williams would suspect so significant a degree of mobility. More specifically, this external information serves to correct the impression created by Williams's token acknowledgements of movement: to describe Alice Barnett as 'late of' Ablington (*supra*) suggests an exceptional, once-for-all move at odds with the

full story. The effect of this is mildly distorting, though surely not deliberately so.

What census does not record is, of course, the question of *motive* for movement. As already observed, the motor force is employment, whether through necessity or choice. Shifts driven by work in agriculture seem to have been largely local. The large-scale moves cited above concern estate jobs: the blacksmith Gascoigne of Somerset was recruited by Biddulph for his Kemble estate (see biography *infra*), and Larkin moved from Sussex to be gamekeeper at Shrivensham on the Barrington estate (was this one advertised?). Another common cause of large moves was domestic service, as in the contrasting cases of Mrs Rowles (Marston Meysey to Witney definitively) and Sarah Timbrel (Eastleach to Leonard Stanley and back again).

A further, sometimes related factor is marriage. Take the case of Eli Dawes (biography *infra*), who as a young man moved for employment from his native Kempsford (Glos) a mile or two north to Southrop, where he married one of the natives and settled for the remainder of his long life. In other cases, the wife adopted her husband's parish. Williams makes the point: 'Marriages of parties of the same village are rare.'⁶⁶ If marriage outside the village is the norm, it was usually a *neighbouring* parish.

Finally, a cause of movement in old age is to be cared for by a relative: this applies notably to Shadrach Haydon, who moved from the area around Faringdon to Bampton, where he was found by Williams (and Sharp); but a number of singers moved away after being collected, such as David Sawyer, whose death is recorded at Cheltenham whither he removed presumably following the decease of his wife.

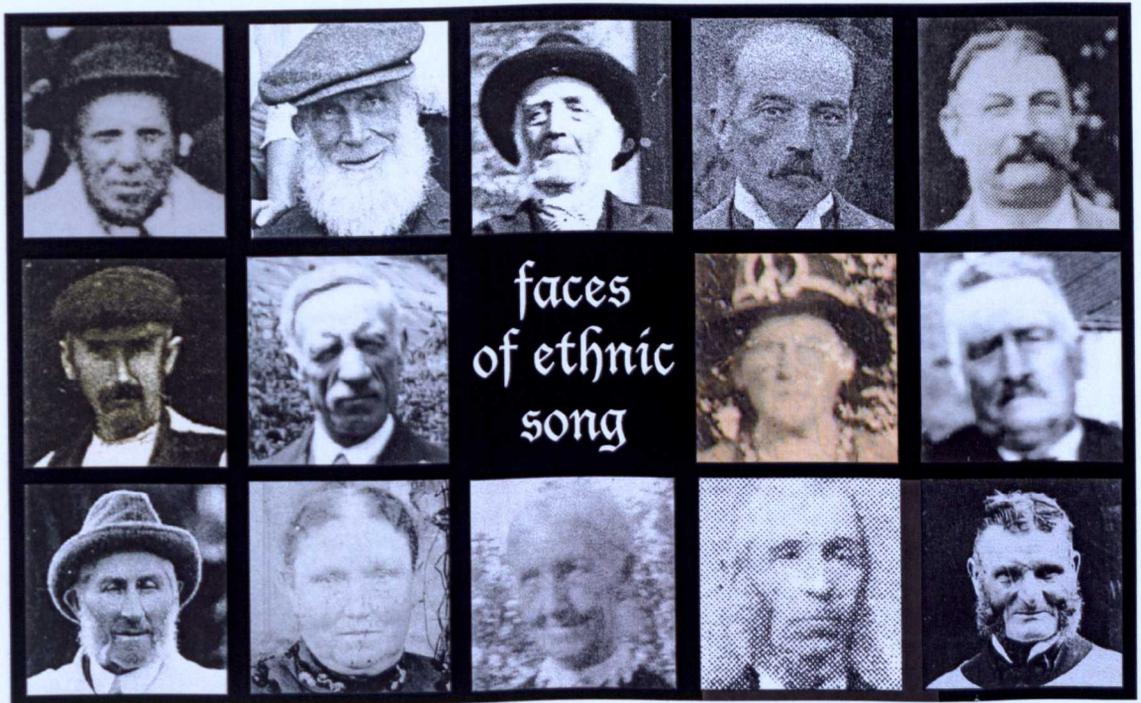
This corpus is too restricted and quirky to stand useful generalization: a footloose period at coming of age (a period of musical receptiveness?), connected to employment, sometimes resulting in marriage, and often followed by gravitation back to the native parish, but not invariably. Historians are much given to the detecting of 'pattern' but perhaps we always finally confront an irreducible congeries of individual circumstance. Finally, lest the pendulum should swing back too far, it should be noted that a significant number of singers concerned did not move, or barely.

The capital adjustment here is to qualify the privileged association of singer with place of collecting, often a circumstantial gravitating rather than some deep bond.



2 : BRIEF LIVES

Complementing the analytical-synthetic avenues (*supra*) opened up by the comprehensive table of singers, this section presents discursive vignettes of individuals. Two groups are of particular moment. Firstly, those heavyweights by whom Williams was impressed—Elijah Iles (Inglesham, Wilts), David Sawyer ('Ogbourne', Wilts), 'Wassail' Harvey (Cricklade, Wilts), Daniel Morgan (Braydon, Wilts), John Pillinger (Lechlade, Glos), Shadrach Haydon (Bampton, Oxon), Charles Tanner (Bampton, Oxon)—and whom he generously documented. Secondly, those for whom photographs have been located, listed in Chapter I, largely from fieldwork:⁶ Alfred Howse (Latton, Wilts), John Ockwell (Somerford Keynes, Glos), Herbert Gascoigne (Kemble, Glos), Eli Price (South Cerney, Glos), Edwin Griffin (Hatherop, Glos), Sarah Timbrel (Quenington, Glos), Eli Dawes (Southrop, Glos), Alfred Spiers (Southrop, Glos), Mrs Brunsten (Clanfield, Oxon), Ellen Trinder (Northmoor, Oxon), William King (Castle Eaton, Wilts), John Johnson (Hinton Parva, Wilts). With the exception of Charles Tanner, the sole overlap of the two groups, and Alfred Howse, published in a canal connection (p. 49 *supra*), none of these pictures has previously been used: they consequently constitute an important element of the originality of this thesis.



⁶ Not including Shadrach Haydon and Henry Radband, both at Bampton, photographed by Cecil Sharp.

Elijah Iles (Inglesham, Wilts) : 1822-1917

ELIJAH ILES ('GRAMP') WAS BORN C. 1822 AT LECHLADE (WHERE HIS PARENTS HAD married), though he does not figure in the register there. In 1851 he was living at Coleshill with his parents, aged 27 (*sic*).⁶⁷ He married the following year (21 February 1852) at neighbouring Highworth, Ann Gibbs: Iles signed in a neat sloping hand, but his bride merely made a mark. In 1861 the family was still at Highworth, the children including Sarah Ann (aged 13, native), who was to care for her father in his dotage. Iles disappears from the records until 1901, by which date he had finally gravitated to Inglesham: he was then aged 78, living on parish relief with his widowed daughter Sarah Lawrence, granddaughter Emily Lawrence aged 11, a native of Ashbury, and

1852, Marriage solemnized in the Church in the Parish of Highworth in the County of Wilts								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
106	February 21 1852	Elijah Iles Ann Gibbs	25 21	Single Single	Labourer -	Both at Highworth	Joseph Iles Robert Long Gibbs	Labourer Labourer
Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England by the Rev. Robert Benjamin								
This Marriage was solemnized between us		Elijah Iles Ann Gibbs		in the Presence of us		Thomas Gibbs & Ann Arthur Goodditch & Mark		
Elijah Iles marries Ann Gibbs at the church of St Michael, Highworth, on 21 February 1852: a fine sloping hand								

three boarders. Some time in 1913 or 1914, Iles, rustic sage and champion songster,⁶⁸ was discovered by Williams, who fills many pages with his sterling virtues:

His widowed daughter tends him in his age—he is nearly ~~ninety-four~~ [ninety-five]. The farmer has assured them of the use of the cottage at a nominal rent as long as they have need of it ... Gramp is really a splendid figure—a delightful and congenial soul. ~~He is brimful of the old life and memories of past days, and he has a keenly penetrating eye and spirit and a capacity for summing up the values of things, though he is of great simplicity and delivers his opinions bluntly and wittily, in a truly rustic fashion.~~ He is of medium height, is broad and well-made and as erect as many a man at sixty. His head is massive and his features are typically English, with heavy brows, expressive eyes, aristocratic nose and clean shaven lips and chin. His long, silky, snow-white hair hangs nearly to his shoulders ~~below his billy-cock hat~~ and adds true reverence to his appearance. Every day, when it is dry and fine, with his white Stockinged feet inside a pair of large slippers and gripping a stout stick in his hand, Gramp walks down the road to the old pound and chats with his neighbour. When it is wet and cold he sits indoors by the fire, hat on head, and smokes his pipe, or hums over the airs he learned as a youth.

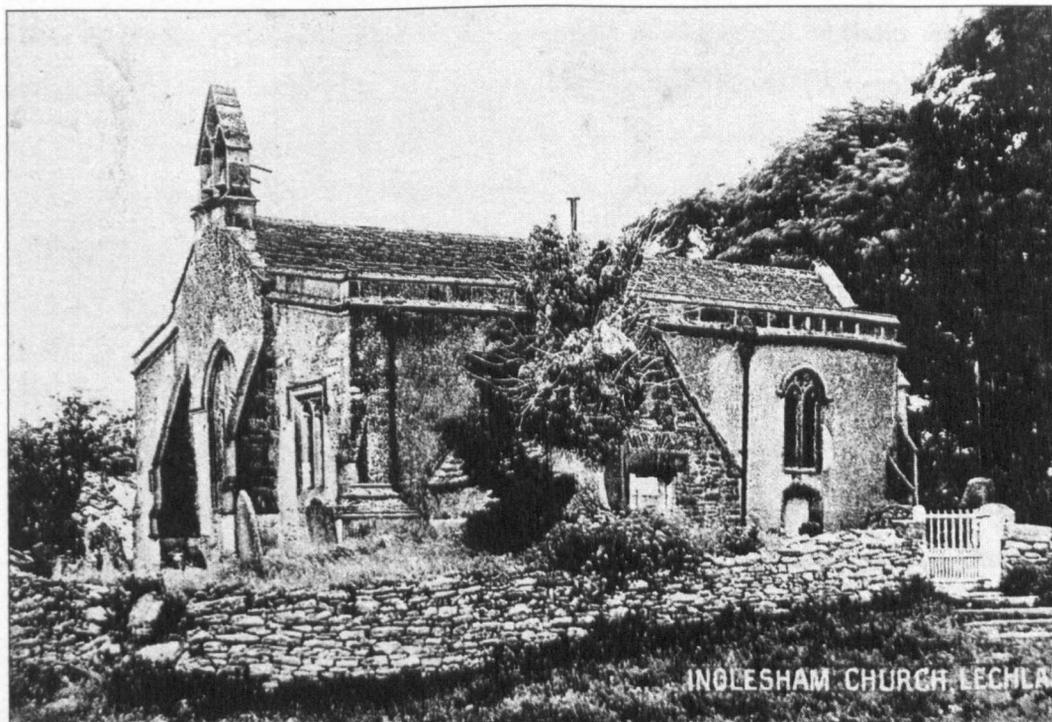
⁶⁸ See Appendix 4 for a full listing of Iles's song repertory.

The old man was born in the parish and has lived in the locality all his days [*sic*]. As a boy he was apprenticed to a baker, but he did not like the trade and he soon ran away from it and went to work on the farm, ploughing with the oxen. He quickly became expert in the handling of them, and when the bailiff upset him and he left to go to another place he immediately assumed command of the bullocks again: he tended them for over thirty years together.

Until he was over ninety Gramp gathered flags and bulrushes from the river Cole, that flows through the field at the back of his cottage and made baskets, chair-bottoms and other articles. He also made the has-socks in use at the quaint little church by the Thames' side.⁶⁸

Iles was buried at Inglesham on 15 March 1917, aged 95. Williams, then serving in the Army in Ireland, submitted a lengthy and heart-felt obituary to the local press:

The old men of the Upper Thames are one by one disappearing, and such interesting materials as they were capable of furnishing, provided they have not already been secured, must pass with them. I often feel sorry to think that the life of the neighbourhood was not more elaborately depicted and typified some twenty years or so ago: the traditions of the English countryside—as I am forcibly reminded here in Ireland, where there is an intense regard for such matters—has been sadly neglected. When all the Elijah Iles's and Wassail Harvey's have gone from our midst valuable links with the past will have been severed, and we shall be the poorer for it. It is by those who have travelled the road of life that we may best be made acquainted with its pleasures and hardships.⁶⁹



Hic iacet sepultus : the little Thames-side church of St John the Baptist, Inglesham, where Elijah Iles lies buried

David Sawyer (Ogbourne, Wilts) : 1832–1918

SUPREME DISPROOF OF THE BELIEF IN RUSTIC *PANTOUFFLARDISME* IS DAVID SAWYER, who was baptized at Ogbourne St Andrew, near Marlborough, on 11 November 1832.⁷⁰ Throughout Williams's song writings, Sawyer is said to be 'of Ogbourne', yet the likelihood is that he had not resided there for half a century by the time he was 'collected'. On 13 August 1853 he married Eleanor Coules (both parties signed) at Bishopstone, a few miles across the downs wither he had presumably drifted for employment. The *ménage* had returned to Ogbourne by 1861, when Sawyer's occupation is listed as 'general dealer', but by 1881 they had moved to Lyncombe, on the outskirts of Bath. By 1901 Sawyer and his wife were living at 138 Winifred Street, Swindon, he working as a 'gardener domestic'. The indications are that by the time Williams stumbled upon Sawyer—the encounter is, alas, not recorded—the latter was living at Stratton St Margaret, adjoining South Marston on the Swindon side. The grounds for this are oblique but add up to a compelling case. In the original version of the introduction to *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Sawyer is said to be 'of Stratton St Margaret', altered to 'Ogbourne' in the book version.⁷¹ In four subsequent headnotes, Sawyer is said to be 'formerly' of Ogbourne (without specifying wither), the first of which occurs in the note to 'The Wild Rover' (Wt 476), printed in the *Standard* serialization on 6 November 1915. In a letter to Mrs Field at Winson, by coincidence Sawyer's niece, Williams reported that he 'often' saw him (cited *infra*), an unlikely occurrence if Sawyer lived at Ogbourne. Then there is the fact that Sawyer's his wife was buried at Stratton St Margaret on 6 January 1917.⁷² Finally, Williams wrote to his wife from India: 'Do you know anything about poor old David Sawyer at the Cross Roads? I wish you'd inquire, or look in and see the old fellow, as I should much like to know how he is.'⁷³ Mrs Williams could hardly 'look in' on someone who lived ten miles away. Thus the 'crossroads' in question is most likely to be the one at Stratton Park, formed by the intersection of Ermin Street and the Swindon-Oxford road, which would have been on Williams's route westwards from South Marston. The point has important bearing on the distribution of his song fieldwork, removing what is otherwise the sole (recorded) informant in the strip of country in the south of the district (see map in Chapter V).

Sawyer was conceivably the most prolific of the old singers Williams chronicled, and a great personal favourite. He was also notable as being one of four singing match champions discovered in the Upper Thames. Since Sawyer does not feature in any of Williams's prose works, direct biographical material is confined to headnotes to the more than 40 texts recovered from his lips.

For this song ... I am indebted to David Sawyer. He and Granny, who is aged eighty-nine, live in a little cottage by the road side. David does all the work. He gets Granny's breakfast, cleans up, makes the bed, puts on the pot, cooks the dinner, washes the clothes once a week, and sees to everything else. He has travelled far in his time and is possessed of much useful knowledge, in addition to his songs, which are numerous. "You never seed a better songbook than I be, I warn," says David. And I admit that I never did. ('The New Garden Fields', Wt 460)

Au passage, the cryptic notation 'he has travelled far in his time' tends to confirm the trajectory reconstructed above. The note to 'The Shearer's Song' (Wt 468) refers to Sawyer's having sung the piece 'at the shearing feasts every year about the Downside'. His renown as a singer at bucolic gatherings earned him a moniker:

The majority of the pieces sung by David Sawyer, the sheep-shearer, of Ogbourne, were rather sentimental. [He] was styled "Phœbus," since, at harvest-home, he always sang the harvest song containing the line—"Bright Phœbus is sinking in the west."⁷⁴

It is certain that Williams spent much time in Sawyer's company, using him as a touchstone against which to evaluate songs located elsewhere in his zone of investigations. By happy chance, Williams discovered at Winson (Glos) a daughter of Sawyer's sister Emily (then Mrs Davis, born c. 1838), also a singer:

Fancy David Sawyer having a sister! I often see him. I have spent many hours with him and Granny. Of course, we talk of many things, and David has told me a good deal about his life and affairs, but he has never told me of his sister. I must mention her to him when next I see him. He does not know that I go so far for songs; I have promised him a book when they are published, if he is still living then.⁷⁵

With exemplary diligence, Williams duly made the arduous bicycle journey to Theale in June 1916, where he found Mrs Davis 'very much like' her brother.⁷⁶ She died within a few weeks of his visit. In the event, Sawyer himself died at the age of 86 in 1918, while Williams was still serving in India and before he was able to produce the book he had for so long contemplated.

'Wassail' Harvey (Cricklade, Wilts) : 1826–1915

SOME UNCERTAINTY ATTENDS THE IDENTITY OF THIS SINGER IN OFFICIAL RECORD, not least because he is known in the Alfredian corpus purely by his colourful sobriquet. Working backwards, only one burial register entry matches the terminal biography supplied by Williams, namely that Harvey died at Cricklade in 1915 *aetatis* 90 (see headnote *infra*): a Henry Harvey was buried at Cricklade St Sampson on 27 August 1915, aged 89, his place of residence misrendered by the functionary as the 'Vorty' (a vernacularism for the Forty, an enclave at the town's southern rim).⁷⁷ This in turn tallies with a baptism date of 25 June 1826 for a Henry Harvey at Cricklade St Mary, son of George and Ann. The complication lies between these outer points, an expanse of 90 years in which a pair of coeval Henry Harveys consistently occupy the Cricklade records. The considerable effort of demographic detective work required to resolve the issue would not significantly affect the outline.

Chapter XIII of the original version of *Round About the Upper Thames* supplies much fascinating background about Harvey's long life, virtually all of it deleted from the book version of 1922.

Then there is old Wassail, who, with the aid of two sticks, manages to hobble up the High-street every day, when it is fine, and to keep in touch with former scenes and times. Both he and his aged wife worked for Squire Archer, of Lushill, when they were young—Wassail for eight shillings a week, and his wife, as a girl, for threepence and, afterwards, for sixpence a day. At one time all the women and girls in the fields struck work and went in a body to the farm to demand more money, but when they arrived at the door their courage failed—Wassail's wife alone dared to speak. Then Jacky called her "a silly humbugging thing," and told her to go home, though he gave the women more wages, as they desired.

"Cowman, how do these cows milk?" inquired John of Wassail one day. "Oh, all right, sir," replied Wassail.

"Ah! we shall have a short cut next summer. 'Tis a dark Christmas," John returned. The following year proved very nearly disastrous to the flocks and herds, for the big mead of forty acres by the river only yielded six tons of hay. Wassail's father and grandfather both lived to the age of one hundred and four years. As a boy Wassail went with the boats and helped to convey corn, salt, and other produce to Lechlade and Radcot Bridge. If the river was swollen with rains they had to go full trot with the horses in order to round the curves. At such times professional pilots, under the directorship of one Jim Booseley, of Lechlade, steered the boats: an amateur would not have been able to negotiate the curves with the river so high. [An earlier passage explains: 'The broad open space at the lower end of the town ... was formerly a pound of the river. Here were the wharves

at which corn, cheese, wool, coal and stone were deposited and the boats loaded for conveying it down stream to Oxford and London, before the canals and railways were built, or thought of.}]⁷⁸

As a songster, Harvey, a member of a noted singing family at Cricklade,⁷⁹ was among the most prolific Williams chronicled, yielding more than 20 songs for his collection. The story of their first encounter is set out in the note to 'Down Radcliffe Highway' (Wt 353), cited in Chapter V.3 (p. 367). Harvey was almost certainly one of the early discoveries that led Williams to pursue song more purposively, an affectionate association dating possibly from 1914, as this passage from *Round About the Upper Thames* indicates, introducing a text of 'Botany Bay' (Wt 350):

There was a song for some years prevalent concerning the deportation of convicts to Australia. This old Wassail sang to me, sitting in his arm-chair by the fire one rough winter's night.⁸⁰

The note to 'The Fox and the Grey Goose' (Wt 354), printed in instalment XI of the *Standard* serial on 25 December 1915, provides the detail of decease referred to above, and explains how he came to acquire his distinctive moniker in a community much given to nicknames:

This and the following piece, "Daddy Reynolds," are obviously related. "The Fox and the Grey Goose" is much the older version, and is also more complete than the other. This I obtained of the late "Wassail" Harvey of Cricklade, who died recently in his ninetieth year. The reason of his being called "Wassail" was that he was the last of the old band of wassailers, who used to perform their merry games at Cricklade every Christmas time. He was a dear, gentle old man, of great simplicity, but a fine singer. [In *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, the whole of this is deleted in favour of a perfunctory form of words: "There were two very good versions of this. The following I obtained of "Wassail" Harvey, Cricklade.']]

A wassail piece (Wt 367), appropriately, features among the texts recovered from Harvey. Furthermore, the account of the local wassail that Williams recycles many times in his writings on tradition and lore was derived from this source.

The particulars of this [*the Cricklade wassail*] I obtained from an old man named Harvey at Cricklade in 1914. He was called "Wassail" Harvey, because he was the last survivor of the Cricklade wassailers, and he was also a great singer of folk-songs. His father and grand-father had also been members of the wassail team. From him I learned particulars of the local wassail as it was practised in his day; it has been discontinued for about half a century. The old man died in 1916 [*sic?*] at the advanced age of 90 years.⁸¹

Daniel Morgan (Braydon, Wilts) : 1855-19??

ALFRED WILLIAMS WAS EVIDENTLY TAKEN BY DANIEL MORGAN, WHO FURNISHED him with an exotic ancestral spiel many times rehearsed. The will-'o-the-wisp character of the subject means that any biographical reconstruction must work outwards from two census entries (1891 and 1901) located. Born c. 1855, possibly at Cheltenham, Morgan married c. 1870, and was apparently dwelling in a tent on Liddiard Plain, west of Swindon, by the late 1870s (when a daughter was born).⁸² The family had returned to Liddiard by 1891 following a period in Oxfordshire. That year's census for Liddiard Millicent had a separately scheduled panel appended, listing eight *ménages* living in tents, of which the Morgans are the last. Daniel, aged 36, was a licensed hawker, both he and his wife Elizabeth born in the 'UK'. Four of the five children listed were natives of 'Liddiard Plain'. Ten years later, the family was living at 30 Worcester Street, Cheltenham, Morgan and his wife recorded as natives of that place, he running a shop as a general dealer. Four children are given as natives of 'Swindon', with later sons William (9) and John (7) born in Cheltenham.

No. of HOUSES		No. of HOUSES		NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON-DITION as to Marriages	AGE last Birthday	PROFESSION or OCCUPATION
No. of HOUSES	No. of HOUSES	No. of HOUSES	No. of HOUSES					
8				Daniel Morgan	Head	all	36	Licensed Hawker
				Elizabeth Morgan	Wife	all		
				Sarah Morgan	Daughter			
				Daniel Morgan	Son			
				Edith Morgan	Daughter			
				Margaret Morgan	Daughter			
				Fluence Morgan	Daughter			

Life under canvas? Daniel Morgan, a 'licensed hawker', and family are enumerated for the census of 1891

By the time of collecting c. 1915, Morgan had returned to north-east Wiltshire, this time exchanging romantic life in a tent for a cosy cottage at Braydon Wood Lane (Purton). His nomadic, tinker-like propensities were evidently in the blood, as Williams's note to 'Bold Sir Rylas' (Wt 322) recounts in some detail:

A very old song, formerly popular in North Wilts, especially around Bradon, where it is still sung by the local traveller and dealer, Daniel Morgan. Morgan's great-grandfather was a squire, and he disinherited his son and also attempted to shoot him, lying in wait for him for three days and nights with a loaded gun, because he courted a pretty gipsy girl.

In spite of the squire's opposition, however, his son married the gipsy lass and left home to travel with his wife's kindred and earn his living by dealing, and attending the markets and fairs. Daniel Morgan, of whom I obtained Sir Rylas, is a ~~keen~~, witty, and ~~extremely~~ vivacious man. He lives amid the woods of Bradon, the relic of the once large forest of that name, in which the famous Fulke Fitzwarrene is said to have defied the King at the time of the Barons' War. I have spent pleasant hours in the cottage, during the dark winter's evenings, listening to the old man's songs, which he sang ~~as he was~~ sitting on a low stool cutting out clothes pegs from green withy, while his wife sat opposite ~~him~~ making potato nets. The "I an dan dilly," etc, is, ~~of course~~, meant to interpret the sound of the bugle horn.

The story had some mileage in it for lecture purposes, with a twist discreetly omitted from the printed version.

It was here (BRAYDON WOOD) that I found one of my most curious songs: Bold Sir Rylas. This was sung by an old gipsy dealer DAN MORGAN who lived in the forest. They say that his great-grandfather was a squire, and that he disinherited his son and tried to shoot him, lying in wait for him for three days and nights with loaded PISTOLS, because he courted a pretty gipsy girl. In spite of his father's opposition, however, the young man married the gipsy lass and left home and joined his wife's people: he got his living by dealing, and trading at the markets & fairs. I found him busy making bird cages and mole traps while his wife made nets. They told me it was potato nets, but I thought they were more likely to be rabbit nets or fishing nets because you don't see potato nets 20 YARDS LONG SPREAD over holes and banks and mounds. (Thee bist come again then! oh ah ... *[illegible from here]*)⁸³

No trace has been found of Morgan's death but, by an odd coincidence, John Baldwin was to track down, in the late 1960s, his youngest son John lingering on in the hallowed precincts of South Marston. Morgan *filis*, born c. 1894 from census (*supra*) but 1896 from his own testimony, was also a singer, though by then very feeble. (See tunes transcribed in Appendix 2.) In the course of a lengthy interview, Baldwin elicited much trivia concerning the frail epigone's own life, and took a rather fine photograph of him, but established very little on Morgan *père*, the customary squandered opportunity. As for the famous family tableau, it had become by then truly threadbare, emblematic, perhaps, of the atrophy of a whole world of life and music:

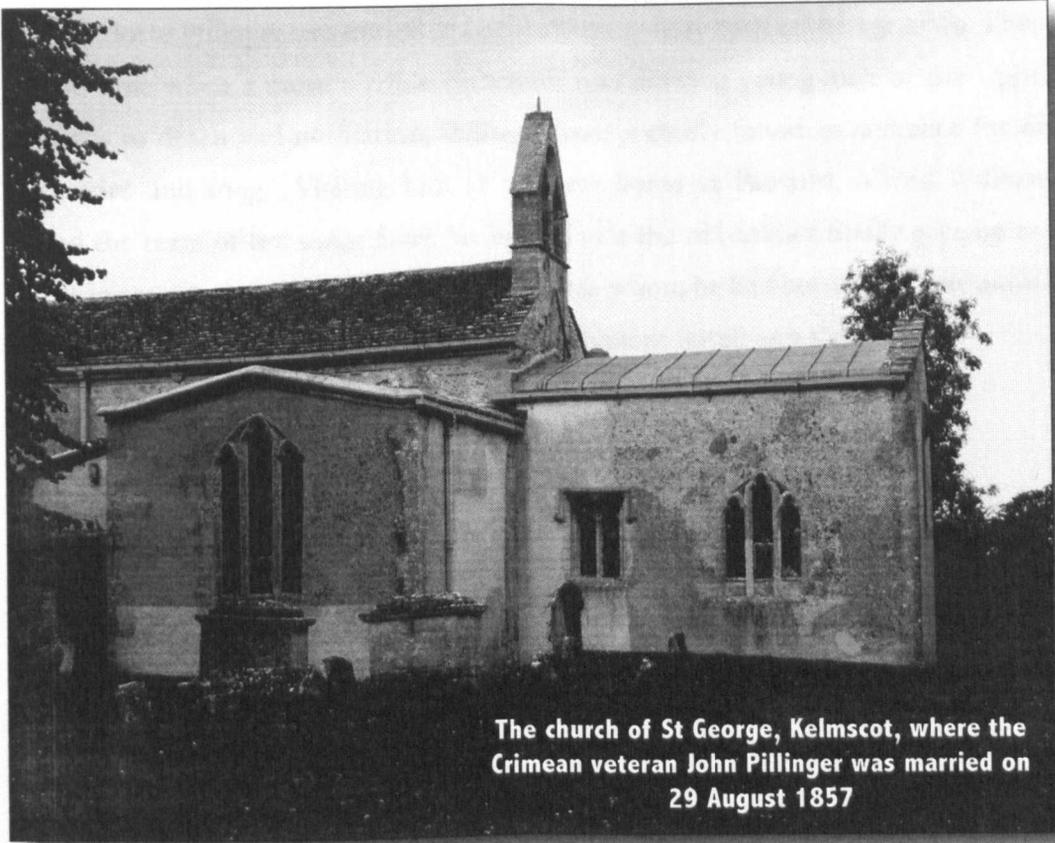
*JB: Because, you know, you were telling me about the story of ... was it his father or his grandfather? Was it your father's father or your father's grandfather? What ... er ... JB: The one who ran away from home, or something? Oh ah ... it was my grandfather I think as run away from home ... and er ... he got turned out ... and he never bothered about no title or nothing ... he had this gipsy girl and that was it ... JB: And he came from Cheltenham? Oh yeah ... it's similar like when the king married that girl and they disherited [sic] him from the throne [presumably a reference to Edward VIII and Mrs Simpson] ... er very much similar ...*⁸⁴

John Pillinger (Lechlade, Glos) : 1832-1924

MOST TRAVELLED, AND MOST SCARRED, OF ALL WILLIAMS'S CONTRIBUTORS WAS John Pillinger of Lechlade and latterly Fairford. Pillinger, apparently destined for a life of unexceptional provincial toil, was baptized on 30 September 1832 at Lechlade, where by 1851 he was an 18-year-old agricultural labourer living with his parents (paupers) at Thames Street (their name rendered as 'Pillenger').⁸⁵ Then fate took a hand. With conflict raging on the shores of the Black Sea, Pillinger seized his chance for adventure by crossing the Thames to Faringdon and enlisting, on 23 September 1854, for service in the Grenadier Guards. Aged by then 22, the military records reveal him to have been 5 feet 7 inches (1.6m) tall, of fresh complexion with grey eyes and light brown hair, and bearing no distinctive mark or scar. Guardsman Pillinger saw service with the Army in the East from April to December 1855, receiving at the siege of Sebastopol the leg wound that was to lead to amputation.⁸⁶

No. 7314 John Pillinger						
ENLISTED for the Gren. Regiment of Foot Guards on the 23 Sept. 1854						
ATTESTED for the said Regiment at Faringdon						
On 25 Sept. 1854 at the Age of Twenty-two Years and — Months.						
Regiment	Promotions, Reductions, Casualties, &c.	Rank	Period of Service in each Rank		Amount of Service	
			From	To	Years	Days
Gren. Gds		Private	25 Sept. 1854	11 March 1856	1	170
<u>Discharged 11 March 1856 aged 23 1/2 Years</u>						
Montagu Seymour Capt. Regt. Gds						

Summary of John Pillinger's service in the Grenadier Guards, showing dates of enlistment and of discharge



The church of St George, Kelmscot, where the Crimean veteran John Pillinger was married on 29 August 1857

The resultant period of inactivity was clearly put to good musical use: of the song 'The Union Jack of Old England' (Gl 111, unpublished) Williams later noted, 'Learnt at Sebastopol, while Pillinger, with his leg nearly shot off, was lying in hospital.' Upon discharge from the service on 11 March 1856, his character was reported by the Regimental Board to be 'very good'. He was awarded a pension of 1/- per diem (5p).

A year later, after adventure enough for a lifetime, Pillinger stumped out of the little church at Kelmscot (Oxon) with his bride Charlotte Wilkins: both had signed their names in the register. By 1861 the couple had settled in his native Lechlade, where they remained long years, working and bringing up their numerous children. He is listed in the census records mainly as an agricultural labourer and pensioner, and as a 'stonebreaker' in 1901. In what is surely a reference to Pillinger, Williams writes of the annual September horse fair at Lechlade:

In addition to them [yeomen] are the loiterers and sightseers—the wooden-legged pensioner rigged in Sunday best; the town tailor, crippled in both feet; and, to be sure, the old blacksmith of ninety years.⁸⁷

Charlotte Pillinger was buried at Lechlade on 25 May 1903 at the age of 69. Then, at the time when a more terrible cataclysm was drawing young men of the Upper Thames to death and mutilation, Pillinger unexpectedly found an audience for his memories and songs. Visiting him at his new home at Fairford, Alfred Williams noted the texts of ten songs from his lips. When the old soldier finally gave up the ghost in 1924 at the age of 93, the daughter with whom he had been living was moved to make this poignant appeal to his former regiment (cited as written):

Sept 21-9-24 Horcutt Fairford Glos

Sir My Father

John Pillinger late 7314 Private of the Grenadier Guards died yesterday Sept (20) aged (93) years—He served through the Crimean War losing his left leg—at the Fall of Sebastopol and it his thought by members of our family that his old Regiment might like to be represented at the funeral—which will take place here on Wensday afternoon next 2 oclock

Sir I should like to ask if their his any thing allowed to burry him nice & Respectable as my Husband his only a Farm labour & he as been an old Soldier him self.

I am Sir

yours truly

Mrs E A Barnes

[*illegible*] Daughter

Residing with me

With unimpeachable courtesy, the officer commanding the Grenadier Guards—who oddly neglected to sign the letter—responded from Buckingham Gate:

Dear Madam

I am so sorry to hear of the death of your father, the late No. C/7413 [*sic*—should be 7314] John Pillinger, and hope that you will accept my most sincere condolences.

I am sorry that, as Fairford is so far away, it will be impossible to send any representative of the Regiment to the funeral but I am enclosing a cheque for £2 to help you pay the funeral expenses.

Kindly acknowledge receipt on the enclosed slip.⁸⁸

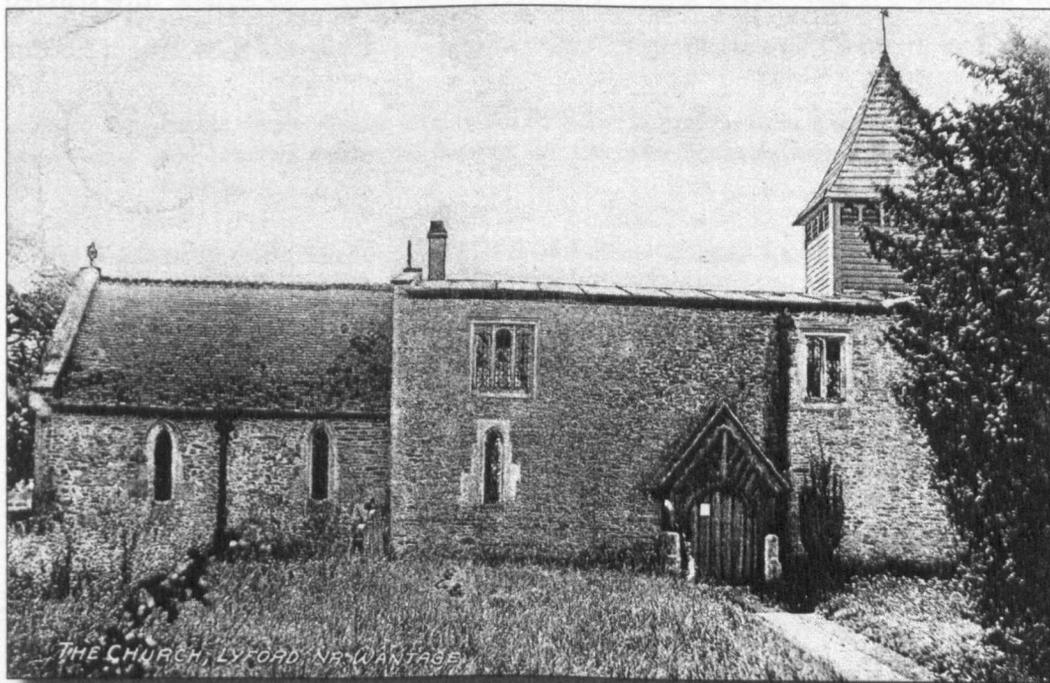
The burial at Fairford, on 24 September 1924, was reported in the local press:

Despite the great burden of his years, he retained much of his activity till about six months ago, and his acquaintances know well the many tales he could relate of our troops during the terrible winter of 1854-55. His remains were laid to rest in the Parish Churchyard on Wednesday afternoon, the coffin, covered with a Union Jack, being borne to the grave by six members of the Gloucestershire Regiment, and a bugler from the same regiment sounded the Last Post after the committal. A large number of relatives and friends were present at the graveside.⁸⁹

Shadrach Haydon (Bampton, Oxon) : 1829–1916

SHADRACH HAYDN / HAIDEN / HADEN / HAYDEN / HAYDON FURNISHES A USEFUL instance of the way hard-and-fast indentifications between individual and any particular settlement may prove fallacious. Baptized at Lyford, Berks, on 18 January 1829, Haydon married Jane Neale on 13 November 1849 in her native Hatford (neighbouring), neither party being able to sign the register.⁹⁰ The family lived at Hatford until some time after 1871, when they moved to nearby Pusey. By 1891, the couple then in their early 60s, they had settled at Bampton, a few miles across the Thames in Oxfordshire. He was thus only ‘of Bampton’ in that he gravitated there late in life (after 1881), and where he ever more remained to be looked after by family. The greater part of his life was spent in a cluster of Vale of White Horse villages south of Faringdon. His occupation is given as ‘agricultural labourer’ until 1871, after which he assumed the pastoral mantle of his nickname: as a shepherd on the Berkshire downs, Haydon would doubtless have attended the celebrated sheep fairs at East Ilsley (see p. 81 *supra*).

Some glimpses of Haydon’s character are recorded. Noting the link between a singer’s temperament and choice of song, Williams reports: ‘Shadrach Haydon, the



The church of St Mary, Lyford, where Shadrach Haydon was baptized on 18 January 1829 (Tomkins & Barrett)

old shepherd of Hatford, preferred the strong and formal order'.⁹¹ Under the moniker 'Old Sheddy', Williams nominates him, furthermore, in a lapidary list of sundry local characters drawn up for lecture purposes: 'Lechlade & Piliinger [*sic*] ... Gramp ... The Kings ... Isaac Tibbles ... The Tanners & Old Sheddy ... Morris at Bampton'.⁹² Additionally, Cecil Sharp had previously visited Haydon at Bampton, mainly in 1909 as a spin-off from morris hunting (pp. 384-5 *infra*), and entered these notes in his manuscript, illustrating in places how unreliable orally-derived information can be:

Shepherd Haden [*sic*] was 83 in April, his wife 83 in January of this year [1909]. They were married when they were 20 and have thus lived together for 63 years. They live with a granddaughter and her children. He gets 2/- a week with two loaves from the parish. She gets 1/9 per week and nothing else.

He was born at Lyford Berks, lived at Pusey Berks & migrated to Bampton when a young man [*sic*?]. He married a Bampton woman [*sic*] (3 months younger than himself) who died 4 years ago after a married life of upwards of 60 years. He at present [1914] lives with a grandson & his family of six children—his great grandchildren. Except that he is a little deaf he is in full possession of his faculties and is physically very active.⁹³

Haydon was evidently a prolific singer, though a substantial disparity obtains between numbers of songs collected: where Sharp amassed 27 (29 including repeat performances) from eight visits, Williams noted a mere nine texts (five of which overlap with Sharp). Of the combined total of 31 songs, at least one is consonant in subject matter with Haydon's occupation, 'On Compton Downs' (Ox 197):

An old shepherd song, local to the Berkshire Downs between Wantage and Streatley, and one of the very few that were obviously written by rustics.

As a sobering coda, George Swinford of Filkins (Oxon) has a story which, if it refers to the Haydon here in question, reveals him to have been a rough handful:

One of the early things I can remember when I must have been about five or six years old [c. 1893] was my father sitting in a chair with two black eyes, holding his arm and in a very bad humour. ... In later years I found out he had been to Lechlade market, and had fallen out with a man named Shep Hayden. They had a fight in the yard of The Swan, and Dad came off best. He stayed in Lechlade drinking until ten o'clock, and then started home. When he got to the station bridge three men were there waiting for him and gave him a good hiding, leaving him there until someone came along and got him home.⁹⁴

Shadrach Haydon was buried at Bampton on 20 December 1916, aged 91.

Charles Tanner (Bampton, Oxon) : 1845–1922

BAPTIZED ON 16 NOVEMBER 1845 INTO A PROMINENT FAMILY IN THE CELEBRATED Morris survival at Bampton, Charles ‘Cocky’ Tanner married on 5 December 1874 Mary Ann Hunt, a native of Brize Norton, both parties being literate.⁹⁵ They ever after dwelt in the ancient Bampton enclave known as Weald. Of Tanner’s involvement with the morris, historian Keith Chandler writes:

Charles Henry Tanner made a claim for a dancing career spanning 40 years, but he too [*as Henry Radband*] meant that he had danced when young and had later become ragman for the Bampton side. In that role he continued to perform an occasional solo jig, or take a spell in the dance set when one of the six dancers required a break, up to the period immediately prior to the First World War, until the age of 69.⁹⁶

Tanner’s involvement with the morris was through his father, also Charles (‘Blind Charlie’), one of the principal sources of testimony for Percy Manning’s important article of the 1890s, ‘Some Oxfordshire Seasonal Festivals: with Notes on Morris-Dancing in Oxfordshire’. Manning’s observations prove there was once an intimate connection between the morris and song:

In some places, as at Bampton, they sang while dancing various songs suited to the air which was being played. Other songs were sung in the intervals between the dancing. At Bampton the songs were: “Green Garters,” “Constant Billy,” “The Willow Tree,” “The Maid o’ the Mill,” “Handsome John,” “Highland Mary” (not Burns’s poem), and “Bob and Joan.”⁹⁷

Williams’s gleanings, nearly 20 years later, amplify Manning’s information:

‘The Maid of the Mill’ (Ox 209): This also was given me by Charles Tanner. It was one of the Bampton Morris songs, and may still be heard there, occasionally, during Whitsun week, when the Morris dances are held.

‘Then my love and I’ll be married’ (Ox 221) and ‘Oh dear, what can the matter be’ (Ox 213): For the following two fragments I am indebted to my old friend, Charles Tanner, of Bampton. They were probably used by the morris dancers in conjunction with their music at the morris games.

Other songs with morris associations noted by Williams from Tanner are ‘The Old Woman Tossed up in a Blanket’ (Ox 214) and ‘The Willow Tree’ (Ox 215). These offer a rare opportunity to match Williams’s words to tunes. (See Appendix 2.) As with Shadrach Haydon, Tanner was also visited at Bampton by Cecil Sharp, who offers incidental confirmation that the family was a nexus for transmission of song

as well as of dance: 'Both this ['The Miller'] and the preceding songs were favourites with his father—Blind Charlie—from whom he learnt them.'⁹⁸ The results of the two collectors' efforts, however, are inverse to the case of Haydon: whereas Sharp noted only a handful of songs in September 1909, Williams's tally of more than 20 texts indicates a successful bond between collector and informant, borne out by the affectionate tenor of comments in the headnotes (as also *supra*, 'my old friend'):

'My Own Dear Home' (Ox 212): Both this and following piece I obtained of Charles Tanner, the aged morris dancer, of Bampton. All the Tanners were morris dancers, and it is said the annual Whitsuntide morris games have been observed in unbroken succession at Bampton for over three hundred years. Mr Charles Tanner was by occupation a drainer and he learned many songs, not one of which is common or modern. At the present time [1916] the old man is unfortunately a cripple and bed-ridden owing to wounds in the ankle, supposed to have been occasioned by the too strenuous exertions of morris dancing.

'The Maltman and the Highwayman' (Ox 211): Evidently of Wiltshire origin, though I discovered it at Bampton. As my informant once worked for a while near Malmesbury, Wilts, he may have learned it there in his young days. Obtained of Charles Tanner, Bampton, Oxon.

This evident affection finds further expression, as with David Sawyer (*supra*), in letters he wrote home to his wife from military service in India:

I've not heard from Mrs Tanner, Primrose Cottage, Bampton, for a long time. I wish you'd write to them: they were so kind to me, and the old man gave me such a number of fine songs.⁹⁹

In an instance of how chronicling begets more chronicling, Williams's serialization of songs in the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* during 1915–16 attracted the attention of Frederick Bingham, who was moved to seek out and interview Tanner:

Charles' ambitions were realised early in life. At the age of sixteen he joined a boys' team, formed with the laudable intention of outshining the men's team. [*This is the only known record of a boys' team at Bampton.*] His active career was brought to an end from physical causes. About nine years ago, acting on medical advice, he gave up dancing owing to heart trouble. In addition, he had the misfortune to fracture one of his ankles by stepping on a stone and twisting it while dancing. Nevertheless, until last year he went with the Bampton morris team as clothes carrier. Then ulceration of the injured ankle resulted in his being bed-ridden, as stated by Mr Williams. Mr Tanner was by occupation a hedger and ditcher. His wife, two sons and two daughters (both married) are all living.¹⁰⁰

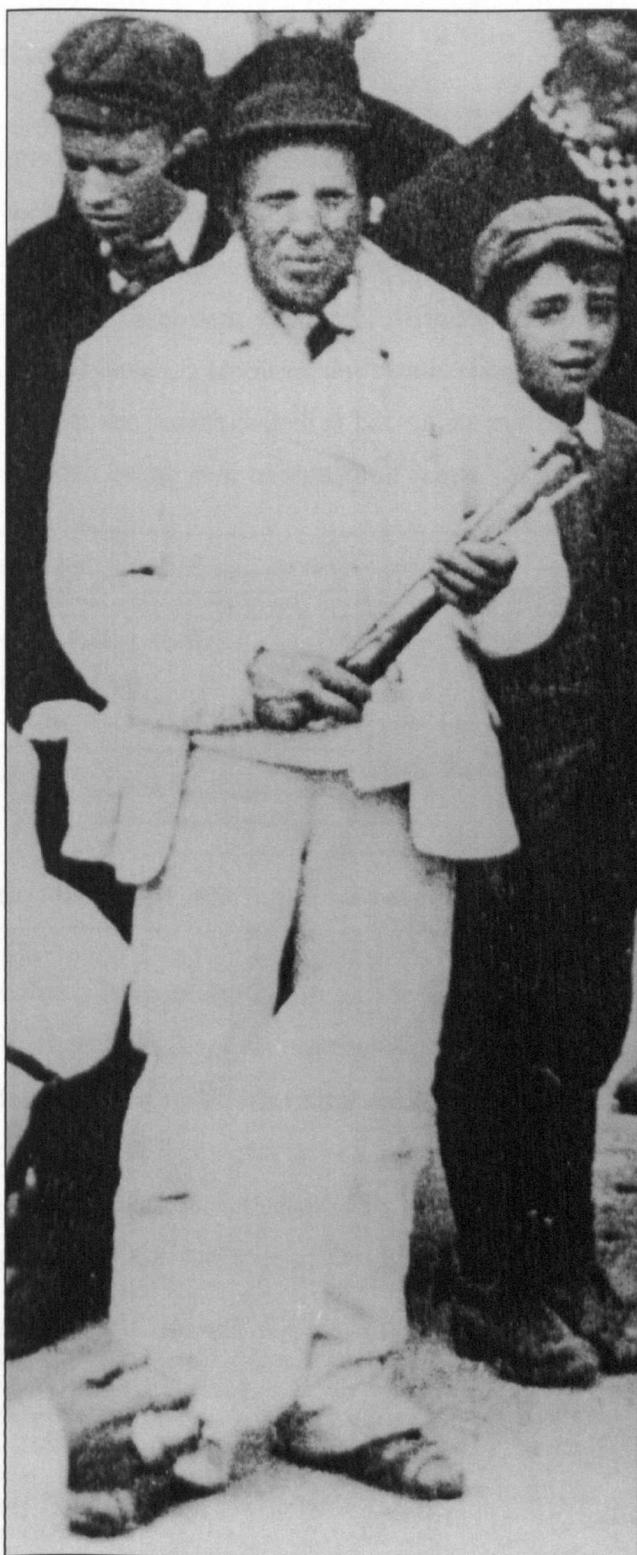
Tanner was buried at Bampton on 10 November 1922, aged 77.

PLATE I

CHARLES TANNER
1845 – 1922



Bampton
Oxon



Alfred Howse (Latton, Wilts) : 1851–1937

BY THE TIME ALFRED WILLIAMS WHEELED HIS BICYCLE EXPECTANTLY DOWN THE track to the canal basin at Latton, lock-keeper Alfred Howse was well established as a venerable parish character: snowy bearded at the head of a numerous family, he had taken on something of the air of an Old Testament patriarch. Alfred was baptized in the village on 24 August 1851, son of James, a labourer, and Anne, though by 1871 his father had died.¹⁰¹ On 7 April 1877, at the parish church at Latton, he married Anne Prudence Smith of Castle Eaton, both being able to sign their name. Within

1877. Marriage solemnized in the Parish Church in the Parish of <i>Latton</i> in the County of <i>Wilts</i>								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
100	<i>April 7th</i>	<i>Alfred Howse</i> <i>Anne Prudence Smith</i>	<i>25</i> <i>20</i>	<i>Bachelor</i> <i>Spinster</i>	<i>Labourer</i>	<i>Latton</i> <i>Castle Eaton</i>	<i>Richard</i> <i>Anne Smith</i>	<i>Labourer</i> <i>Labourer</i>
Married in the <i>Parish Church</i> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the <i>Church of England</i> by me, <i>Hyde W. Beadon</i>								
This Marriage was solemnized between us		<i>Alfred Howse</i>			in the Presence of us,		<i>Robert C. Howse</i> <i>May Ann Davies</i>	
		<i>Anne Prudence Smith</i>						

Alfred Howse marries Anne Prudence Smith at Latton church, 7 April 1877. They lived all their lives in the parish

a year or two, Howse was installed with his burgeoning family in the lockhouse at Latton Basin, an enclave just to the west of the village where the Wilts and Berks Canal entered the Thames and Severn. This was to be his home until his death in 1937, though initially Howse himself continued to be employed as a 'general labourer' while his wife officially fulfilled the role of 'canal toll collector'. His granddaughter, Josephine Steele, conjures up a vivid picture of the routines of family life:

He [Alfred] had a brother John—who with his wife Ann kept a small inn at Cerney Wick—"The Good Intent". My great aunt Ann died there at the age of 102. The beer at that time was drawn from the wood. Sometime about 8 or 10 of the grandchildren would be on holiday (a whole month of August). Each Sunday evening—we would have to have on our clean "pinneys" & Granny & Gramp would lead the way from the Basin along the tow path to Cerney Wick. We grandchildren would play in the orchard while the elders had their drinks. Of course we stole one or two of Aunt Ann's apples—which had Grandfather found out—we should have had a stroke of his stick. We had an old donkey & cart which Gramp used to take his garden produce into Cricklade. In those days we did not know what a car was—or even looked like. We were very well off if we owned a bicycle. Wherever we went we used our legs. There used to be a hump backed bridge just past Latton Cross in

those days & we always walked to Cricklade along the stream by North Meadow. Grandfather used to cut the grass in North Meadow & we kids had to turn it over and make the hay-cocks & push poles underneath & carry it to the barge which Gramp had on the canal. The old donkey then pulled it home and we had to build the ricks. I was about 7 years old then—but we had to earn our corn as soon as we could handle a rake. They were happy carefree days & such a happy family.¹⁰²

However life was sustained materially, there was no shortage of home-spun entertainment. Mrs Steele remembered Alfred Howse as a martinet with a heart of gold, whose enthusiasm for song and dance ensured that musical gatherings within the family were a routine part of life at the Basin. She specified that much activity at the messuage revolved around the 'hogtub house', one of a number of outbuildings, and that her own place within the domestic foyer was far from passive.

My Gramp was a very happy man & was always singing funny ditties to us or playing the accordian. He taught us all to dance to the tunes he played.

We had gravel pathways & Gramp used to sit on his 3-legged stool by the pig stys playing for us to dance. I think it was a melodian or concertina that he had—a round one with buttons. He could play any tune by ear—so long as he kept us dancing—we loved it. When I was 4 years old, he taught me to dance the Broomstick—with a broom. All the old times. Daisy the Polka—I put my money on a Bob-tail mare—Nellie Dean—Maggie so many I have forgotten. We had a wonderful childhood. I think we sang & danced our way through life.¹⁰³



The Howse family, directed by their father Alfred, set to work in the yard at Latton Basin during the Great War

The period invoked by Mrs Steele corresponds roughly to the time, and a little before, Alfred Williams was conducting his vigorous fieldwork, when Howse would have been in his mid-60s. (She did not, needless to say, recall his visits.) From this apparent wealth of musical materials, Williams recovered four song texts, two of which—‘Fanny Blair’ and ‘The Spider and the Fly’—were published in the *Standard* serial on 4 December 1915, but do not survive in manuscript. The other two are ‘Life let us cherish’ (Wt 418, attributed to the ‘Howse family’) and ‘The Struggle for the Breeches’ (Wt 419; see also p. 185), of which Mrs Steele recalled:

I am 91 and I can remember my Grampy & Aunt Rose doing the duet ‘Struggle for the Breeches’—but then we were always doing plays & songs within the family & amusing ourselves in various hilarious ways.¹⁰⁴

In addition, Williams had a text of ‘The Wiltshire Labourers’ copied from a broadside in Howse’s possession (Wt 521). A connection might be suggested here between Latton’s location within a transport nexus (canal, Thames, Ermine Street) and the fact that all these texts are broadside staples.



The church of St John the Baptist at Latton (postcard by H C Broad, Chemist and Stationer, Cricklade, Wilts)

END OF THE IDYLL

It is a happy story with a sad ending, as Mrs Steele poignantly conveys:

Uncle Frank was in the 1914 war. He came home to Catterick Camp to be demobbed in 1918. He caught Pneumonia & died. My Granny was with him & my mother. Mother brought Granny home (my family lived in B'ham then). She only lived a week—she died of a broken heart. That was the end of it all. The heart had gone out of the family. There are 12 of them buried in Latton Churchyard—so they are all together. Sorry to add the sad ending—but it was really the ending of a wonderful life for all of us. Granny was the heart of it all & such a big heart.¹⁰⁵

Warrior son and heart-broken mother occupy contiguous burial register entries:

BURIALS in the Parish of <i>Latton</i>				
in the County of <i>Wilts</i>		in the Year <i>1918</i>		
Name.	Abode.	When buried.	Age.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
<i>Frank Howes</i> No. 609.	<i>The Basin, Latton</i>	<i>December 7th, 1918</i>	<i>33.</i>	<i>E. J. Stuart-Mentall..</i>
<i>Ann Prudence Howes</i> No. 610.	<i>The Basin, Latton</i>	<i>December 12th, 1918</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>E. J. Stuart-Mentall..</i>

'She died of a broken heart': Alfred Howse's son Frank and wife Ann are buried within a few days of each other

The old man assiduously tended his garden at The Basin for 20 more lonely years, before he too made the final journey to the little graveyard on 29 July 1937, aged 85. An obituary notice in the local press conveys a sense of his standing in the village:

The coffin, of plain oak with brass fittings, was borne on a horse-drawn vehicle to the main road, being then placed on a hand bier ... Vale of Cricklade Benefit Society, of which Mr Howse was secretary till his retirement at the age limit of 65, was represented ... Floral tributes were received from ... [*list of family and friends*] ... the garden he tended for 60 long years. Last Sunday evening a memorial service was held at Latton Church, when the Vicar spoke of the great gap caused in the village by Mr Howse's death.¹⁰⁶

Let Mrs Steele have the last word: 'He was a wonderful man in every way and it seems so nice to keep his memory alive.'¹⁰⁷

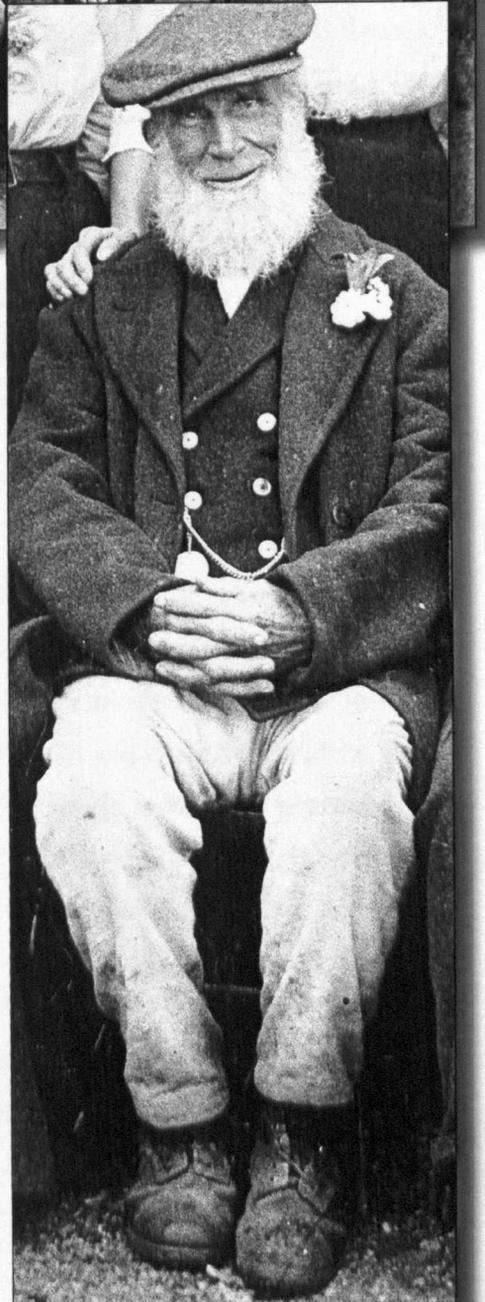
PLATE II



ALFRED HOWSE
1851 – 1937



Latton
Wilts



John Ockwell (Somerford Keynes, Glos) : 1871–1944

THE SINGLE TEXT NOTED BY WILLIAMS FROM JOHN OCKWELL AT SOMERFORD KEYNES, 'The Bunch of Nuts' (Gl 139), was most certainly not the sum of his repertory. Consistent with the collector's set to the archaic, Williams makes more, in his note to the song, of Ockwell's late father, said to have been a vaunted local singer:

The words I obtained of John Ockwell. It was one of his father's favourite pieces. The old man was a fine singer, and could beat all other local minstrels in the number and quality of his songs. He has been dead for some years now.

The songster in question, Thomas Butt Ockwell, was buried at Somerford Keynes on 1 December 1912, which rather qualifies the assertion that he had been dead 'for some years' by 1916.

On November 26th there passed away in this village, at the ripe age of 89 years, Thomas Butt Ockwell, a much respected old parishioner, as was shown at the funeral, which took place on Sunday, December 1st, the blinds being drawn down as a mark of respect on the route of the long walk from his residence to the church. The deceased, who was the oldest inhabitant, was born in the village and had lived there all his life [*sic*]. The family desire to thank all who have shown them kindness and sympathy in their bereavement.¹⁰⁸

Ockwell *père* (interestingly, the surname sometimes occurs in the records as 'Ockle', evidently reflecting local pronunciation) was baptized at Somerford on 16 November 1823.¹⁰⁹ The *ménage* illustrates, in passing, the baroque character of some domestic arrangements in this period of extended, supportive families. In 1851 the household was composed of Mary Ockwell, widow, 68, an outdoor pauper born at Rencombe (*sic*), and her two sons: Walter 33 and his wife and their five children, and Thomas aged 26, unmarried. By 1861 Thomas was still single, working as a carrier, but now formed a separate household with two of his brother's children. On 7 December that year, Thomas took a bride 15 years his junior, Mary Elizabeth Whittle, at which point he was unable to sign his name. From census details of birth of the first child, the family lived in the mid-1860s at Purton, Wilts.

Their son John, who became Williams's informant, was born at Somerford ('Robert John') on 19 February 1871. The family is not recorded in the village in 1871, but in 1881 consisted of Thomas 54, Mary 39, Sophia, 15 born at Purton, and John, a

scholar aged 10. John was still living with his ageing parents in both 1891 and 1901, his occupation given as agricultural labourer. He married, finally, c. 1905, Annie Ockwell. (Their only daughter, Marjorie, who was born in 1906 and who lived in the family cottage until her death in 1998, said that the ceremony had taken place at Cirencester Register Office rather than in the parish church, and that her mother's maiden name was Ockwell by coincidence. See interview in Chapter I, pp. 61-2.) The family occupied Beech Cottage in Mill Lane, at the southern end of the village. Starting out in life as a humble labourer, Ockwell had worked his way to the tenancy of a small estate farm. An agent would call March and September to collect rent due. He had farmed mainly cattle, with some pigs. The messuage was purchased, as part of his marriage settlement, from the Fawcett family, lords of the manor. John Ockwell was buried in Somerford Keynes churchyard on 18 April 1944.

That the Ockwell family was at one time a substantial musical presence at Somerford is acknowledged in the introduction to *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*.¹¹⁰ John Ockwell would have been a relative youngster in his mid-forties when collected by Williams. His daughter recalled him singing at home of a winter's night in his patriarchal armchair at the hearthside (see photograph p. 63 *supra*). She also knew of Saturday night sing-songs in the Baker's Arms in company with fellow songster and sparring partner Charlie Radway—who was in due course to supply the arrangements for Ockwell's funeral. Following Miss Ockwell's death, a cache of printed popular music belonging to her father came to light in the cottage. These are cheap post-broadside song sheets containing a heterogeneity of matter, issued mainly by Chappell and Such. The Such sheets represent a link with the broadside trade, and confirm that printers typically knocked out a ragbag of material: 'Tom Bowling' and 'Sally in our Alley' sit alongside 'Banks of Sweet Primroses'. A further twist is added by one of the Chappell sheets: lurking amid the newly composed pieces is 'The week before Easter—A Sussex Folk-Song, collected by Mrs Kate Lee, arranged by Percy Pitt (© MDCCCXCIX)', presumably noted from the Copper family. Thus, revival notation of a song from oral tradition in one part of the country comes into the possession of a singer in a different district, via mainstream commercial printing rather than through Sharpian philanthropic 'folk' selection; a case of self-conscious revival beginning indirectly to entangle with surviving tradition.

PLATE III

JOHN OCKWELL
1870 – 1944



Somerford Keynes
Glos



THOMAS BUTT OCKWELL
1823 – 1912

Somerford Keynes
Glos

Herbert Gascoigne (Kemble, Glos) : 1870–1925

BLACKSMITH BY TRADE, GASCOIGNE ENTERED THE WORLD AT THE END OF 1869 at Bath, then in Somersetshire, baptized Henry Herbert.¹¹¹ He was evidently brought up by his grandparents at Kilmington in Somerset, where his grandfather practised the trade he himself was to adopt, and his grandmother kept a pub (see letter reproduced *infra*). Exactly when he removed to Gloucestershire remains unclear: his wife Elizabeth (born c. 1874) was a native of Tetbury, where they are likely to have married. The Gascoignes had become an established part of life at Kemble by the turn of the century:

Herbert Gascoigne made the ornate wrought iron lych gates for the new churchyard extension ... which was opened in 1884 ... Herbert was also remembered as one of the finest cricketers ever to play for Kemble. ... The Gascoignes moved to the new forge in Church Road, built for them by Lord Biddulph in 1900.¹¹²

Gascoigne played a prominent role in community affairs, serving *entre autres* as chairman of Kemble Parish Council.¹¹³ The family's musical leanings were revealed in the local press in 1915, incidental to wartime enforced separation from home:

In the course of a letter to his parents, Mr and Mrs Gascoigne, of Kemble, Shoeing Smith A Gascoigne, 5th Dragoon Guards, says: "Glad to hear that Harry has joined the Army—now we're all soldiers. Has Percy any idea of when he will be coming out? Am pleased to say I am feeling quite well once again ... I am afraid my Christmas will not be spent at home, but no doubt we shall be fixed up comfortably. Thank you for the Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard received on the 25th. We have already set tunes to the 'Songs of the Upper Thames.' I see the old 'Dame Durden' is in this week, but I only remember about half the tune ..." Shoeing Smith Gascoigne went to France with the 1st Cavalry Brigade in the original Expeditionary Force, and was in the retreat from Mons. He follows the Folk Songs with great interest, and has written home several letters commenting on them. As a result of this letter the music of "Dame Durden" has been sent to him with last week's paper.¹¹⁴

This engaging instance of how the *Standard* serial was put to use at the time also suggests that Gascoigne *fils* was a singer. It is possible that this was what prompted Williams to contact Gascoigne *père*, then in his mid-forties, who responded by post with four (irregular) verses and chorus of the highwayman song 'Turpin and the Lawyer' (Gl 94).¹¹⁵ The accompanying letter (*infra*) sheds light on his background, confirming the role of the hearth in the perpetuation of rustic music-making.

Kemble
Feb 29th [1916]

Dear Mr Williams,

Your letter to hand. Thanks very much for your kind remarks. I am very much interested in your "Folk Songs on [*sic*] the Upper Thames". I daresay you saw a letter in the "Glos Standard" some few weeks back, from my son at the Front re "Folk Songs on the Upper Thames". I have since received another from him, in which he says he is now known by the nick-name of "Upper Thames". At the Canteen, he says the boys call for a pint of "Upper Thames". As you know the ale out there is noted for its mildness.

You say you are not satisfied with the Kemble Folk Songs. Unfortunately you came at a period when the old man who used to sing them had passed away. If I had only known I could have collected quite a nice few.

I will do my best to try and get what you ask. Re Mr Fisher. His son tells me sometimes when he is at work with him, he will sing "The Skylark", but when he gets home his mind seems quite a blank. Re the Folk Song "When I was single oh then", in Somerset we used to sing another verse, which ran:

Now all young men that have wishes,
And all young men that have none,
Be kind to the first
For the second may be worse
And you'l [*sic*] long for the old one again.

I do not know what your opinion is, but I think this last verse is wanted to complete the song, as it points the moral.

I used to hear them raise the roof in the tap room with a song part of which I remember from a little boy. I don't know if you have it. It ran something like this:

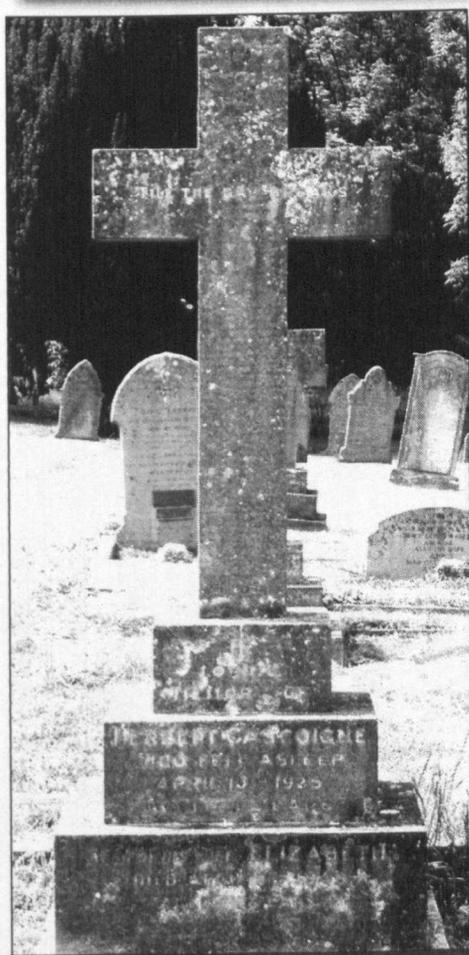
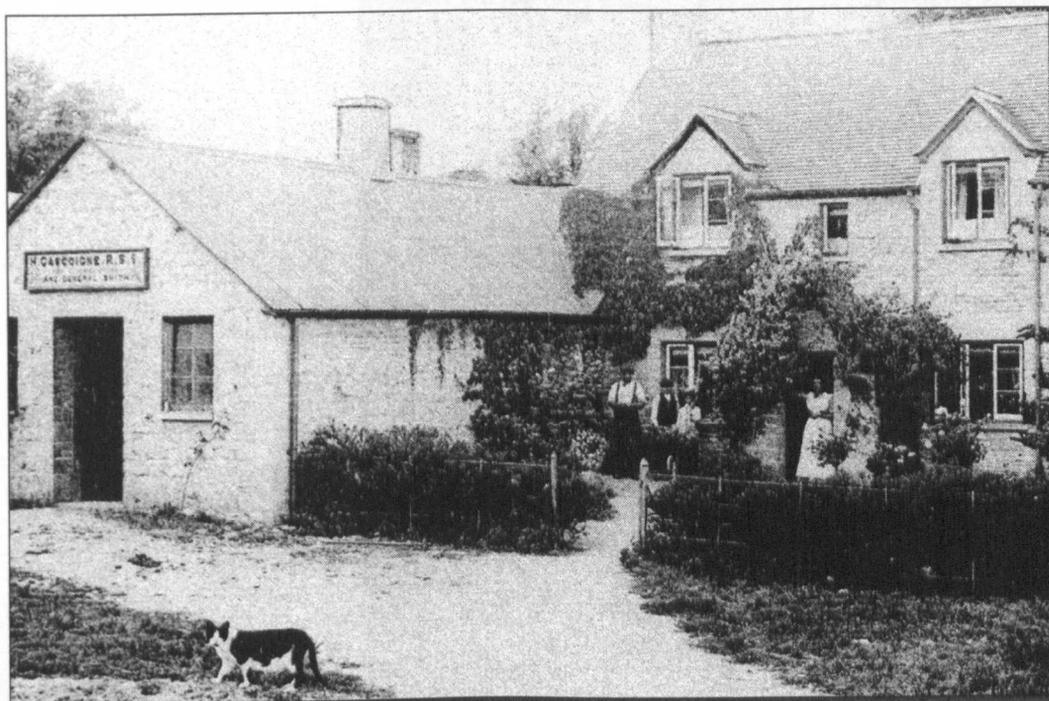
I stepped up and wished her "Good morning"
Her pale cheeks did blush like the rose,
Saying I [*sic*] if this is your fair daughter
A Guardian I'll be if you choose
Ten thousand a year is my fortune
A Lady your daughter shall be
And ride in her Chariots with horses
On the green mossy banks of the Dee.

I am not quite sure of the last line but remember the tune quite well, it used to be a special favourite with the farm hands. Re "Rosin the Beau". My Grandmother who used to keep a Village Pub in Somerset told me; years ago they used to nick name an old man in the village "Rosin the Bow" from his being in the habit of bringing his fiddle to the tap room evenings, and playing for the others amusement. I have also heard her sing the song, also "He's just as good as Gold", "Hard hearted Barbara Allen", and several which have appeared in the Glos Standard.

Trusting I have not wearied you with this long screed. With kindest regards,
I remain yours sincerely

H. Gascoigne

Mr A. Williams
Dryden Cottage
South Marsden [*sic*]
Nr Swindon, Wilts ¹¹⁶



✎ Herbert Gascoigne's forge at Kemble
(postcard by Moss of Cirencester)

✎ His grave in Kemble churchyard

Herbert Gascoigne died on 10 April 1925, aged 55. His grave, a solid stone cross, occupies a prominent spot in the churchyard at Kemble. His son, Albert, also lies there: he survived the rigours of the Western Front and returned to follow his father's trade, acquiring the distinction of having been Kemble's final blacksmith. **PLATE IV**



HERBERT GASCOIGNE
1870 – 1925



Kemble
Glos

Eli Price (South Cerney, Glos) : 1861–1952

FROM ELI JASPER PRICE AT SOUTH CERNEY WILLIAMS COLLECTED A SINGLE TEXT, entitled 'The Bold Champions' (Gl 151). Price was among the youngest of the singers noted by Williams: his long, and we suppose hard, life was touched with sadness with the early death of the wife he had married as a minor, doubtless worn out by frequent childbirth. Price was a native of South Cerney, where he was baptized on 31 March 1861, son of Samuel, a labourer, and Hester, the family occupying a cottage near the Royal Oak.¹¹⁷ He was a life-long resident of the village, marrying Esther Emma Baughan on 26 August 1884, when he was able to sign the register in his own hand. In 1891 Price and his wife were at that part of South Cerney known as Ram Alley with five young children (Francis 5, Maud 3, Jasper 2, Eli 1, Alice 4 months). His wife was buried at South Cerney on 9 May 1908, aged 43, so that when Williams arrived Price, though only in his mid-fifties, was already a widower. A professionally taken photograph (*infra*), by A J Roberts of Barnsley, survives of Price with his son Frank and daughter Louise, who at the age of 11 was accorded a dispensation from school to run the household following the death of her mother. He lingered on into the early 1950s, clinging to an ever more tenuous independence made possible by the ministrations of daughter and granddaughter. When his inevitable demise came, at the age of 91, its circumstances were elaborately reported in the local press.

Having been told by a daughter of the deceased how she had found her father injured at the bottom of the stairs one morning, the Coroner said that he was satisfied that Mr Price had accidentally fallen down the stairs. The daughter, Mrs Esther Louisa Davies [*sic*], of Upper Up, South Cerney, told the Coroner that her father lived alone. She looked after him, visiting daily. She described how, on visiting her father at 8 a.m. on Tuesday Nov. 18, she found him in a sitting position at the bottom of the stairs. He was conscious but said that he could not remember what had happened. Dr E J Guest (Cirencester) said that when he saw Mr Price about half an hour later, he was suffering from very severe shock and had cuts and bruises on his head and body, consistent with having fallen down the stairs. Death was due to heart failure and shock, accelerated by the fall. The doctor said that Mr Price was "a very independent man" and had always refused to go into hospital. His eyesight had become much poorer of late and his hearing was not good. [...] Mr Price was born in South Cerney and had lived in the village the whole of his life. In his younger days he was employed as a farm worker but in later years worked on the sewage disposal works at Shorncote.¹¹⁸

Eli Price was buried at South Cerney on 24 November 1952.

PLATE V



ELI JASPER PRICE
1861 – 1952



South Cerney
Glos

Edwin Griffin (Hatherop, Glos) : 1878–1952

THE TEXT OF 'JOHN APPLEBY' (GL 92) IS CREDITED TO 'EDWARD' GRIFFIN AT HATHEROP. There are no Edward Griffins in the village, but (initially) two Edwins, uncle and nephew. Of the two, the uncle, born c. 1859 at Hatherop, disappears from the village records following his marriage in 1886, so the nephew seems the likelier candidate, even though notably young at the period of collecting.¹¹⁹ This younger Edwin, son of the elder Edwin's brother Henry (a gardener), was born c. 1878 at neighbouring Coln St Aldwyns, showing up there in 1881. By 1891 the family had moved to Hatherop. Edwin Griffin married Mary Ayers in the village on 24 November 1897, when he was aged 20, a labourer, and literate. This means he would have been about 36 in 1914. 'Ted Griffin used to be caretaker for the school, he lived in a little school cottage, and he worked at the gardens—Hatherop Castle gardens—that's where he worked,' recalls Mrs Lucy Thomas (born 1922), a native of neighbouring Quenington.¹²⁰ A photograph of Griffin survives as part of a Hatherop bellringers group. He was buried at Hatherop on 16 February 1952, aged 74.

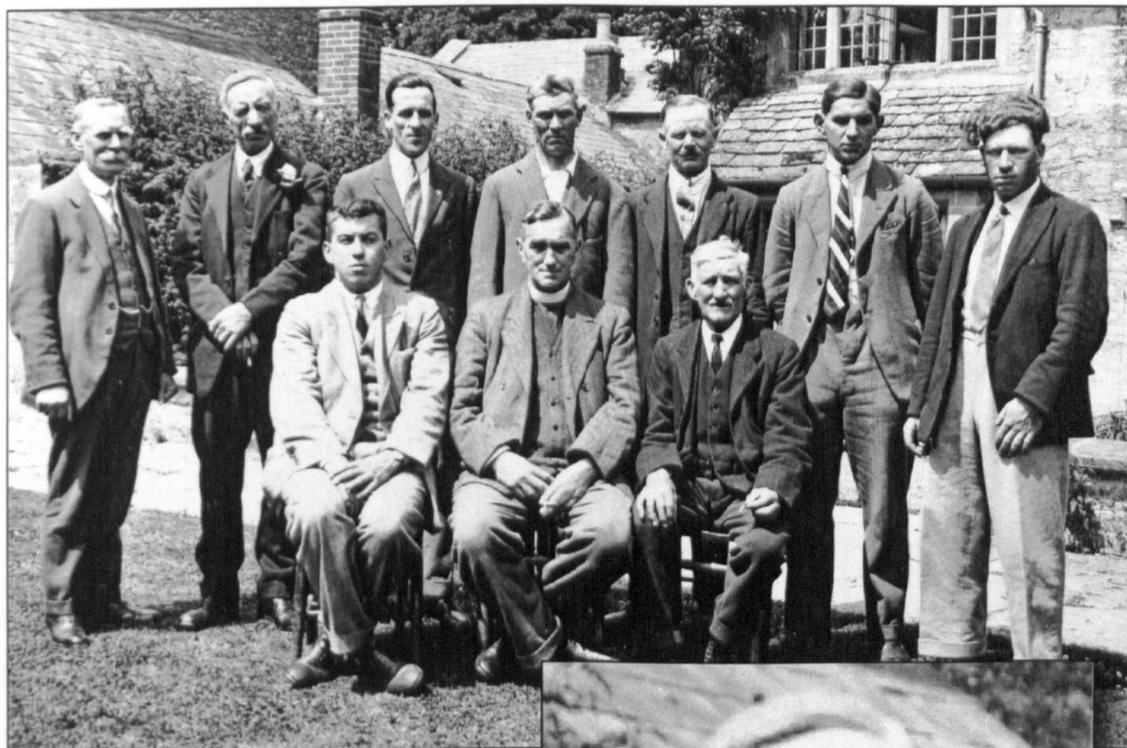
PLATE VI

Sarah Timbrell (Quenington, Glos) : 1865–1950

FROM SARAH TIMBRELL AT QUENINGTON WILLIAMS NOTED TEXTS FOR 'THE ISLE OF Wight' (Gl 133) and the fragment 'Robin Hood and Little John' (Gl 134).¹²¹ Sarah was baptized on 12 March 1865 at Fyfield, a hamlet of Eastleach Martin (Glos), daughter of Robert and Mary Anne Hackling.¹²¹ By 1881 she had entered service at Leonard Stanley, some miles further south-west in the county, as a domestic servant to farmer Frederick Fowler. She married, on 2 August 1884 in her native Eastleach Martin, John Timbrell, a carter of Quenington, both parties being literate. In 1891 the family was at Brize Norton (Oxon), whither they had moved following the marriage (from birth details of the children). They had gravitated to Quenington by 1914, when they were living at Carey's Cottage, around which time Sarah, then a woman of about 50, was collected by Williams. She was buried at Quenington on 21 January 1950, aged 86.

PLATE VII

¹²¹ Gl 134 is ascribed by Williams to 'Mrs J Timbrell', causing the cataloguers to list it under a separate source. If 'J' is presumed to be Sarah's husband's initial (John), then this is the same singer.



EDWIN GRIFFIN 
1878 – 1952

Hatherop
Glos





SARAH TIMBRELL
1865 – 1950



Quenington
Glos

Eli Dawes (Southrop, Glos) : 1861-1951

OF THE THREE SONG TEXTS RECOVERED FROM ELI DAWES AT SOUTHROP—‘NEEDLE Cases’ (Gl 152), ‘The Spanish Cavalier’ (Gl 153), and ‘Three Maidens a-milking would go’ (Gl 154)—the second was not selected by Williams for publication. Dawes (or Daws) was baptized at Kempsford on 27 January 1861, son of John, a shoemaker from Hannington (Wilts), and Mary.¹²² In 1871, aged 10, he was employed as a ‘farm servant’ in the village, but by 1881 had moved to nearby Southrop, where he was working as an agricultural labourer, lodging with the Wells family. He married at Southrop on 28 October 1882 Mary Jane Taylor, when he was unable to sign his name, though his bride was literate. In 1891 the couple had three young sons, all natives of Southrop: William 6, Sidney 4 and Albert 2. Two of the Dawes’s sons died on the Western Front in 1918. At the point of collecting, Eli Dawes would have been in his early fifties. He was buried at Southrop on 13 March 1951, aged 91. **PLATE VIII**

Alfred Spiers (Southrop, Glos) : 1844-1924

ALFRED SPIERS WAS BORN C. 1844 AT DEFFORD, WORCESTERSHIRE. HE MARRIED C. 1870, after which the *ménage* lived at Kempsey, a village south of Worcester.¹²³ By 1876 the family had moved to Witney (Oxon), gravitating from there to Lechlade (Glos) by 1879. The census of 1891 records the Spiers as licensees of the Crown Inn at Lechlade. Spiers suffered a double blow in 1909, when his wife and daughter Edith died within a few months of each other. In his sorrow, he removed the short distance to Southrop, where his daughter Dolly (Mrs Newman) had the Swan. When he gave Williams the text of ‘Nothing else to do’ (Gl 157, an 1850s Hatton and Fry composition), Spiers would have been about 70. He lived on for 10 years and more, and was buried at Lechlade on 11 September 1928, at the age of 84. A generous obituary notice carried in the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* reveals that he had been employed as a railway agent (explaining much of his mobility), had been a prominent personage in the town, and had taken an active interest in politics.¹²⁴ His granddaughter-in-law, of Tiltup Farm, Southrop (see p. 57 *supra*), believed Spiers, evidently a character of some enterprise, had also run a coal business at Lechlade while a landlord. **PLATE IX**

ELI DAWES
1861 – 1951



Southrop
Glos





ALFRED SPIERS
1844 – 1928



Southrop
Glos

Priscilla Brunsten (Clanfield, Oxon) : 1847-1924

IN NOTING THE WORDS TO 'MY WIFE'S A GOOD OLD CREATURE' (OX 250) FROM MRS (Priscilla) Brunsten, Williams was evidently taken with his informant's bearing:

This pleasing old song I obtained at Clanfield, near Faringdon, of a genial and motherly person, who learned it of her master, a farmer, at ~~Brize Norton~~, near Witney, when she was a girl. Every harvest-home and Christmas time the farmer sang the piece, and his wife signified her appreciation of it by sitting very close to him and looking proudly round upon the company present.

Priscilla Gardner was baptized at Shilton (Oxon) on 7 March 1847, daughter of James (a labourer) and Martha; on 10 April 1874, she was married to Frederick Brunsten (or Brunston: there is some doubt over the spelling) at Shilton, both parties signing in their own hand.¹²⁵ In 1881 the family was living at Gloucester Place, Witney, but had moved by the mid-1880s to Clanfield, where Mrs Brunsten was discovered by Williams, by which time she would have been in her late sixties. She was buried in the village on 16 February 1924, at the age of 77. PLATE X

Ellen Trinder (Northmoor, Oxon) : 1838-1923

FROM ELLEN TRINDER AT NORTHMOOR THREE TEXTS WERE NOTED, PRESENTED AS A group in the *Standard* serial, in the collective note to which they are judged to be 'all old, and good folk songs': 'The Dove' (Ox 284), 'Down in the Low Country' (Ox 285), 'When I was a Maid, O then' (Ox 286).¹²⁶ Of these only the first was selected for inclusion in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* (oddly, the revised note attributes the text to 'Miss' E Trinder). Ellen was baptized at Northmoor on 14 October 1838, daughter of James Webb (schoolmaster) and Margaret.¹²⁷ She married at Northmoor on 23 November 1857 David Trinder, when she was unable to sign her name (although he was literate). She appears never to have strayed from her native village. In 1891 she and husband Daniel, a native of neighbouring Stanton Harcourt, shared their cottage with three lodgers from Shenstone, Northants, all steam saw labourers. At the point of collecting she would have been in her mid-seventies. She was buried at Northmoor (Ellen Mary Trinder) on 17 December 1923, aged 85. PLATE XI



PRISCILLA BRUNSDEN
1847 – 1924



Clanfield
Oxon

ELLEN TRINDER
1857 – 1923



Northmoor
Oxon



William King (Castle Eaton, Wilts) : 1843-1930

WILLIAM KING SUPPLIED A PAIR OF SONG TEXTS, 'SOUTHROP POACHING SONG' (Wt 347) and 'Once I courted a fair beauty bride' (Wt 346). William, scion of a noted singing family, was baptized at Castle Eaton on 29 October 1843, son of Joseph and Sophia.¹²⁸ He was married, on 28 November 1864, to Rose Hannah Sparrow in her native parish of Hankerton, Wilts, he unable to sign his name (see p. 108). The family returned to Castle Eaton, where further children were born, but had moved on to neighbouring Inglesham by 1878, before going to Buscot (Berks) around 1880. Sometime after 1891, and before being collected by Williams c. 1915, King gravitated to Highworth (Wilts), where he settled for the remainder of his life. In celebration of 64 years of married life, the *North Wilts Herald* ran a photograph of the archaic country couple.¹²⁹ He was buried at Highworth on 23 May 1930, aged 86. **PLATE XII**

John Johnson (Hinton Parva, Wilts) : 1849-1919

JOHNSON IS NOTABLE IN BEING ONE OF ONLY A HANDFUL OF SINGERS WILLIAMS located in the downland villages of north Wiltshire. A native of Hinton Parva, where he was baptized on 16 September 1849, he married young at neighbouring Wanborough in 1869, when he was able to sign his name as might be expected of a craftsman.¹³⁰ The suggestion is that he had been apprenticed to a smith there. From the details of birth of the numerous children, the family stayed at Wanborough until the early 1870s, before gravitating back to his native Hinton. By the time Williams arrived c. 1912 gathering material for *Villages of the White Horse*, Johnson—'Young John'—was evidently a pillar of village life, rating a lengthy passage in the book:

The smith is tall and boney, but none too robust since he had the severe attack of bronchitis last fall, which played havoc with him; he is hard on seventy now. In manner he is extremely gentle and agreeable, a lovable man, with a playful, yet serious mind, full of quaint sayings and sparks of wit, able to converse on matters of the deepest import, and to make rhymes while he beats out the fizzing metal on the anvil. His voice is soft and mellow, and he sings the tenor part in the choir at the tiny church; he has been a chorister all his life, from early childhood.¹³¹

Johnson was buried at Hinton Parva on 9 April 1919, aged 69.

PLATE XIII



WILLIAM KING
1843 – 1930



Castle Eaton
Wilts



JOHN JOHNSON
1849 – 1919

Hinton Parva
Wilts

PART II : SONG

REPERTORY | TRANSMISSION

§I THE MELODICO-VERBAL (WITHOUT THE MELODY) CORPUS

(I) WORKING CONSPECTUS The matter of melodico-verbal (reducing to verbal) contents is emblematic of the false separation which bedevils this whole chapter. The question, 'What order of popular song was (had been) prevalent in the Upper Thames *independently* of Alfred Williams's documenting of it?' is hypothetically valid but in practice inextricable. A detailed examination *in extenso* of the Williams song (text) collection as it survives, checking off comprehensively against other field corpora and the prodigious sediment of broadsides, would constitute a study in its own right. In essaying a *tour d'horizon*, Purslow, *lui*, opts for a quirky selection of nine items deemed, variously, to be exceptional: 'The Suffolk Miracle' (Gl 90), 'The Oaksey Fox' (Wt 431), 'Down in the North Country' (Ox 233), 'False-Hearted William' (Bk 4), 'The Poor Drunkard' (Gl 63), 'The Drunkard's Farewell to his Folly' (Mi 560), 'Pat Maguire' (Wt 483), 'As I was in the fields one day' (Ox 245), and 'You ask me to sing' (Wt 416).¹³² Useful as this approach seems in pointing up rarities, what more properly is required is a handy conspectus capturing something of the *range* and distinctive feel of the gathered texts as a totality. The great mass of (what is extant of) what Williams excavated in his zone accords with the efforts of his contemporaries. He found most of what, *volens volens*, is served up as *echt* 'folk song': 'The Seeds of Love' and 'The Cloudy Banks' and 'The Bold Fisherman' and 'The Spotted Cow', though not (or not surviving) 'The Flash Lad' or 'The Shooting of his Dear'. Perhaps of greater moment is what might be construed as lying at either end of this stout middle, 'Child' ballads and ascribable popular compositions.

CHILD At the classic end of the received spectrum stand residual representatives of the balladry codified by Child: a total of 28 texts in Williams correspond to 23 canonical instances in Child (there are three versions each of 'Lord Thomas and Fair Eleanor' and 'Barbara Allen', and two of 'The Draggled-tailed Gypsies'). Of that total, only two were omitted by Williams from *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*: 'The Banks of Green Willow' and 'The Lover's Ghost'. The table which follows was established using a filter on Steve Roud's electronic database of song collections.

CHILD	TITLE (WILLIAMS)	REFERENCE	SINGER AND LOCATION
2	Holly & Ivy	Wt 479 / FSUT 221	Mrs Hedges (Purton, Wilts)
3	The Knight	Wt 320 / FSUT 37	Thomas Smart (Blunsdon, Wilts)
4	The Outlandish Knight	Wt 504 / FSUT 159	Edwin Warren (South Marston, Wilts)
18	Bold Sir Rylas	Wt 322 / FSUT 118	Daniel Morgan (Braydon Wood, Wilts)
20	She laid these babes across her lap	Gl 129 / FSUT 295	Mrs Bond (Quenington, Gos)
24	The Banks of Green Willow	Gl 85 / —	George Grubb (Ewen, Gos)
43	The Maid's Wager	Ox 210 / FSUT 75	Charles Tanner (Bampton, Oxon)
53	Lord Bateman	Wt 362 / FSUT 147	Wassail Harvey (Cricklade, Wilts) and Shadrach Haydon (Bampton, Oxon)
73	Lord Thomas & Fair Eleanor	Gl 132 / FSUT 135 Gl 165 / — Mi 623 / —	Mrs Harris (Quenington, Gos) Mrs Field (Winson, Gos) Unattributed
75	Lord Level	Wt 371 / FSUT 145	Mrs Goodfield (Crudwell, Wilts)
78	Cold Blows the Winter's Wind	Wt 370 / FSUT 76	Mrs Goodfield (Crudwell, Wilts)
84	Barbara Allen	Gl 144 / — Ox 205 / FSUT 206 Wt 388 / FSUT 204	James Mills (South Cerney, Gos) Charles Tanner (Bampton, Oxon) Elijah Iles (Inglesham, Wilts)
95	The Prickly Brier	Ox 218 / FSUT 283	Charles Tanner (Bampton, Oxon)
105	Bailiff's Daughter of Islington	Ox 187 / FSUT 174	Mrs Collis (Aston, Oxon)
110	The Shepherd's Daughter	Gl 126 / FSUT 102	Shepherd Banting (Quenington, Gos)
125	Robin Hood & Little John	Gl 134 / FSUT 296	Mrs Timbrell (Quenington, Gos)
167 ^a	Henry Martin	Gl 117 / FSUT 78	James Shilton (Lechlade, Gos)
200	The Draggie-tailed Gipsies	Ox 195 / FSUT 120 Ox 260 / FSUT 121	Shadrach Haydon (Bampton, Oxon) George Giles (Filkins, Oxon)
272	The Lover's Ghost †	Gl 90 / —	Richard May (Fairford, Gos)
274	The Old Farmer & his Young Wife	Wt 461 / FSUT 188	David Sawyer (Ogbourne, Wilts)
278	There was an Old Farmer	Wt 471 / FSUT 211	David Sawyer (Ogbourne, Wilts)
286	The Golden Vanitee	Wt 444 / FSUT 199	David Sawyer (Ogbourne, Wilts)
289	While the raging seas did roar	Ox 224 / FSUT 84	Charles Tanner (Bampton, Oxon)

^a **Henry Martin** — also Child 205.

† **The Lover's Ghost** — Child has this as 'The Suffolk Miracle', discussed by Purslow in *Folk Music Journal* 1, 5 (1969), p. 305.

IDENTIFIABLE COMPOSITIONS

At the other end of the spectrum embodied by the Williams collection lies the more contentious but, in the light of a decisive shift in attitudes, equally significant incidence of popular song for which composer and author, and potentially date of publication, may be established. It is in this respect that Williams has to a degree come into his own as a mediator of ethnic singing, where in his own day it drew down the opprobrium of the establishment (see Chapter IV.3).

Information thus operosely gathered can be adduced to a number of ends, not least to qualify assertions made by previous commentators. John Baldwin, for example, arraigns Williams for not having noted any recent (in relation to 1914) material of this order (p. 322 *infra*), whereas the table shows a number of songs dating from after 1890. The chronological spread of songs as found (from this angle, the table needs recasting in date order) extends from c. 1720 ('Says my Uncle', known as 'Molly Mogg') to 1910 ('Thy voice is near me in my dreams'). A number of important exercises in correlation also open out. Identifying an 'original' form (not, of course, without its difficulties) permits a word-for-word textual comparison with the set recorded by Williams. Tunes are also potentially provided, although there is no guarantee that Williams's singers employed the melody to which the words were initially put. Cross-referencing to the broadside collections needs conducting, as one obvious mechanism of dissemination (*infra*). More ambitiously, the place of these compositions within a practice of ethnic music-making might be understood in relation to the total nexus of a singer's condition: age, location, occupation, literacy (data which could be incorporated into a more elaborate form of the table). An exercise of this order is, alas, compromised by Williams's annotational habits (see p. 25), calling into being the subset of *compositions noted from identified singers*. Details of publication by Williams give clues to the character of his selection, for *Standard* serial and book.

THE TABLE Primary source is the British Library catalogue of printed music. Titles and dates—the latter recording acquisition, not (necessarily) first publication—are drawn from this authority unless otherwise noted, with the Williams details cross-referenced to it, rather than the reverse. The tally—which only includes songs of certain ascription and which makes no claim to exhaustivity—of 72 equates to almost 10% of the total collection, an exceptionally high proportion at the time.

TITLE OF SONG	COMPOSER : AUTHOR	DATE	BRITISH LIBRARY	WILLIAMS COLLECTION	WGS	FSUT
And has she then failed in her Truth?	H R Bishop (M&W)	1813	H 1652 d (29)	Mi 702a (unattributed)	—	—
As I'd Nothing else to do	J L Hatton : H Fry	1859	H 1491 (24)	Gl 157 (Alfred Spiers, Southrop)	XVI	143
Auld Robin Gray	Trad / Rev Leevess : Lady Anne Barnard	1771	No early copy	Wt 420 (Keylock Family, Latton)	VII	—
Beggar Girl (The)	H Piercy (M&W)	1802	G 356 (10)	Ox 228 (Frederick Falconer, Black Bourton)	XXVIII	239
Ben Bolt	Trad arr N Kneass : T D English	1848	H 1650 rr (9)	Mi 531 (unattributed)	—	—
Ben Cable	George Nicks (M&W)	1865	H 1772 w (23)	Mi 532 (unattributed)	—	—
Blackbird (The)	James Hook : Thomas Upton	1796	H 1651 c (21)	Mi 533 (unattributed)	—	—
Blighted Flower (The)	M W Balfe : John Hazlett	?1835	H 2835 c (2)	Mi 536 (unattributed)	—	—
Brave Old Oak (The)	E J Loder : H F Chorley	?1834	G 805 g (21)	Bk 21 (Thomas Larkin, Shrivenham)	XXV	—

And has she then failed in her truth? – Williams's title: 'Has she failed in her truth?'

As I'd nothing else to do – Williams's title: 'Nothing else to do'

Auld Robin Gray – A song much documented: Lady Anne Barnard's polite text composed to an old tune was refurbished with a further melody by the Rev William Leevess in 1812. See for example Derek Scott, *The Singing Bourgeois* (Stony Stratford, 1989), pp. 95-6.

The Beggar Girl – Williams's title: 'Over the Moor and over the Mountain'

TITLE OF SONG	COMPOSER : AUTHOR	DATE	BRITISH LIBRARY	WILLIAMS COLLECTION	WGS	FSUT
Brookside (The)	James Hine : R M Milnes	1846	H 1700 (61)	Ox 301 (Leah Serman, Stanton Harcourt)	—	—
Canst thou love?	John Barnett : T J Thackeray (from <i>The Mountain Syph</i>)	1834	H 1980 r (28)	Mi 541 (unattributed)	—	—
Come Home, Father	Henry Clay Work (M&W)	1858	Not in catalogue	Ox 275 (Tom Trinder, Holwell)	—	—
Cot where I was born (The)	Caroline Balls (M&W)	1856	H 1771 a (7)	Gl 121 (George Herbert, Poulton)	—	—
Death of Tom Moody	William Shield : W Pearce (from <i>The Wandering Melodist</i>)	1803	H 367 (14)	Mi 726 (unattributed)	—	—
D'ye ken John Peel	John Woodcock Graves	c1832	Not in catalogue	Gl 118 (Charles Acott, Meysey Hampton)	XL	56
Ere around the Huge Oak	William Shield : John O'Keefe (from <i>The Farmer</i>)	1788	G 377 (54)	Gl 42 (Henry Cook, Arlington)	XXXIV	83
Garden Gate (The)	W T Parke : W Upton	1809	Not in catalogue	Mi 577 (unattributed)	—	—
Gleaner's Slumber Song (The)	Richard Henry Mathew : C Battersby	1895	H 2074 (5)	Mi 579 (unattributed)	—	—
Gentle Annie	Stephen Foster (M&W)	1860	H 1401 a (46)	Wt 518 (Mr Bridgeman, Wanborough)	—	—

D'ye ken John Peel — See for details, W R Mitchell: *The John Peel Story* (Clapham, 1968).

The Garden Gate — Information from Baring-Gould, *English Minstrelsie*, Volume 1 (1895), supplied by Steve Roud.

TITLE OF SONG	COMPOSER : AUTHOR	DATE	BRITISH LIBRARY	WILLIAMS COLLECTION	WGS	FSUT
Gentle Jenny Gray	H E Osborn (W unspecified)	1869	H 1790 a (81)	Wt 485 (John Lewis, Purton)	—	—
Hail, Smiling Morn	Reginald Spofforth	1799	E 270 l (4)	Mi 587 (unattributed)	—	306
Hard Times come again no more	Stephen Foster (M&W)	1858	H 1523 (25)	Mi 588-9 (unattributed)	—	—
Hurrah, for the Life of the Farmer	G D Fox : H Hunter	1881	H 1787 f (59)	Mi 594 (unattributed)	—	—
In the Days we went a-gipsying	Nathan James Sporre : Mr Ransford	?1840	G 806 e (23)	Wt 402 (Elijah Iles, Inglesham)	XXXIII	69
Irish Emigrant (The)	G A Barker : Lady Dufferin	1846	H 1700 (16)	Mi 604 (unattributed)	—	—
Isle of Beauty	C S Whitmore : Thomas Bayly	?1830	G 805 c (54)	Gl 62 (Charles Messenger, Cerney Wick)	—	—
I traced her Little Footprints in the Snow	Harry Wright (M&W)	1878	H 1784 e (14)	Ox 251 (Mr Clark, Clanfield)	—	—
I'll hang my Harp on a Willow Tree	Wellington Guernsey : Thomas Haynes Bayly	1845	H 1694 (18)	Mi 735 (unattributed)	—	—
I will stand by my Friend	G Bicknell : B Reuter	1867	H 1775 c (40)	Wt 519 (Mr Bridgeman, Wanborough)	—	—

Gentle Jenny Gray — There are two songs by this title, the other being by Charles L Ward (BL: H 1780 s (31), 1856)

In the Days we went a-gipsying — Two sets of words were put to this tune, the other set being by Z Barton Stout (BL: H 1320 b (22), 1839)

I'll hang my Harp on a Willow Tree — Williams's title: 'The Warrior's Grave'

TITLE OF SONG	COMPOSER : AUTHOR	DATE	BRITISH LIBRARY	WILLIAMS COLLECTION	WGS	FSUT
Jeanette and Jeannot	Charles William Glover : Charles Jefferys	?1848	H 1775 n (12)	Gl 163 (Anon, Tetbury)	—	—
Joe in the Copper	George Ford (M&W)	1855	H 1753 (9)	Mi 612 (unattributed)	—	—
Katey's Letter	'Traditional' : Lady Dufferin	1857	H 1771 e (35)	Mi 617 (unattributed)	—	—
Lass of Richmond Hill (The)	James Hook (M&W)	1789	H 1651 c (33)	Ox 281 (James Thorne, Langford)	XXXVI	70
Little more Cider, too (A)	Austin Hart (M&W)	?1858	H 1780 o (28)	Mi 621 (unattributed)	—	—
Love was once a Little Boy	J A Wade (M&W)	1826	H 1653 h (28)	Wt 493 (Miss A Cross, South Marston)	XXXIX	—
Low-backed Car (The)	Samuel Lover (M&W)	1846	H 1450	Wt 505 (Edwin Warren, South Marston)	XXIII	—
Maggie's Secret	'Caribel' (M&W)	c1860	H 1601 dd (8)	Ox 292 (Mrs Parrott, Standlake)	IV	—
Mistletoe Bough (The)	Henry Bishop : Thomas Bayly	?1840	H 1980 y (25)	Mi 637 (unattributed)	—	—
Nothing More	William Winn : J B Rogerson	1856	H 1771 w (10)	Mi 651 (unattributed)	—	—

The **Low-backed Car (The)** — Williams's title: 'Peggy in her low-backed car'
The **Mistletoe Bough** — Roy Palmer (*Everyman's Book of British Ballads*, 1980) locates this song to the 'early 1830s'

TITLE OF SONG	COMPOSER : AUTHOR	DATE	BRITISH LIBRARY	WILLIAMS COLLECTION	WGS	FSUT
Oh! No! We never mention her	Henry Bishop : Thomas Bayly	1821	H 1653 w (4)	Mi 655 (unattributed)	—	—
Old Armchair (The)	Henry Russell : Eliza Cook	c1845	H 1653 f (27)	Mi 658 (unattributed)	—	—
Old Brass Locket (An)	Harry Dacre (M&W)	1894	H 3460 (42)	Wt 500 (Albert Spackman, South Marston)	XXIII	—
Old Dan Tucker	Anon : Dan Emmett	1843	H 1650 d (30)	Bk 6 (Edward Archer, Coleshill)	XVI	142
Old Dog Tray	Stephen Foster (M&W)	1855	H 1753 (13)	Mi 659 (unattributed)	—	—
Old Mill Stream (The)	John Read (M&W)	c1885	H 1654 aa (1)	Ox 277 (Mr Godwin, Kencot)	—	—
Old Towler	William Shield : John O'Keefe (from <i>The Czar Peter</i>)	1793	G 249 (25)	Wt 510 (F Fulford, Stanton Fitzwarren)	XL	61
Our Sailors on the Sea	Alfred Lee : F W Green	1874	H 2345	Mi 667 (unattributed)	—	—
Post Captain (The)	William Shield : 'Mr Rannie'	1802	G 367 (11)	Mi 675 (unattributed)	—	—
Pretty Polly Perkins	Harry Clifton (M&W)	1863	Not in catalogue	Mi 680 (unattributed)	—	—

Old Dan Tucker — Williams's title: 'Old Ann Tucker'

The Old Mill Stream — Williams's title: 'Down by the Old Mill Stream'

TITLE OF SONG	COMPOSER : AUTHOR	DATE	BRITISH LIBRARY	WILLIAMS COLLECTION	WGS	FSUT
Remember, Love, Remember	William Thomas Parke (M&W)	1820	H 1652 aa (3)	Wt 464 (David Sawyer, Ogbourne)	XVIII	—
Riding on a Load of Hay	Harry Birch (M&W)	1877	H 1778 d (12)	Mi 688 (unattributed)	—	—
Robin's Petition (The)	J Whitaker : Miss Edgeworth	1819	G295 ss (14)	Mi 690 (unattributed)	—	—
Roger Ruff, the Ploughman	Joseph Geoghegan (M&W)	1860	H 1771 g (6)	Mi 691 (unattributed)	—	—
Rovers of the Sea	Charles H Purday (M&W)	c1835	H 1061 j (27)	Mi 695 (unattributed)	—	—
Says my Uncle	'Clarinda's an exquisite creature': John Gay (<i>et alii?</i>)	?1720	G 305 (44)	Gl 143 (Thomas Baughan, South Cerney)	VII	—
Skipper and his Boy (The)	'Gabriel' (M A V March)	1865	G 383 j (15)	Mi 705 & 6 (unattributed)	—	—
Soldiers' [<i>sic</i>] Prayer (The)	W Denham: G Hubli-Newcombe	1898	G 807 l (43)	Mi 709 (unattributed)	—	—
Sower's Song (The)	Music? : Thomas Carlyle	??	(Poem, 12273b)	Gl 102 (Mrs Mackie, Lechlade)	XLI	141
Spider and the Fly (The)	Henry Russell : Mary Howitt	1880	H 1783 w (54)	Uncatalogued (Alfred Howse, Latton)	X	—

Says my Uncle — Williams's title: 'Sweet Molly Mogg'. See Chapter VI part 3, and Appendix 3, for discussion of this song. Also page 35 for a reproduction of an early printing.
The Skipper and his Boy — Williams's title: 'The Skipper and his Child'

TITLE OF SONG	COMPOSER : AUTHOR	DATE	BRITISH LIBRARY	WILLIAMS COLLECTION	WGS	FSUT
Teddy O'Neal (e)	C Lindly	1868	H 1775 u	Mi 718 (unattributed)	—	—
That's how you get served when you are old	John Read (M&W)	1879	H 2345	Mi 719 (unattributed)	—	—
Think of your Head in the Morning	Jonathan Bluwitt (M&W)	1873	H 1778 d (31)	Mi 722 (unattributed)	—	—
Thy Voice is near me in my Dreams	Arthur de Guichard: M Lindsay	1910	H 1792 m (3)	Mi 725 (unattributed)	—	—
Tomorrow	Music? : John Collins (the poet)	??	H 2342	Gl 122 (George Herbert, Poulton)	XXXVIII	249
Wait for the Waggon	G P Knauff (M&W)	1855	H 1254 (68)	Wt 514 (John Goddard, Stratton St Margaret)	XIII	—
When the Robins nest again	Frank Howard (M&W)	1884	H 1788 r (41)	Mi 741 (unattributed)	—	—
Willie we have missed you	Stephen Foster (M&W)	1855	H 2345	Mi 746 (unattributed)	—	—
Will Watch, the Smugler	John Daw : A Cherry (from Spanish Dollars)	1805	H 2721 (38)	Mi 747 (unattributed)	—	—

That's how you get served when you're old — Williams's title: 'That's how we gets served when we are old!'

Tomorrow — Williams's title: 'The Downhill of Life', by which it is most commonly known. How Collins's early nineteenth century poem, popularized through inclusion in Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, came to be set to music remains unclear. The BL date of 1856 is unlikely to be the first publication.

TITLE OF SONG	COMPOSER : AUTHOR	DATE	BRITISH LIBRARY	WILLIAMS COLLECTION	WGS	FSUT
With my Village Fair	Robert Guylott : Thos Hudson	c1830	H 2832 (19)	Wt 450 (David Sawyer, Ogbourne)	IV	163
Won't you tell me why, Robin?	'Claribel' (M&W) (Charlotte Alington Barnard)	1861	H 2514 (8)	Mi 751 (unattributed)	—	—
Wreck of the Emigrant Ship (The)	George Arthur Barker : Mrs Crawford	1850	H 1710 (26)	Mi 561 (unattributed)	—	—
You Gentlemen of England	John Wall Calcott : J Oliver (from <i>The Travellers in Switzerland</i>)	1794	G 364 (11)	Ox 192 (Anon, Aston)	XXV	201

With my Village Fair – Williams's title : 'I don't mean to tell you her name' (the refrain)

The Wreck of the Emigrant Ship – Williams's title : 'Dublin Bay' (by which the song was alternatively known)

Williams also has a set of words entitled **You'll Never Miss the Water 'til the Well Runs Dry** (Mi 753) which has nothing in common with the song of that name by Harry Williams and Egbert A van Alstyne (1908: BL 3988 i (38)) except for its theme (prudence) and the proverb-title in the final line of the chorus.

(2) SCALE OF REPERTORY : POWER OF MEMORY

It was clear to Williams that this tradition of singing involved prodigious powers of memory. Gargantuan repertory was most conspicuously on display in singing matches, a practice removed from the print trade, though possibly fuelled by it:

I have frequently come into contact with those who have assured me that such and such a one knew from two hundred to three hundred pieces. And I myself have positive proof of the fact. It was common, years ago, during wet weather ... for the rustics to assemble at the inns and have singing matches, in order to see—not which could sing *best*, but which could sing *most*.¹³³

He reports that Tanner and Sawyer had a quasi-encyclopædic acquaintance with song circulating in the district;¹³⁴ and writes of the 'remarkable acquisitive faculties' of many of the venerable singers from whom he noted texts:

I have heard many old labourers say that if they could hear a song clearly once only they were able to remember it completely. And we must bear in mind the fact that they were not short pieces. One old labourer told me a song containing eight verses of eight lines each, and took his oath that he had only heard it sung once—at Highworth Fair. And knowing the man's keenness of wit and general honesty, I saw no reason at all for doubting him.¹³⁵

The impression conveyed, however, by the collection *in toto* is in need of some adjustment (see the Williams song index). Aside from the handful of singers of extensive repertory, the great bulk of informants have no more than one or two songs attributed to them, when they almost certainly knew more. One obvious adjustment would be that the 200+ unattributed texts (catalogued as 'miscellaneous') represent additions to repertory of identified singers. Additionally, where Williams specifies venue only, at which a single singer is otherwise recorded, probability stands in favour of that singer. The note, for instance, to 'Of all the Brave Birds' (G1 130) from Mrs M Bond at Quenington reads: 'I first heard this at Aston, afterwards at Inglesham', where Inglesham is likely to mean Elijah Iles. In a small number of instances, Williams himself acknowledges that informants had more sizeable repertories than his collecting suggests. Of Henry Cook of Arlington (three texts extant): 'he is still a vigorous songster, and could render at least a dozen pieces'; Richard Gardner of Harwick (three texts extant): 'is capable of rendering at least a dozen lengthy songs'; Mrs Calcott of Northmoor (two texts extant): 'she sang me several songs, including

Lord Bateman'; Thomas King of Castle Eaton: four texts extant but he also knew 'Creeping Jane' (from David Sawyer), and is likely to have known others.

Whereas some indicators of further repertory are anecdotal—Eli Price at South Cerney 'was always singing something when he was by himself';¹³⁶ John Ockwell at Somerford Keynes owned a considerable cache of printed matter (*infra*), from both of whom Williams noted a single text—specifiable titles can be added to repertories from a variety of sources: two texts from Alfred Howse in the *Standard* serial are not extant in the collection, bringing his tally to four; Iles rises from 31 to 45 from titles (without text) mentioned in *Round About the Upper Thames* (Appendix 4); Haydon at Bampton rises from nine to 31 using Sharp's notations; and Morgan rises from six to 12, largely from John Baldwin's interviewing of his son (*supra*).

Dave Harker (see Chapter IV.3) attends to this generally neglected matter of repertory scale, in order merely to crunch the numbers: 'Three-quarters of the attributable texts came from 75 people; two-thirds came from 54; half came from 25; one-third came from ten; and one-quarter came from four men.'¹³⁷ Apart from observing this to be a 'thinner spread' than Sharp, Harker draws no inferences from the figures. As they stand, these tallies are a supreme instance of statistical nullity, stating no more than that some singers (as recorded) knew more songs than others. Any significance will lie in exploring correlations with other facets of the condition of singers: degree of remoteness in geographical spread, generation, occupation / social group, gender, literacy. Williams offers typically thought-provoking but undeveloped remarks on these matters, which might, in another study, be pursued. His prodding at the song / location question is discussed in Chapter VI.3. Possible links to literacy, which he does not broach, are sketched out in the broadside piece, *infra*.

✚ Do songs tend to be generation-specific? Did older singers, that is, tend to know a *different type* of song (as well as, by that period, tending to know more than younger singers)? Williams is alive to the possibility:

'The Green Bushes' (Wt 397): An old favourite, once popular throughout the Upper Thames Valley. It has many times been offered to me by the oldest men now living here. [Composite text noted from Elijah Iles, and William Jefferies, Longcot.]

'The Rover' (Wt 411): An ancient and simple piece, that is only remembered by the most aged men. I obtained the copy of Elijah Iles, Inglesham, and James Shilton, Lechlade, one of whom is ninety-four, and the other ninety years of age.

'Two Babes in the Wood' (Ox 229): Formerly a great favourite with the old men throughout the Thames Vale. I have heard it at Castle Eaton, [Cricklade,] Black Bourton, and Brize Norton, though I have not found it sung by any young or middle-aged people. ... Words obtained of the late "~~Wassail~~ Harvey, of Cricklade, and Fred Falconer, Black Bourton, Oxon.

'Phoebe and her dark-eyed Sailor' (Wt 409): A special favourite, both of men and maidens, and also loved by the old folks. Words obtained of Elijah Iles, Inglesham, Wilts.

A less circumstantial variant on this connection is that to 'purity' and (relative) antiquity of repertory. Of Tanner's stock of songs (Bampton), Williams writes, 'not one of which is common or modern' (headnote to 'My Own Dear Home', Ox 212).

✎ Is there a discernible link to occupation? Here, too, Williams inkles without developing (blacksmiths and shepherds are perhaps the most obvious candidates):

'The Jolly Waggoner' (Wt 454) : Formerly a great favourite throughout the Thames Valley. ~~Almost every carter and ploughman could sing it~~

'The Gay Ploughboy' (Wt 443) : A popular old ploughing song that was sung ... by the carters

✎ Is there a link to intelligence / education? He equivocates:

'The Jolly Miller' (Gl 60) : Songs dealing with the miller and his trade were generally popular, though perhaps rather with those of higher intelligence and better education than with the bulk of the rustics. At the same time I have met with the two following songs in many villages, and have heard them from farm labourers. Copy obtained of Raymond Smith, gamekeeper, Bibury.

✎ Does the distaff side have its preferences?

The women's songs were chiefly the sweetest of all. This is as befits the feminine nature. They were rarely sung by the males. The women might sing some of the men's pieces, but the men seldom sang those of the women. They appreciated their sweetness but they felt that the songs did not belong to them. There can be no doubt but that many choice and rare old songs, comparatively unknown, existed in the memories of the cottage dames. They are obviously more difficult to obtain than are those of the males. Most of the men sang at the inns, and their pieces were consequently more or less publicly known, while the women's songs were sung over the cradle and might not often have been heard out of doors. I have never omitted an opportunity of searching for the women's songs, where I suspected any to exist, and I was never disappointed with anything I obtained as the result of such inquiries. Examples of the kind and quality of songs sung by women are discovered in such pieces as "~~Maggie's Secret,~~" "~~The Scarlet Flower,~~" ["Lord Thomas and Fair Eleanor," "Grandma's Advice,"] "The Seeds of Love," "Lord Lovel stood at his Castle Gate," "If you will walk with me," "Cold Blows the Winter's Wind," and so on.¹³⁸

§2 TRANSMISSION OF SONG AMONG SINGERS

The music of untutored country people may be recorded, scrutinized for intrinsic properties, savoured as performance, but it also has to be acquired, and acquisition raises complex issues of conditions and mechanics. For the purposes of this study, the question is whether evidence furnished by Alfred Williams from his patch helps to illuminate this aspect of the subject. Discussion of the transmission problem might proceed from a capital distinction between vertical and lateral modes: the first corresponding in effect to the family (kinship), the second to occupational and social contacts (the world beyond the hearth). Lateral acquisition clearly connects to the issue of displacement, inviting further sub-division into active and passive forms—singers who move and acquire music as a result, and kinds of circulation which bring music to the singer—this including the central mechanism of the broadside trade. The other aspect to the question is the age at which a song is acquired. (This concerns contents and circumstances of transmission: absorption of performance *style* is presumably predominantly vertical.) The primary division is of oral and printed.

(I) BY ORAL MEANS

HEARTH AS NEXUS The most evident nexus within which music passes from mouth to mouth is immediate family: evidence suggests that singers commonly contracted the singing habit from parents or grandparents. Alive to this dominant condition, Williams usefully lists noted singing families in his district:

As some individuals were more musical than others, so also were some families. Very often the entire members of a family, for generations, had been famed for singing, and their songs had usually belonged to a distinctive class or order. One of the most convincing illustrations of this is the case of the Kings, of Castle Eaton. ... Other well-known singing families were the Deans and Ricketts, of Down Ampney; the Howses and Messengers, of Latton; the Barrets, of Marston Meysey; the Harveys, of Cricklade; the Ockwells, of Somerford Keynes; the Sparrows, of Crudwell; the Caswells, of Marlborough; the Leggs and Zillards, of Hannington; the Pillingers, of Lechlade; the Wheelers, of Buscot; the Jordans and Jefferies, of Longcot; the Tanners, of Bampton; and others too numerous to mention.¹³⁹

More usefully, Williams records a significant number of instances of a particular song passing vertically through the generations. The first table *infra* sets out records of songs learned from grandparents, the next two from parents. In some cases, these antecedents have been identified from parish registers.

ORAL TRANSMISSION 1 : ACQUISITION FROM GRANDPARENTS

SONGS ACQUIRED FROM A GRANDFATHER (9)

SINGER	LOCATION	SONG	GRANDPARENT
Elijah Iles c. 1822-1917	Inglesham (Wilts)	'The Old Woman Drinking her Tea' (Wt 409) <i>'It was his grandfather's song, and the old man was born about 1750.'</i> Also, 'Preaching for Bacon' (Wt 410)	pgf Joseph bn 1769 (<i>'1750'</i> is mistaken?) mgf not found (f Angel bap 1799)
Williams notes that Iles also had 'Green Grow the Rushes' and 'The Banks of Bonny Doon' from this source ('Upper Thames Folk Songs', <i>Oxford Times</i> , 20 January 1928, p. 10)			
Lot Couling 1858-1943	Kempsford (Glos)	'Here's a health to King George' (Gl 97) <i>'it used to be sung by the grandfather of my contributor'</i>	pgf Isaac bn c. 1794 mgf not found
James Midwinter 1857-1939	Aldsworth (Glos)	'Music and Wine' and 'How Happy is the Man' (Gl 38 & 37) <i>'These I obtained of James Midwinter, who learned them of his grandfather, fifty years ago.'</i>	pgf Thomas bn 1781 mgf not found
Jane Ockwell c. 1847-1935	Poulton (Glos)	'Christmas Carol' (Gl 124) <i>'the communicator of the following carol is three score years and ten, and remembers to have heard the piece sung by her grandfather'</i>	pgf not found mgf not found
Thomas Baughan 1870-1920	South Cerney (Glos)	'Molly O'Mogg' (Gl 143) <i>'The song was a favourite of his father's, and of his grandfather's'</i>	pgf James, bn Highworth 1796 mgf not found

SONGS ACQUIRED FROM A GRANDMOTHER (3)

William Mills 1848-1920	Ablington (Glos)	'The Mice and the Crumbs' (Gl 31) <i>'The song was a favourite of his grandmother's.'</i>	f William, bn 1824 p gm Ann (née ?) born 1790s
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William's mother (Sarah) died early, so the matrilineal option is unlikely

Mrs Collis ??-??	Aston (Oxon)	'The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington' (Ox 187) <i>'Her grandmother sang the song'</i>	
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Lack of a forename makes this singer all but impossible to identify with certainty

Jane Wall ??-??	Driffield (Glos)	'The Deserter' (Gl 80) <i>'It was sung by the grandmother of my contributor, who is now an elderly woman.'</i>	pgf not found mgf not found
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KEY pgf = paternal grandfather | mgf = maternal grandfather | p gm = paternal grandmother |
m gm = maternal grandmother

ORAL TRANSMISSION 2 : ACQUISITION FROM FATHER

SINGER	LOCATION	SONG	FATHER
James Falconer 1838-1923	Brize Norton (Oxon)	'Bonny Old England O' (Ox 232) <i>'My informant, who is nearly eighty years of age, told me that his father sang it as long ago as he could remember.'</i>	John bn c. 1815
Mrs Hancock c. 1835-1917	Blunsdon (Wilts)	'The Gamekeeper' (Wt 317) <i>'who told me she learnt it of her father, when a girl.'</i>	James bn c. 1815
John Ockwell 1870-1944	Somerford Keynes (Glos)	'The Bunch of Nuts' (Gl 139) <i>'It was one of his father's favourite pieces.'</i>	Thomas 1823-1912
William Jefferies 1842-1916	Longcot (Berks)	'The Bold Dragoon' (Bk 15) <i>'The favourite piece of his father, Aaron Jefferies.'</i>	Aaron bn 1798
John Pillinger 1832-1924	Lechlade (Glos)	'The Football Match' (Gl 104) <i>'I obtained the piece of John Pillinger, who learned it of his father at Lechlade, over seventy years ago.'</i>	George bn 1803
Mrs Rowles 1872-??	Witney (Oxon)	'The Buxom Blade' (Ox 305) <i>'formerly popular in and around Marston Meysey, where it was sung by an old carter named Barrett, of whose daughter, Mrs Rowles, Bridge Street, Witney, I obtained the copy.'</i> Also, 'I'll weave him a garland' (Ox 306)	John Barrett bn c. 1832

Ox 306 identifies the father as 'W' Barrett. If this is Minnie Maud Rowles, née Barrett, born 1872, married Henry Rowles at Witney in 1911, then the father's name is John.

Leah Serman c. 1861-1937	Stanton Harcourt (Oxon)	'Rodney so bold' (Ox 302) <i>'It was her father's favourite piece.'</i>	James c. 1829
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Elizabeth Webb 1849-1927	Alvescot (Oxon)	'Little Dickie Milburn' (Ox 174 / 227: no ms extant?)	Robert Batts 1825-1878
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Field notebook (p. 3) has: *'Mrs Webb's father (Alvescot) sang this song.'* *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* does not specify an informant: *'I give it exactly as I heard it at Bampton and Alvescot, Oxon.'* (p. 293)

Edwin Warren 1863-1933	South Marston (Wilts)	'The Bold Privateer' (Wt 501) <i>'a favourite song of Mr Warren's father, who was a thatcher, a very intelligent villager, and a fine singer.'</i>	William c. 1839-1909
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Also 'John Barley Corn' (Wt 503): 'It was sung by his father, the old thatcher.'

The Barretts of Sevenhampton/Highworth (Wilts) furnish two instances of garbled attribution. The note to 'The Squire and Chambermaid' (Wt 493) reads: 'It was sung by blacksmith Barrett, of Sevenhampton, to whose son, Mr Frank Barrett, I am indebted for the words.' Does that mean Frank sang the song? Similarly, 'Old Adam' (Wt 378): 'I have only heard of it at Highworth, where it was sung by an old blacksmith, of Sevenhampton, named Barrett. Obtained of "Tibby" Barrett, the mat-maker.' Research suggests that "Tibby" was another son (Alfred) of old man Barrett: did he sing the song to Williams, having learnt it from his father?

ORAL TRANSMISSION 3 : ACQUISITION FROM MOTHER

SINGER	LOCATION	SONG	MOTHER
Mrs Bond 1850-1935	Quenington (Glos)	'Fragment' (Gl 129) <i>'she learnt it at her mother's knee, as a child, but has forgotten the opening verses'</i>	Elizabeth Maisey bn c. 1828
Mrs 'W' Field c. 1880-1951	Winson (Glos)	'Richat and Robet' (Gl 167) <i>'who learned [the words] of her mother as a child.'</i>	Emily Davi(e)s née Sawyer bn 1837
Mrs Field's mother was a native of Ogbourne St Andrew (Wilts) and sister to David Sawyer, following. She had married William Davi(e)s by 1880, when they were living at Theale, Berks.			
David Sawyer 1832-1918	Ogbourne (Wilts)	'A-Begging Buttermilk' (Wt 432) 'I once had plenty of thyme' (Wt 451) 'Old Simon' (Wt 462) <i>'Obtained of David Sawyer, whose mother sang it at Ogbourne and Marlborough, Wilts, eighty years ago.'</i>	Hannah bn c. 1810 at Norwich
Thomas Smart 1838-1919	Blunsdon (Wilts)	'The Knight' (Wt 320) <i>'The song was his mother's.'</i>	<i>details not yet found</i>
A further instance of matrilineal transmission is furnished in passing in <i>Round About the Upper Thames</i> (p. 272): sundry games 'all of which the ploughboys learned at home on winter evenings, while ... their mother sang to them the piteous fate of William and Dinah, the unhappy lovers who poisoned themselves and who "lay both in one grave," or told how [cites two stanzas of 'Raggle-Taggle Gipsies']'.			

Thus instances of 'vertical' transmission recorded by Williams are: parents 17 (father 11, mother 6), grandparents 12 (grandfather 9, grandmother 3), 29 in total.

EXTRA-FAMILIAL MILIEUX Beyond the confines of the hearth, what parochially were the conditions in which song was performed and absorbed? Williams, from the outset, places song (that is, singing) in a context of performance, though generally as fleeting notation not sustained discussion: the manifold erstwhile farm festivals, country inns, fabled village singing matches, markets and fairs, and the workplace, of which one exemplification is young females migrating for employment:

When the young women left their situations and returned home, or married, they remembered the songs sung by their companions, or, very often, by the farmer and his wife, and, in time, passed them on to their children, who treasured them for their mother's sake.¹⁴⁰

These aspects are examined later in the thesis, especially in Chapter VI.

Finally, there is the jumble of 'lateral'—that is, extra-familial—transmissions, connecting to the topics of transport and mobility, as set forth in Part 1 of this chapter. Some of the recorded instances are cases of a singer moving for work and acquiring a song as a result; others are acquisitions from neighbours or employers:

ORAL TRANSMISSION 4 : ACQUISITION BEYOND THE FAMILY

GEORGE ASH (Ampney Crucis, Glos), 'Here's away to the Downs' (Gl 39): 'It was sung by a shepherd, who learned it ... of an aged morris dancer, near Cirencester.'

SHEPHERD BARRETT (Lechlade, Glos), 'Sheep Crook and Black Dog' (Gl 98): 'who learned it of an old woman, his neighbour.'

ALBERT SPACKMAN (South Marston, Wilts), 'An Old Brass Locket' (Wt 500): 'It came from the neighbourhood of Didcot, Berks; at least, that is where my informant learned the song, some fifteen years ago.' (*i.e. c. 1900, when Spackman would have been 20*)

MRS BOND (Faringdon, Berks), 'Old Adam was a Gentleman' (Bk 13): 'she learnt it of her old master, a farmer'

MRS BRUNSDON (Clanfield, Oxon), 'My Wife's a good old Cratur' (Ox 250): 'obtained at Clanfield, near Faringdon, of a genial and motherly person, who learned it of her master, a farmer, at Brize Norton, near Witney'

JONAS WHEELER (Buscot, Berks), 'False-Hearted William' (Bk 4): 'He tells me he learnt the song ... at the wharf at New Bridge, where he was employed with the barges. A woman, the wife of one of the bargemen, sang the piece.' ('Wassail' Harvey of Cricklade also worked on boats as boy: see p. 118 *supra*.)

WILLIAM PRESTON (Grafton, Oxon), 'In Rockley Firs' (Ox 268): 'He is an old earth-stopper, and remembers to have heard the song near Cricklade, many years ago.'

CHARLES TANNER (Bampton, Oxon), 'The Maltman and the Highwayman' (Ox 211): 'As my informant once worked for a while near Malmesbury, Wilts, he may have learned it there in his young days.'

Two examples, the second at a remove, of circulation promoted by military endeavour:

JOHN PILLINGER (Lechlade, Glos), 'The Union Jack of Old England' (Gl 111): 'Learnt at Sebastopol, while Pillinger, with one leg nearly shot off, was lying in hospital.' **EDWARD ROBERTS** (Siddington, Glos), 'Captain Brooks and his Gallant Crew' (Gl 138): 'he learnt it of an old sailor, who took part in the bombardment of Alexandria.' In his *Word-Lore* article of 1926, Williams records a boyhood memory at South Marston: 'An old soldier, who had been in many wars, sang snatches of songs learned aboard ship, or at the ports; but, as was often the case with men of this type, he could not well be depended upon for versions, being defective in memory, and careless as to tune.' (p. 12)

To this tally can be added the impromptu prandial transaction by which Elijah Iles acquired one of his songs: "Ow about Woodman Spare that Tree? I gied my dinner for 'e when I was drivin' plough a'top o' Badbury 'ill yander." (*Round About the Upper Thames*, p. 306.)

Vertical and horizontal transmissions taken together thus amount to some 40 examples, a significant contribution to the question on Williams's part. The further transmission aspect is the age at which songs were acquired, indicated in some of the instances cited. Perhaps all kinship acquisitions can be taken as juvenile, but those specified by Williams are: 'eighty years ago' (Wt 462), 'fifty years ago' (Gl 38-9), 'over seventy years ago' (Gl 104), 'as long ago as he could remember' (Ox 232), 'when a girl' (Wt 317), 'as a child' (Gl 167), 'at her mother's knee' (Gl 129). The extra-family cases give: 'when he was young' (Gl 39), 'nearly eighty years ago' (Bk 13), 'when she was a girl' (Ox 250), 'when he was a boy' (Bk 4), 'in his young days' (Ox 211). Also *infra*, 'when he was seventeen' (Wt 402). These notations suggest strongly that singers commonly absorbed their music in youth.

FOREIGN PRESENCES : NOT SO DARKEST ENGLAND

Internal performance and transmission does not account for how the parochial community comes to possess that music in the first place, given that the testimony, overwhelmingly, of the great field collections reveals the bulk of the material to have been known all over the country. (See, for example, Sharp's conclusion cited Chapter IV.2, p. 280.) The key to the problem, manifestly, is extensive circulation, intrusions from beyond the pale. Historians have dispelled the fallacy of any absolute remoteness: 'English rural society had never been a completely closed world and its cultural isolation should not be exaggerated.'¹⁴¹ The overview of transport and mobility set out in this chapter is enough to establish that the Upper Thames was no exception to the rule. At issue here is what impact, if any, these means of movement might have had on the dissemination of music. A L Lloyd makes this connection to expose a nonsense which has become enracinated in popular conceptions of 'folk song':

the pointless old enquiry: 'What county does that song come from?' ... (the same song is likely to turn up in Cumberland or Kent, Durham or Devon; it is evidence of the mobility of our population, not much else).¹⁴²

2° THE WORLD COMES TO THE UPPER THAMES : PEOPLE

Any impact of the late development represented by the railways is deemed generally more bane to ethnic music-making than stimulus.¹⁴³ Williams has little to say on the advent of the railways in the countryside (though much, of course, on industrial

Swindon).[⊗] Effects, musical or other, in the earlier period of driving of canals through the countryside are likely to have resulted from migrant labour used in their making, not from later snail-like traffic. As cited (p. 80), Williams found recollection of shenanigans at sleepy Castle Eaton created by the clash of hosts and visitors as the Thames and Severn Canal was dug out north of the village in the late 1780s.

In the context of migrant labour drawn in to agriculture, he makes the connection to ethnic composition of those involved:

Formerly a great many Irishmen came over the Channel every year, to haymaking and harvesting, and then returned in time to get their crops of potatoes in, in late autumn. These lived very scantily and frugally, and were hard workers; they saved quite a little pile before going back to the "Old Country". They lived almost entirely on bread and cheese, or cold boiled bacon, and drank ale, cider, and water, not much tea.¹⁴⁴ †

Of gypsies, the ultimate itinerants, he recalls:

Gipsies visited the village [South Marston] when I was a boy, and pitched their camps annually in the Green Lane. These were very peaceable and friendly, for the most part; the village children used to mix with them, and be very often invited to tea or supper.¹⁴⁵

The reminiscence is fleshed out in the note to 'The Prickly Bush' (Wt 498):

The song was a favourite of the gypsies who camped in Marston Lane when I was a boy. The principal gipsy, whose name was Archelaus, had three sons, *viz*, Zephyrus, Adolphus, and Job. They all slept together in a little twig tent, and lived chiefly on hedgehogs. The old man played the fiddle, and sang at the fairs.

Thus does Williams add his customarily quirky snippets to the extensive record of migration. He offers but a single instance of a song transmitted by this means, 'In the days we went a-gipsying' (Wt 402), known to Elijah Iles at Inglesham: 'He remembers hearing it sung by travelling navvies and drovers, who camped in a dis-used stone quarry between Coleshill and Faringdon, when he was seventeen.'

[⊗] Of navvies building the GWR line from London to Bristol, for example, it is recorded: 'Depredations among the farms and fields in the vicinity were frequent. They injured everything they approached ... They often committed the most outrageous acts in their drunken madness.' John Francis, *A History of the English Railway: Its Social Relations and Revelations 1820-1845* (1851), quoted in *Swindon: The Legacy of a Railway Town*, (London, 1995), p. 11.

† Frank Purslow makes the musical connection: 'Bearing in mind the thousands of Irishmen who came to England from about 1760 onwards to work on the building of roads, canals and railways, and to help with seasonal work on farms, it is hardly surprising to note the unmistakable influence of Irish melody and verse patterns on English songs, or the large incidence of purely Irish songs in the repertoires of English singers.' ('The Williams Manuscripts', *Folk Music Journal* 1, 5 (1969), p. 312. The remarks introduce the Williams text 'Pat Maguire', taken to be an instance of this circulation.)

2 THE WORLD COMES TO THE UPPER THAMES : PRINT

For centuries, the vagrant hawkers of broadsides, along with drovers, carters, itinerant harvest hands, pedlars, gipsies, soldiers too, were the main instruments [*sic*] for spreading the ballads across the shires and through the streets.¹⁴⁶

In this compendious little catalogue, Lloyd properly accords primacy to the bawling agents of what is by far the most salient external force in the dissemination of song: the broadside trade. Conditions, social and economic, locally obtaining have been set out in Part 1: loci of congress, literacy levels amongst the rustic populace. On the supply side, the trade *per se*, a species of gutter literature, lends itself to partial elucidation. The difficulty is that, despite leaving a substantial paper trail through what is distinctively an oral—that is, not self-documenting—province, the trade's specific impact on an ethnic domain of *singing* remains shrouded in shadow. Methodologically, enquiry proceeds from two orders of documentary deposit (the printed and the orally-derived), whose extensive inter-connection is commonly assumed but only exceptionally recorded. Field notations may be minutely compared with printed sheets, but illumination of musical *process* supposes a taking into account of dimensions beyond the merely textual.

What traces of this enterprise are discernible in the 'Upper Thames'? Consonant with the tenor of this chapter, this section brings together notations (most of which just happen to be drawn from Williams's writings) on the topic, an exercise in stitching together.⁹ The larger issue of how the broadside trade relates to 'folk' song as such, and the particular question of the hermeneutico-evaluative construction placed on it by Williams himself, are addressed in Chapters IV and VI respectively.

I: PRINTERS (SUPPLY)

Within the bounds of Williams's 'Upper Thames' as circumscribed, the most considerable publishing centre was at Cirencester (Glos), where printing is recorded from the early years of the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁷ The printer and bookseller Rudder issued chapbooks,¹⁴⁸ while assorted booksellers and jobbing printers of the early nineteenth century include five purveyors of broadsides (the term 'purveyor' subsuming agent as well as printing proper). Of this number, three remain shadowy

⁹ As with investigation of singers' backgrounds, this topic, too, is the subject of Bearmanian conceit: 'the only survey of the prevalence of literary as against oral transmission appears to be my own'. Christopher James Bearman, 'The English Folk Music Movement 1898–1914', PhD thesis, University of Hull, 2001, p. 12.

figures. Madden preserves two sheets issued by Shipway—‘The Lamentation of W. Warner, T. Ward & T. Williams, who were executed at Warwick, August 4 1818 for highway robbery’, and ‘The Waterloo Wedding’—and one sheet by W Turner of Cricklade Street, ‘Wig [*unclear*], Hat and Cane’.¹⁴⁹ Finally, at least three of Catnach’s (London) sheets include the name of Shatford among appointed provincial dealers, for example that bearing the texts ‘The Banks of the Clyde / Our Cottage lay a distant mile’:

Printed by J. Catnach, 2, Monmouth-court [*sic*], 7 Dials. Battledores, Primers, &c. sold very cheap. Sold by W. Marshall, Bristol; T. Batchelar, 14, Hackney Road Crescent; Mrs. Boyes, Market-street, Brighton; and Shatford, Cirencester.¹⁵⁰

Since no sheets survive bearing Shatford’s imprint, he may have operated purely as an agent for other printers.¹⁵¹

Less shadowy is T S Porter, known to have been active in the period 1815–16, when he issued the proto-newspapers *The Gloucestershire Garland*, and *The Gleaner or Cirencester Weekly Magazine*, from premises ‘opposite the Swan Inn.’

This was claimed by the originators to be the first work of the kind ever published in Cirencester, for in the first number they declared it to be “a reproach to so considerable a town as Cirencester, the residence of opulence, respectability, and independence, that hitherto it has never given birth to any periodical work, while it so amply supports those produced in other places.” This claim was, however, unfounded, as the *Cirencester Post* or *Gloucestershire Mercury* preceded the *Gleaner* by nearly a century.¹⁵²

Norris further writes: ‘A rare broadside printed by Porter is in the Bingham Library, “Verses on the late Illumination.” Porter is described as a printer, stationer, and vendor of horse medicines, Castle-street, Cirencester. The illumination was probably in honour of winning the Battle of Waterloo. The last verse runs: “I sat me down without controul | For to taste the flowing bowl, | The punch and wine so swift did fly | To welcome Peace and Liberty.” Written by Sarah Browning.’¹⁵³ Porter also issued a sheet entitled ‘The Maid’s Lamentation for the Loss of her Sweetheart’, without date or author.¹⁵⁴ A further four sheets are preserved in the Madden Collection: ‘Song’, ‘A Wife Well Managed’, ‘Light Bob’, and ‘Nobody coming to bury me, Nobody coming to cry’.¹⁵⁵ Porter also operated at Wotton-under-Edge, to the west of Cirencester, though the period is unknown.¹⁵⁶

Undoubtedly the most prolific of the Cirencester broadside printers is W[illiam] Clift. Born c. 1791, Clift set up as a printer from c. 1820, relinquishing the issue of ballads c. 1836-7 but persevering in the print business. He was located in the Market Place at Cirencester in 1839 before moving to Gosditch Street by 1841, where he continued at least until 1844.¹⁵⁷ The nature of his enterprise can be glimpsed from the puff attached to the sheet dubbed 'The Royal Adelaide Bouquet':

CIRENCESTER: Printed and [*sic*] Sold by WILLIAM CLIFT, at his CHEAP WAREHOUSE, where may be had writing Paper, Pens, Ink, Sealing Wax, Wafers, Copy Books, Memorandum Books, Children's Books, and all kinds of Stationery on very low Terms.¹⁵⁸

The extent of Clift's output of broadsides is witnessed principally in Madden, where 90 sheets are preserved containing around 150 texts.¹⁵⁹ To these can be added the rare cache of a further ten sheets held by the museum at Cricklade (*infra*) comprising 25 texts (not counting the duplication of 'Lovely Anne').¹⁶⁰ Clift emerges thus as the familiar jobbing printer-cum-stationer and dabbler in pharmaceuticals. His sizeable output, all of it presumably purloined, indicates that he had spotted a considerable niche.



The broadside of 'The Four Seasons' issued by Clift, Cirencester. The text was found in tradition at nearby Culkerton

These shreds of record suffice to confirm Cirencester as a parochial centre of the trade in the first half of the nineteenth century. There are no extant records of printing anywhere in the quarters of Berkshire and Oxfordshire encompassed by Williams's zone of enquiry. In Wiltshire, however, a printer of broadsides had operated at Highworth, in the heart of the Alfredian Upper Thames. Joseph Ricketts was a native of Castle Eaton (Wilts), where a number of his children were also baptized, including Joseph *filis* on 18 January 1826, when the profession of Joseph *père* was given as 'farrier'.¹⁶¹ In 1851 Ricketts, by then a widower aged 74, was living in Sheep Street, Highworth, his occupation given as druggist. The household further included a spinster daughter aged 51, a grandson aged 23 (druggist's assistant), a granddaughter aged 26 (all three natives of Castle Eaton), and a daughter-in-law aged 26, born at Fyfield, Hants.¹⁶² Remarkably, Ricketts left a rude autobiography which has since been published.¹⁶³ Like Clift, Ricketts was evidently a jack-of-all-trades, though unlike him none of his broadside output appears to have survived. Also in Wiltshire, a number of printers are recorded at Marlborough (at the southern rim of Williams's zone), without any attested connection to the broadside trade.¹⁶⁴

As far as can be gauged, these parochial printers had all ceased to issue sheets by the mid-century. Williams's designated area, of course, also lay within peddling reach of more considerable bastions of gutter printing. At Cheltenham were such as Birt (1816–1821, before shifting to London) and Willey.¹⁶⁵ Perhaps most dominantly, Bristol was strategically sited to serve both West Country and Midlands.¹⁶⁶

2: DEMAND (IMPACT) Supply, extensive though it may be, must correlate to demand. Did this teeming publishing enterprise, parochial and regional, result in a countryside (not to mention a townscape) littered with cheap print? To what extent did the apparent plethora of matter lodge in the humble dwellings of the Upper Thames; and, by extension, how much inserted itself into a practice of singing (given that possession does not automatically bespeak performance)? The target clientele is the working people introduced above; the record, in so far as there is any, is furnished largely by Williams.

In his *Folk Song Essay*, Williams announces familiarity with broadsides and their originators, reporting with partisan pride the existence of Clift and Ricketts:

There are also several inferior songs composed on local events, such as the one on Watkins, the Purton Stoke murderer, "The Wiltshire Labourers," and "The Poor Tradesmen's Lamentation," printed at Wotton-under-Edge. But ~~there is this interesting fact to record: many ballad-sheets were printed at Cirencester [and Highworth]. I have in my possession four broadsides bearing the imprint, Clift, Cirencester, and one bearing the name J. Ricketts, Highworth.~~ ... I also have sheets that were printed at Wotton-under-Edge, Bristol, Newport, Birmingham, Winchester and London.¹⁶⁷

Of these references: the (unidentified) Clift sheets he owned might well have included 'Follow the Drum', the manuscript of which bears the attribution '(Old Ballad Sheet) Clift, Printer, Cirencester';¹⁶⁸ and the printer at Wotton-under-Edge may well have been Porter (*supra*), though Williams's copy of 'The Poor Tradesman's Lamentation' to which he appends the note 'Printed at WuE' is a submitted text (manuscript, not in his hand) rather than an original sheet.¹⁶⁹

Further instances are recorded in the headnotes to individual texts. At Latton (Wilts), lock-keeper Alfred Howse gave Williams a sheet entitled 'The Wiltshire Labourers' printed by William Bailey.¹⁷⁰ Williams also owned a copy of 'Life let us cherish', the implication being that this, too, came from Howse.¹⁷¹ More cryptically, he refers to a printed copy of 'We're all Jolly Fellows that Follow the Plough', passed over in favour of an orally-derived version:

An old favourite, once widely known, but at this time scarcely to be met with. I had a copy on an ancient song sheet, but I was compelled to search over the whole Vale before I could find one to recite me the words complete from memory.¹⁷²

Revealingly, two separate mentions occur in passing in the lecture notes:

VI: Ballad sheets: uses of Life let us cherish. Religious poems. "Watkins".
Red Barn murder of Maria Martin drunkards [*sic*] catechism

~~The One-eyed Ballad Singers.~~ Show the Ballad Sheets.¹⁷³

This shows that Williams used his (presumably exiguous) collection of sheets as props for his talks on folk song, among them copies of 'Maria Marten' and 'The Drunkard's Catechism', suggesting potential confirmation of the thesis advanced by Roly Brown that some of his unattributed texts may have been copied from printed sources.¹⁷⁴ Frustratingly, no evidence of this personal accumulation of broadsides survives among Williams's *Nachlass*.

In addition to those items that came into his own hands, Williams had access to printed matter retained by informants. Of 'Auld Robin Gray' he reports: 'I copied it from an old broadside which I found at Latton, where the piece was sung by the Keylock family'; and of 'The Happy Country Lass': 'I have seen the words on an old ballad sheet, bought at Cirencester Mop. Copy of W Merritt, Meysey Hampton'.¹⁷⁵ Finally, he encountered two printed texts *chez* Thomas Baughan at South Cerney: 'Sweet Molly O'Mog' and 'The Recruiting Sergeant'. (These are discussed *infra*.)

Accepting that Williams's access to these materials, and thus his knowledge of the trade, derived from the song fieldwork (rather than from independent acquisition) of c. 1914–16, his spattered notations offer a tantalizing but valuable glimpse of the extent to which printed matter had penetrated the rustic musical consciousness in the Upper Thames. What he recovered, after his customarily impressionistic fashion, were the fragile, random leavings of a commerce long since extinguished.

A fortuitous instance of accumulation, in rare counterweight to Williams's atomistic testimony, is the bundle of 35 broadsides salvaged by Tom Ramsden-Binks for the museum at Cricklade (Wilts), within Williams's bailiwick: 'They were donated by Mr H W J Cuss, a Cricklade gentleman in his 80s, after I rescued them from his waste paper basket!' ¹⁷⁶ □ Signal as this small act of retrieval was, its significant bearing lies less in the sheets themselves than in what they might have to reveal of the workings of the broadside trade in the locality. *It is an idiomatic museologico-archival failing to accumulate the physical remains of the past severed from any record of the circumstance in which they subsisted and took on meaning: a heedless fetishizing of the object which elides the informing relation to people.* Ramsden-Binks dutifully supplied what contextualizing information he could summon up (it was, of course, far too late):

They [the broadsides] were given to Mr Cuss by his maternal grandfather, Harry Stephens, who was a baker at 29 High Street, and was also the Cricklade subpostmaster during the 1910s. ... I can't recall when he was born and died, but it was around 1860–1920.¹⁷⁷

The sheaf may thus have been bequeathed several times following original acquisition and (possible) use, exemplifying the 'heirloom' effect (*infra*). Whatever

□ These circumstances recall Bishop Percy's eighteenth century retrieval of what became the seminal Percy Folio Manuscript: 'Bishop Percy discovered this unique collection of ballads and songs, written down around 1650, being used to light fires at the house of his friend Mr Humphrey Pitt.' (Leslie Shepard, *The Broadside Ballad* (London, 1962), p. 49.)

their lineage, the clear implication is that the sheets had been in parochial circulation. The bundle breaks down as ten by Clift of Cirencester, 15 from the press of Catnach, with the remaining ten representing seven printers, among them Willey of Cheltenham and three based in Birmingham (John Whiting, William Harris, and W Pratt). All customary features are evident: maculate typography (Clift was especially slapdash in his production values), and quirky, often glaringly incongruous woodcut illustrations. Without supposing ‘representativeness’, this mixture—sheets locally printed alongside those scattered from further afield including the metropolis (some of which, importantly, were distributed through local agents)—may supply clues to patterns of penetration.

If these flimsy loose leaves did not exactly blow into the Upper Thames from the four quarters of the kingdom, extant traces suffice to show that they circulated extensively in its southern half. Who were the agents of this wide scattering?

3: HAWKERS (GRUBBING GO-BETWEENS)

Serving as connector of this production / possession polarity are the dynamics of dissemination, a kinesis of purveying and purchasing constitutive of process. Performing (in every sense) this pivotal role were the broadside hawkers, vagrants whose identity and peregrinations are necessarily obscure. Of contractual relations between printer and hawker the merest glimpse is afforded by some occasional self-promotings emblazoned on the sheets: Clift’s ‘The Four Seasons’ (reproduced *supra*) bears the bold inscription: ‘Printed at W Clift’s Cheap Repository CIRENCESTER—Travellers and Shops supplied Wholesale’, while ‘Wig [*unclear*], Hat and Cane’ by W Turner, Cricklade Street, Cirencester has: ‘By whom Travellers and Country Dealers may be supplied.’¹⁷⁸ This clearly implies a skein of hawkers plying the district, who typically only emerge from the shadows of a peripatetic existence to bawl their wares at country gatherings, essentially fairs. These occasions of rustic congress, fostering the very public enterprise of broadside hawking as well as less licit activities,¹⁷⁹ were abundant in the Upper Thames region (see section *supra*).

As with the material residue, Williams’s forays around the locale uncovered traces of these grubbing go-betweens lodged in the parochial popular memory, fading echoes of a defunct calling. The resultant sketches of country life are dotted with passing mentions of the ‘ballad singers’, typically in recollection of annual fairs:

They [fairs] had provided the people with convenient means of association. The ballad-singers with their bundles of broadsides, travelling players, in fact any who could provide entertainment at the inns never failed to attend, and were listened to by an appreciative audience.¹⁸¹

In the context of Highworth Michaelmas Fair he writes of 'strolling ballad singers', and at Lechlade 'the travelling minstrels and ballad-singers, fiddlers, dancers and wrestlers'.¹⁸² In the later *Banks of Isis* he has this to report of Faringdon:

The simple amusements of the annual fair drew a large crowd from the surrounding villages. Then the ... professional ballad-singers sang and distributed the eagerly-sought broadsides with attractive type and curious illustrations.¹⁸³

In contrast to these inspecific, essentially token mentions, a more extensive picture of the hawking network is painted in the slightly earlier *Villages of the White Horse*, a chronicle of life along the northern edge of the Wiltshire-Berkshire downs:

The schoolmaster remembers when the ballad-singers went from village to village, singing their rhymes; he had helped to train them when he was a young man. These strolling minstrels frequented all the feasts, fairs and revels along the downside, and gave an exhibition of their skill. They carried bundles of ballad-sheets with them, and sold them to the rustics at one penny each. The old carter of Woolstone declares that hundreds of these sheets were disposed of at a single fair time. The number of singers varied; there might be four, or no more than two. Very often it was a man and his wife, and they sang alternately, in response to each other. The ballads were some grave, some sentimental, and others comic or satirical. The old carter could only remember two lines of a satirical piece, dealing with the eternal question of authority in the home. After a proposition, relating to home rule, had been set forth by the female singer; the man responded:

"I do decline and you shall find I will the breeches wear,"

the answer to which was:

"Oh, no, not I! for I will die, but I will have my share."

Here we have a form of verse somewhat in the style of the old Alexandrine measure, and though the subject-matter of this fragment is crude enough, there can be no doubt but that there was some good material circulated in this manner. One can readily understand, from this, how it was that the countryside was vocal in the old days, since every cottage contained sheets of the ballads, the airs of which had been taught the people by the singers at the feasts.¹⁸⁴

The reference to the schoolmaster who 'trained' the ballad-singers is mysterious. The snatch of song cited is from 'The Struggle for the Breeches' (see *infra*). Most interestingly, this 'ballad-singer' line shows that seeds of his later view of song were present in the period before he had embarked on song gleaning proper.

Modulating, in the Folk Song Essay, from the central role of inns as forum for performance, Williams sketches this rare vignette of a hawking partnership:

The songs were mainly obtained at the fairs. These were attended by the ballad singers, who stood in the market-place and sang the new tunes and pieces, and at the same time sold the broadsides at a penny each. The most famous ballad singers of the Thames Valley, in recent times, were a man and woman, who travelled together; and each of whom had but one eye. They sang at all the local fairs, and the man sold the sheets, frequently wetting his thumb with his lips to detach a sheet from the bundle and hand it to a customer in the midst of the singing.¹⁸⁵

The headnote to 'The Struggle for the Breeches' (Wt 419), adds to the cameo an illustration of the hawkers in action, connecting vending and subject matter:

An old comic duet, that was formerly popular, especially at fair times. A man and woman, each with but one eye, traversed the region of the Upper Thames Valley and sang ballads at the fairs, at the same time selling the sheets. They used also to sing the following, with spirit and emphasis, to the great amusement of the crowd. I have heard it in many villages, especially around Faringdon. The complete copy I obtained of Alfred Howse, Latton, Cricklade.[Ⓞ]

Williams makes this connection of specific instance to occasion in the cases of 'The Bonny Labouring Boy' (Gl 49) and 'Tetbury Mop' (Gl 123):

a ballad of the type that was commonly sung at the fairs, and was popular in many parts of the Thames Valley.

An old local [*sic*] song, sung at the Michaelmas fairs. Cirencester, Highworth or Marlborough might have been substituted for Tetbury.

Williams, furthermore, shows himself to be alive to the *modus operandi* of the hawkers, whether as his own inference or from a printed source such as Bell.

The professional ballad singers, passing from town to town, substituted a fresh name to fit in with the locality. It helped the song to "catch on," and served to sell their sheets. And even though the printed sheet showed the original place-name, the local singers substituted one well known to them.¹⁸⁶

Ⓞ The *achamé* researches of Keith Chandler into local newspapers has unearthed this convergent account of St Giles's Fair, Oxford in 1868: 'This year's fair will long be remembered for its extraordinarily fine weather, and the consequent increase in shows ... The ballad singers mustered in force, and great amusement was created by a hoary headed old man, led along by a woman blind of one eye, when they screamed, with mouths all awry: 'Now twig the young lasses as they go along | With oyster-shell bonnet and dandy chignon.' (*Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 12 September 1868, p. 5—emphasis added.) On the subject of 'The Struggle for the Breeches', the comic-dramatic possibilities of this emblematic framing of domestic strife may have made it a hawker's stock in trade. Howse's granddaughter, Mrs Josephine Steele recalls: 'I am 91 & can remember my Grampy & Aunt Rose doing the duet 'Struggle for the Breeches'. (Private letter, 31 July 1994, cited above p. 132.) This is a cherished topic, generally: Hamish Henderson cites a chapbook of that title in *Alias MacAlias* (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 69; and Anna Clark incorporates it into the title of her book, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the making of the British working class* (Berkeley, 1995).

4: TEXTUAL TRANSACTIONS / VOCAL PERFORMANCES

Ultimately at issue in this context is not alone peddling and acquisition but a particular order of consumption, namely articulation with rustic music-making (not merely circulation but insertion). The primary 'evidence' provided by the great broadside collections is at once extensive and divorced from this defining dimension—assuming, always, that the sheets were purchased to be sung. How do these elements, thus far discussed separately, entwine to form a supra-tribal dynamic sustaining (apparently) an established practice of singing among country people (to name only that group)? Ideally, the strands explored in this chapter as a whole should at this point join up: communications networks, calendar occasions, singers and their circumstances (especially literacy levels), repertory, printers, hawkers, surviving sheets (dividing as: production, consumption, and enabling conditions). A familiar deficiency of direct record, however, means that confluences—the mechanisms by which a mass of popular print and a practice of ethnic singing are bound together—must be obliquely explored. Questions of method are posed: essentially, bringing notations into conjunction in an attempt to gauge impact, the crux of which is to constitute the bearer as *foyer*, corrective both to textual correlations *in abstracto* and to the sweep of confident generality. It is precisely snippets supplied by Williams that, to a very limited extent, enable exercises of this order to be conducted.

The evident procedure for testing influence is to check off field notations against the sheets. Performed indiscriminately, however, the comparative exercise takes no account of local particularities, merely noting similarities between an orally-derived set—necessarily local in incidence—and a sheet chancing to survive in a repository not specific to locality. These presumably are the terms on which commentators note high apparent convergences. Thomson on Williams, for example, has:

Clearly the upper Thames valley was within reach of the major broadside centres of Bristol, Gloucester, Worcester, Birmingham, Coventry, Banbury, Northampton and London. Over six hundred of Williams's texts can be traced on broadsides printed at one or other of these centres. This represents a proportion of eighty percent of the entire collection and the same figure (if not a little higher) is true of the collections made by Cecil Sharp, Vaughan Williams and Percy Grainger.¹⁸⁶

Also in the context of the Williams collection, Frank Purslow takes the view that Upper Thames singers acquired their material 'from copies of the same broadsides

... as villagers everywhere', echoed by John Baldwin citing examples of songs he had found: 'All these are from standard broadside versions and are *therefore* close to those found in the Williams mss'.¹⁸⁷ The connection remains inspecific, a blurring of circumstance and causation in determining to posit the centrality of print. In this respect, possibility of a tighter (less loose) drawing together is provided by the Cricklade Museum materials, confirming, in the case Clift, parochiality of currency as well as of printing. Versions of seven of the Clift texts were recovered from tradition by Williams. In addition there are four at Cricklade printed outside the district. The panel specifies this intersection, providing conditions of a close comparison:

COINCIDENCE OF TEXTS AT CRICKLADE MUSEUM WITH WILLIAMS COLLECTION		
CLIFT'S TITLE (CRICKLADE)	WILLIAMS'S TITLE	WILLIAMS'S SOURCE
'The Poor Little Fisherman's Boy' (#6819)	'The Poor Fisherboy' (Mi 672)	Jonathan Cole Brinkworth (Wilts)
'Mary of the Moor' (#6819)	'Wind Across the Wild Moor' (Gl 89)	George Grubb Ewen (Glos)
'The Rambling Sailor' (#6823)	'The Rambling Sailor' (Mi 684)	Unattributed
'The Pretty Ploughboy' (#6825)	'The Pretty Ploughing Boy' (Bk 5)	Jonas Wheeler Buscot (Berks)
'The Four Seasons' (#6826)	'The Four Seasons' (Gl 73)	Arthur Halliday Culkerton (Glos)
'Going out a Gypsying' (#6827)	'In the Days we went a-Gypsying' (Wt 402)	Elijah Iles Inglesham (Wilts)
'The Little Gypsy Girl' (#6827)	'The Gypsy Girl' (Ox 247)	Frank Cook Burford (Oxon)
NOT CLIFT		
'The Pitcher' (#6833) (Catnach)	'The Pitcher of Water' (Wt 364)	Wassail Harvey Cricklade (Wilts)
'The Transport' (#6837) (Catnach)	'Botany Bay' (Wt 350)	Wassail Harvey Cricklade (Wilts)
'Jeannette's Farewell to Jeannot' (#6842; Birt)	'Jeanette' (Gl 163)	Anon Tetbury (Glos)
'O my love is dead' (#6844; obliterated)	'My love's dead' (Wt 489)	Mrs Phillips Purton (Wilts)

To this can be added a further clutch of Clift texts in Madden, versions of which also occur in Williams. These are, potentially: 'Banks of Claudy' [Gl 61], 'Bonny Bunch of Roses O' [Wt 391], 'Fair Phoebe and her dark-ey'd sailor' [Wt 409], 'William and Dinah' [Wt 345], 'Joe, the Marine' [Ox 172], 'New Garden Fields' [Wt 460], 'Pretty Susan the Pride of Kildare' [Wt 343], 'Here's a health to all good lasses' [Wt 341]; and from the Miscellaneous section: 'Streams of Lovely Nancy' [Mi 714], 'Farmer's Boy' [Mi 565], 'Poor Caroline of Edinburgh Town' [Mi 543], 'Sary Sykes' (tune: Moll in the wad) [Mi 755], 'Undaunted Mary, or the Banks of sweet Dundee' [Mi 664], 'Week's matrimony' [Mi 736], and 'Oh, no, we never mention her' [Mi 655].

The limitation of this exercise is that it effects a comparison of outcome, occluding transmission as process. Those texts, however, known to have been possessed on sheets offer scope for extended investigation. Some of these are unpromising—'Auld Robin Gray' (Wt 420), copied from a sheet, has no oral dimension, and the note to 'The Happy Country Lass' (Gl 120) is insufficiently precise—but the following may be amplified as case studies by reference to the circumstances of the bearers.

(**CHRONOLOGY**) The vintage of Williams's informants stretches from 1816 to 1870+ (similar to that of other collectors), coextensive to a significant degree with the floruit of the broadside renaissance, national and local. If prodigious quantities of sheets were put out during the formative period of many of the singers, or of their immediate predecessors, what more intimately were the conjoinings?

While some ingenuity has attended efforts to date printed matter, any correlation to the bearer's dates has been neglected. 'The Four Seasons' (Gl 73) is an engaging instance of a song (text) which must owe its currency to the print trade: probably an eighteenth-century poetaster's piece, Clift's printing of it necessarily falls within his floruit of 1820s–30s, in which period it was also issued by Pitts, Catnach and others (and from whose sheets Clift may have derived his text). Williams's informant Arthur Halliday of Culkerton (a hamlet of Ashley, Glos), however, belongs to the generation of 1860+. If Halliday acquired his set from print, it is unlikely to have been before 1880, which would mean the sheet had lingered many years after its issue. If, as seems more plausible, he had it orally from an older singer who had it from a sheet, the case describes an effect of indirect acquisition. Thus, small but not negligible disparities thrown up by a comparison of texts may embody an initial degree of oral mutation.

Conversely, Catnach's 'The Transport' (also at Cricklade Museum, #6837) is very close to Williams's 'Botany Bay' (Wt 350) noted from "Wassail" Harvey, of Cricklade, born 1826 and thus much nearer to the period of production of the sheet.

(LITERACY) A section in Part I established that literacy levels amongst Williams's informants were potentially considerable, an elementary condition of print penetration. From there, connections to specific individuals can be explored, pushing beyond a mere aggregating of figures. Of the song 'Life let us Cherish' (Wt 418), for example, the Bodleian holds four copies: one by Catnach (*solus*), two by Pitts (one with three other texts, and one *solus*) and one *sine nomine* (with one other text).¹⁸⁸ A comparison shows that, of these, the last stands closest to the set recovered from the Howse family. Howse himself was literate and had at least one broadside in his possession (p. 181 *supra*). The other connection in this instance is with thoroughfares, Latton being on the Roman route known as Ermin Street.

The print notation of greatest import in Williams concerns purchase of a broadside from a hawker by Elijah Iles ("Gramp")—"documented instances of songs learned from ballad sheets are rare", remarks Roy Palmer¹⁸⁹—translating into performance.

Gramp's songs are very ancient and rude, but they afford a very fair example of the kind of verses that pleased the rustics a century and a half ago. One of his special favourites is "The Bonny Bunch of Roses O" which he bought of a one-eyed ballad-singer as he was taking the butter to Lechlade market in the donkey cart in the year 1832.¹⁹⁰

During a Christmas gathering, Iles is enjoined to render this very song:

"Aa! 'E wants vetchin' off, 'e do. Wants some wind put into 'e. I bought 'e at Lechlade. I axed the ballet-senger if a'd got a good zong an' a zelled ma this un."¹⁹¹

If 1832 is accurate, a date possibly close to the song's first issue, Iles would have been ten at the time. He was certainly literate when he married in 1852. A quirky companion piece is a satirical item on leading political figures of the mid-nineteenth century which Iles characterizes as "a bit o' zummat as us used to zeng at the time o' the fast", the circumstances of transmission of which are anything but oral:

It seems that one of his mates left the farm and went to London to work during the "Fifties". The fast was ordered at the time of the cotton famine that was caused by the American Civil War. Gramp's mate saw the printed sheets containing the skit and bought one and sent it home to him.¹⁹²

For ease of exposition, discussion to this point has broken down the transmission question into principal parts—family, parish, oral migration, print—but these do not in practice exist in separation. Insertion of any given song into the mouth of any individual singer in any particular conditions may be the result of a whole tangle of agencies and contingencies. The rich record on Elijah Iles presented piecemeal in this chapter can be drawn together to illustrate this transmissive multiplexity.

TRANSMISSION : HOW ELIJAH ILES CAME TO ACQUIRE EIGHT OF HIS SONGS

The tacitly 'vertical' dimension of transmission within the hearth and the 'lateral' axis of aleatory contact with the outside world intersect to create the conditions of 'tradition': a multiple dynamic of assimilation and perpetuation.

**VERTICAL
TRANSMISSION:
(KINSHIP)**

|

GRANDFATHER

'The Old Woman Drinking her Tea'
'Preaching for Bacon'
'Green Grow the Rushes'
'The Banks of Bonny Doon'

|

[PARENTS]

|

ELIJAH ILES

|

[CHILDREN]

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**HORIZONTAL
TRANSMISSION:**

WORKPLACE

'Woodman spare
that Tree'

ENCOUNTER

'In the Days we
went a-Gipsying'

PRINTED WORD

'The Bonny
Bunch of Roses'

Political Text

The text Williams has as 'Sweet Molly O'Mog' (Gl 143; 'Says my Uncle', an early eighteenth-century composition) encountered at South Cerney (Glos), and destined to engender testy exchanges with Frank Kidson (see pp. 429-30 *infra*), describes a geo-domestic trajectory beyond the mercantile transaction. This is an exquisitely rare instance, not otherwise extant in either broadside or field collections.¹⁹³ Williams's set has only four of the original 15 verses, recast as dialect. The headnote reads:

Obtained of Thomas Baughan, South Cerney. The song was a favourite of his father's, and of his grandfather's, who bought it on a broadside at Cirencester Mop, where it was sung at least as early as the year 1793. I know nothing more concerning it, having heard it nowhere else.

The demographics are these: Baughan's paternal grandfather, James Baughn (*sic*), a thatcher, was born at Highworth (Wilts) on 21 December 1796 and married on 21 November 1821 at Kempsford (Glos), when he signed in his own hand. A son, John, was born at Kempsford in 1837, father of Thomas. John married first at South Cerney on 21 June 1860 and secondly, sometime before 1870, Thomas's mother. He was unable to sign his name in the marriage register. Thomas himself, 1870-1920, would be literate by definition.¹⁹⁴ So the 'Mogg' sheet may have passed through a generation unable to read it, retained for ornament rather than use. This would offer exemplification of an effect of popular literature much commented on:⁵

Surveys were made of the possession of books in the 1830s and 40s, but these recognised that although ownership was surprisingly widespread, literature was more often inherited than bought, more often neglected than read.¹⁹⁵

A literate countryman purchases locally a song sheet in the period of the great broadside revival. He migrates westward in two stages—Highworth to Kempsford four miles, Kempsford to South Cerney seven miles, 13 in total—marrying and procreating on the way, and taking with him the song as internalized and the physical sheet from which it (words) had been acquired. Both his son and grandson also know the song, and the broadside is preserved in the family at South Cerney, where

⁵ From the same source Williams also had a text entitled 'The Recruiting Sergeant' (Gl 141), of which he writes: 'Verses on an old illustrated handbill, printed and distributed about 1800, and now in the possession of Thomas Baughan, South Cerney.' Thomson proposes: 'A great many singers, particularly those with extensive repertoires, possessed collections of ballad sheets, newspaper clippings with songs upon them or manuscript 'ballet' books. Often these collections were family heirlooms and had been handed down for many years.' (Robert Thomson, 'The Development of the Broadside Ballad Trade and its influence upon the transmission of English folksongs' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1975), pp. 215-6.) The Cricklade broadsides described at p. 182 *supra* are a further instance. An expansion here is domestic accumulations of later printed matter, that is, post-broadside proper. Of particular moment is the mouldering congeries of song sheets belonging to John Ockwell of Somerford Keynes (see p. 136 *supra*).

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

- 1 David Verey, *Gloucestershire: The Cotswolds* (The Buildings of England, Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 291.
- 2 Alfred Williams, *Round About the Upper Thames* (London, 1922), pp. 21-22.
- 3 Verey, p. 283.
- 4 *Round About the Upper Thames*, pp. 182-3.
- 5 *Round About the Upper Thames*, p. 34.
- 6 Humphrey Household, *The Thames and Severn Canal* (Gloucester, 1983), p. 85 and p. 163.
- 7 'Round About the Upper Thames', Chapter VII (part 1), *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 20 March 1915, p. 2—passage excised from book. For details of the landlord of the Trout at this period, see 1901 census for Lechlade, section 2, schedule 105; and obituary in *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 30 March 1918, p. 8.
- 8 'Round About the Upper Thames', Chapter XV (part 1), *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 10 July 1915, p. 2—passage excised from book.
- 9 'Round About the Upper Thames', Chapter XII (part 1), *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 29 May 1915, p. 2—passage excised from book.
- 10 Alfred Williams, *Villages of the White Horse* (London, 1913), p. 18, and pp. 282-3. 'Round About the Upper Thames', Chapter II (part 1), *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 9 January 1915, p. 2—passage excised from book.
- 11 Roy Palmer, *The Folklore of Gloucestershire* (Tiverton, 1994), p. 170.
- 12 *Victoria County History*, Berkshire IV (Oxford, 1924), p. 321.
- 13 *Ibid*, p. 25.
- 14 *Ibid*, p. 492.
- 15 *Victoria County History*, Gloucestershire VII (Oxford, 1981), p. 79.
- 16 *Ibid*, p. 117.
- 17 *Victoria County History*, Gloucestershire XI (Oxford, 1976), pp. 272-3.
- 18 *Victoria County History*, Oxfordshire XIII (Oxford, 1996), p. 38.
- 19 *Ibid*, p. 164.
- 20 *Victoria County History*, Wiltshire XII (Oxford, 1983), p. 81.
- 21 *Victoria County History*, Wiltshire XIV (Oxford, 1991), pp. 148-9.
- 22 *Victoria County History*, Wiltshire XII (Oxford, 1983), p. 212.
- 23 *Ibid*, p. 40.

it is uncovered and recorded by Alfred Williams c. 1915. (That none of this chronology quite stacks against Williams's date of '1793' may simply reflect the vagaries of vernacular memory.) A trajectory is, up to a point, traceable: from the witty, inebriate pen of Gay—*et alii*—in the 1720s, this encomium to a fetching wench passes via money-grubbing, piratical street literature into the mouths of a family of rustics in the nineteenth century Upper Thames, and finally into the notebook of a crusading collector in the early twentieth century, thence into the columns of the local press.

Gathering of shards in this section shows that the supply of broadsides, imported and locally generated, reached well into the territory Williams would later scour, penetrating the rustic hearth with strong suggestion if little overt declaration of assimilation to performance. What wants, of course, is the essential wedding to *tune*. How did Iles supply a tune for the political squib conveyed to him through the post? Did the Baughans sing their dialectized 'Molly Mogg' to 'Clarinda's an Exquisite Creature', as directed by inaugural printings? (Reproduced at p. 35 *supra*.)



In place of the quaint model of a sequestered, medieval peasantry lingering on until the Great War, the reverse predominantly obtains, a defining porousness: it was precisely a degree of circulation of people, goods and information (including music) around the countryside that enabled 'folk song' to take the form it did, in England at least. More specifically, the evidence presented of mobility amongst these working country people serves to correct the insidious habit of fixing the identity (meaning) of a singer in terms of an exclusive location: Shadrach Haydon 'of Bampton' becomes arbitrary, not to say misleading, once it is established that he spent the bulk of his life in the villages around Faringdon and just happened to be living at Bampton in his dotage when Williams—and Sharp, indeed—arrived to invent him as a folk singer. Similarly, Elijah Iles 'of Inglesham', David Sawyer 'of Ogbourne', and many others. The geographical identity which may signify, however, is affiliation not to a settlement but to a locale: although Williams's informants moved around, most stayed within the loose limits of a district, their humble *Heimat*. A loop forms to the tenability of a notional 'Upper Thames': the tendency of rustic denizens, instinctively, to regard this area as discrete stands as circumstantial confirmation of the construct.

- 24 *Victoria County History*, Wiltshire IX (Oxford, 1970), p. 133.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 197.
- 26 'Round About the Upper Thames', Chapter VIII (part 1), *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 3 April 1915, p. 2—passage excised from book.
- 27 *Round About the Upper Thames*, p. 38.
- 28 B. Lawton, 'Markets and Fairs', in *A History of Highworth*, volume 1 (Highworth, 1980), p. 71.
- 29 *North Wiltshire Herald*, 12 October 1888.
- 30 Diana Holmes, *Cricklade* (Stroud, 1993), p. 13.
- 31 *Villages of the White Horse*, p. 154.
- 32 *Round About the Upper Thames*, p. 141.
- 33 *A Wiltshire Village*, pp. 239-40.
- 34 'Round About the Upper Thames', Chapter XIII (part 1), *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 12 June 1915, p. 2—passage excised from book.
- 35 *Villages of the White Horse*, p. 156.
- 36 Alfred Williams, 'Whitsuntide Customs: Observances that have fallen into decay', *North Wiltshire Herald*, 25 May 1928, p. 10.
- 37 *Villages of the White Horse*, p. 154.
- 38 'Round About the Upper Thames', Chapter XVI (part 1), *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 24 July 1915, p. 2—passage excised from book.
- 39 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 22.
- 40 *Fakesong*, p. 217. The reference to 'soldiers' is presumably the isolated case of Pillinger, 'sailors' is presumably Edward Roberts's source for Gl 138: 'he learnt it of an old sailor, who took part in the bombardment of Alexandria.'
- 41 Michael Pickering, *Village Song and Culture* (London, 1982), pp. 169-70.
- 42 See, for example, brief summaries of findings in Leslie Shepard, *John Pitts* (London, 1969), pp. 16 and 83. Robert Thomson, 'The Development of the Broadside Ballad Trade and its influence upon the transmission of English folksongs' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1975) manages no more than a passing nod at 'increased general literacy' (p. 139).
- 43 Richard Sykes, 'The Evolution of Englishness in the English Folksong Revival, 1890-1914', *Folk Music Journal* 6, 4 (1993), pp. 454-6.
- 44 C J Bearman, 'Who were the folk? The demography of Cecil Sharp's Somerset folk singers', *The Historical Journal* 43, 3 (2000), pp. 769 and 771.
- 45 David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1989).

- 46 June R Lewis, *The Cotswolds: Life and Traditions* (London, 1996), p. 62.
- 47 Synthesis from *Victoria County History*, Gloucestershire VII (Oxford, 1981) (Brightwells Barrow Hundred).
- 48 Synthesis from *Victoria County History*, Oxfordshire XIII (Oxford, 1996).
- 49 Synthesis from *Victoria County History*, Wiltshire volumes IX, XI, XII, XIV.
- 50 *Victoria County History*, Gloucestershire VII (Oxford, 1981), p. 105.
- 51 *Victoria County History*, Oxfordshire XIII (Oxford, 1996), 78-9.
- 52 *Ibid*, p. 78.
- 53 *Victoria County History*, Gloucestershire VII (Oxford, 1981), p. 21.
- 54 *Ibid*, p. 43.
- 55 *Ibid*, p. 84.
- 56 *Ibid*, p. 105.
- 57 *Victoria County History*, Oxfordshire XIII (Oxford, 1996), p. 78.
- 58 *Ibid*, pp. 58-9.
- 59 *Ibid*, p. 149.
- 60 *Ibid*, p. 204.
- 61 *Victoria County History*, Wiltshire XI (Oxford, 1980), p. 164.
- 62 See *A Wiltshire Village*, pp. 251 and 299.
- 63 *Round About the Upper Thames*, p. 192.
- 64 Christopher Carter was buried at Longworth on 22 October 1927, aged 81.
- 65 For Smart see Introduction to *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, p. 18; for Sawyer see the original form in *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 2 October 1915, p. 2.
- 66 *A Wiltshire Village*, p. 251.
- 67 Marriages Highworth, burials Inglesham. Census: 1861 Highworth §III schedule 131, 1901 Inglesham schedule 9.
- 68 'Round About the Upper Thames', Chapter V (pt 2), *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 27 February 1915, p. 2, reprised in 1922 as *Round About the Upper Thames*, pp. 88-9. The 1922 amendment 'is nearly 95' is odd, occurring eight years after initial redaction and five after Iles's death.
- 69 *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 31 March 1917, p. 8.
- 70 Baptisms Ogbourne St Andrew, marriages Bishopstone, death GRO Index September quarter 1918 (6 a 478). Census: 1851 Ogbourne St Andrew schedule 39, 1861 Ogbourne St Andrew schedule 91, 1881 Lyncombe & Widcombe schedule 235, 1901 Swindon schedule 138 (Winifred Street).

- 71 As note 65.
- 72 Stratton St Margaret burials, WSRO 2000/3 (2).
- 73 Letter to his wife, 13 December 1918 (WSRO 2598/64). By this date, Sawyer was already in the grave.
- 74 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 21 (no text extant).
- 75 Letter to Mrs Field, 5 May 1916 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 76 Letter to Mrs Field, 27 June 1916 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 77 Baptisms, marriages, burials Cricklade. Census: Cricklade *passim*.
- 78 'Round About the Upper Thames', Chapter XIII (part 2), *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 19 June 1915, p. 2—passage excised from book.
- 79 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 22.
- 80 As note 78.
- 81 'The Thames Head Wassail', *Oxford Times*, 23 December 1927, p. 5.
- 82 Baptism, marriage, burial not found. Census: 1891 Liddiard Millicent supplementary section schedule 8, 1901 Cheltenham 30 Worcester Street (13/ 2460/ 17/ 25, schedule 168).
- 83 Lecture notes (WSRO 2598/36).
- 84 Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture, Brotherton Library Special Collections, University of Leeds), Tape 12A – now LAVC/A487r. Thanks to Robin Wiltshire for facilitating access to the collection.
- 85 Baptisms Lechlade, marriages Kelmscot, burials Fairford. Census (all Lechlade): 1851 §II schedule 4, 1861 §I schedule 119, 1871 §I schedule 23, 1881 §II schedule 7, 1891 §II schedule 22, 1901 §II schedule 73.
- 86 Regimental archives of the Grenadier Guards (Birdcage Walk, London).
- 87 'Round About the Upper Thames', Chapter VII (part 1), *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 20 March 1915, p. 2.
- 88 As note 86.
- 89 *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 27 September 1924, p. 5.
- 90 Baptisms Lyford, marriages Hatford, burials Bampton. Census: 1841 Lyford (unscheduled), 1851 Hatford schedule 14, 1861 Hatford schedule 25, 1871 Hatford schedule 2, 1881 Pusey schedule 9, 1891 Bampton §II schedule 127, 1901 Bampton §I schedule 99.
- 91 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 18.
- 92 Lecture notes (WSRO 2598/36).

- 93 Appended (coincidentally?) to the two renderings of 'The Rambling Sailor' which Sharp noted: 17 August 1909 (FT 2289) and 1 June 1914 (FT 2941). The biographical sketch based on official record shows some of this to be mistaken—Haydon did not move to Bampton as a young man, and his wife was not a native of that place—though this is presumably what Sharp had from the horse's mouth.
- 94 George Swinford, *The Jubilee Boy* (Filkins, 1987), p. 16.
- 95 Baptisms, marriages, burials Bampton. Census (all Bampton): 1851 §II 165, 1861 §II 14, 1871 §II 171, 1881 §II 122, 1891 §II 148, 1901 §II 122.
- 96 Keith Chandler, *Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles* (London, 1993), p. 142.
- 97 Percy Manning, *Folklore* VIII 4 (December 1897), p. 318.
- 98 Cecil Sharp Collection, FT 2373 (Williams Ox 211).
- 99 Letter to his wife, 7 July 1919 (WSRO 2598/61).
- 100 Frederick Bingham 'An Old Morris Dancer: Charles Tanner of Bampton, Oxon,' *The Dancing Times*, March 1916, pp. 172-3.
- 101 Baptisms, marriages, burials Latton. Census (all Latton): 1871 schedule 18, 1881 schedule 52, 1891 schedule 33, 1901 schedule 11.
- 102 Private letter from Mrs Steele, 31 May 1994.
- 103 Private letters from Mrs Steele, 26 May 1995 and 25 June 1994. For notes on the 'broomstick' see Chapter I, p. 59.
- 104 Private letter from Mrs Steele, 31 July 1994.
- 105 Private letter from Mrs Steele, 25 June 1994.
- 106 Obituary, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 14 August 1937, p. 3.
- 107 Private letter from Mrs Steele, 9 June 1995.
- 108 Obituary, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 7 December 1912, p. 5.
- 109 Baptisms and burials Somerford Keynes. Census (all Somerford): 1851 schedule 60, 1861 schedule 56, 1881 schedule 85, 1891 schedule 35, 1901 schedule 21.
- 110 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 22.
- 111 Birth GRO Index Bath district, December quarter 1869 (5 c 636). Census: 1881 Kilmington (2079/78/13/1341501), 1901 Kemble schedule 57.
- 112 Christian Brann, *Kemble, Exwen & Poole Keynes* (Kemble, 1992), p. 38.
- 113 See *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 3 April 1915, p. 2 and *passim*.
- 114 *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 4 December 1915, p. 4.

- 115 The text appeared in the *Standard* serial on 18 March 1916, p. 3, and in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* (1923), p. 100.
- 116 Gascoigne to Williams (WSRO 2598/60). The village songster recently deceased might be William Sparrow, collected at Kemble by Cecil Sharp on 7 March 1913 ('The Irish Girl' FT 2854) and on 7 April 1913 ('The Hermit' FT 2855 and 'Wassail Song' FT 2856). Sparrow was buried at Kemble on 2 February 1915 aged '75' (Gloucestershire Record Office P186 IN 1/8: a later note in the register observes he must in fact have been 80).
- 117 Baptisms, marriages, burials South Cerney. Census (all South Cerney): 1861 §II schedule 115, 1871 §I schedule 63, 1881 §I schedule 60, 1891 §II schedule 65, 1901 §II schedule 55.
- 118 Obituary, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 29 November 1952, p. 3.
- 119 Marriages Fairford, burials Hatherop. Census: 1881 Hatherop schedule 40, 1891 Hatherop schedule 24, 1901 Hatherop schedule 57.
- 120 Filmed interview, 11 July 2005.
- 121 Baptisms and marriages Eastleach Martin, burials Quenington. Census: 1881 Leonard Stanley schedule 113, 1891 Brize Norton §I schedule 90, 1901 Fairford §II schedule 144.
- 122 Baptisms Kempsford, marriages and burials Southrop. Census: 1871 Kempsford schedule 52, 1881 Southrop schedule 27, 1891 Southrop schedule 53, 1901 Southrop schedule 53.
- 123 Burials Lechlade. Census: 1891 Lechlade §II schedule 75, 1901 Lechlade §II schedule 15.
- 124 Obituary, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 15 September 1928, p. 2.
- 125 Baptisms and marriages Shilton, burials Clanfield. Census: 1881 Witney §II schedule 84, 1891 Clanfield schedule 42, 1901 Clanfield schedule 55.
- 126 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', instalment XXXV, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 1 July 1916, p. 3.
- 127 Baptisms, marriages and burials Northmoor. Census: 1881 Northmoor schedule 1, 1891 Northmoor schedule 3.
- 128 Baptisms Castle Eaton, marriages Hankerton, burials Highworth. Census: 1871 Castle Eaton schedule 56, 1881 Buscot schedule 64, 1901 Hannington schedule 73.
- 129 *North Wiltshire Herald*, 30 November 1928, p. 9.
- 130 Baptisms Hinton Parva, marriages Wanborough, burials Hinton Parva. Census: 1881 Hinton Parva schedule 38.

- 131 *Villages of the White Horse*, pp. 194-5.
- 132 Frank Purslow, 'The Williams Manuscripts', *Folk Music Journal*, I, 5 (1969), pp. 305-314.
- 133 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 14.
- 134 Alfred Williams, 'The Local Distribution of the Folk Song and Folk Music', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 6 August 1925, p. 3.
- 135 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 14.
- 136 Private letter, 4 July 1996.
- 137 *Fakesong*, p. 217.
- 138 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, pp. 19-20.
- 139 *Ibid*, p. 22.
- 140 *Ibid*, p. 21.
- 141 Howard Newby, *Country Life* (London, 1987), p. 135.
- 142 A L Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* (London, 1967), p. 49.
- 143 J S Bratton, *The Victorian Popular Ballad* (London, 1975), p. 7.
- 144 *A Wiltshire Village*, pp. 275-6.
- 145 *Ibid*, p. 276.
- 146 *Folk Song in England*, p. 149.
- 147 'The [*sic*] Cirencester printing began in 1718, in which year Thomas Hinton brought out the first number of the *Cirencester Post*.' Plomer, *A Short History of English Printing, 1476-1724*, quoted in Herbert Norris, 'The Booksellers and Printers of Cirencester', part 1, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 16 March 1912, p. 2. (A talk given to the Cirencester Naturalists' and Archæologists' Society.)
- 148 Jean Welsford, *Cirencester: A History and Guide* (Gloucester, 1987), p. 90.
- 149 Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, Madden reel 23. (References via Roly Brown.) Norris lists printer Joseph Turner, 1735-1802.
- 150 Cricklade Museum Collections #6830. Other instances are 'Cottage that stands by the sea / The Belfast Mountains' (#6836), and 'Merchant and Shepherdess / The Cuckoo' (#6839).
- 151 Robert Thomson, 'The Development of the Broadside Ballad Trade and its influence upon the transmission of English folksongs' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1975), p. 144.
- 152 Norris, part 2, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 30 March 1912, p. 2.
- 153 *Ibid*.

- 154 Bingham Library, Cirencester.
- 155 Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, Madden reel 23 (645, 646, 643, 644).
- 156 'The printer at Wotton[-under-Edge] was T S Porter, who also worked at Cirencester, though I don't know whether this was simultaneously or consecutively.' Private letter from Roy Palmer, 3 December 1996.
- 157 Roy Palmer asserts that Clift was in business for 17 years ('from about 1820') (*The Folklore of Gloucestershire* (Tiverton, 1994), p. 243, unreferenced), presumably based on information Clift supplied to Madden (*qv*). Robson's *Directory of Gloucestershire* (1839) lists him as operating from the Market Place, Cirencester, while Pigot's *Directory of Gloucestershire* (1842 and 1844, under the rubric 'Booksellers, Printers & Stationers') locates him in Gosditch Street. Census of 1841 (Cirencester district 5, page 1) has: aged 50, a 'chemist' by occupation, living next door to the Ram public house.
- 158 Sheet in Cricklade Museum (#6827).
- 159 Working from Madden, Roy Palmer (as note 157) reports that Clift 'issued 90 sheets bearing some 150 titles, of which roughly a third consisted of reprintings of traditional [*sic*] texts'.
- 160 These are: '**Alice Gray**' (6825), 'The Black Velvet Band' (6818), '**The Bonny Breast-Knot**' (6825), 'Can I ever forget the valley' (6818), '**Chapter of Cheats**' (6822), 'The Deep Deep Sea' (6825), '**The Four Seasons**' (6826), 'Going out a gipsying' (6825), 'The Huntsman' (6821), '**The Knight of the Silver Shield**' (6823), 'The Lass that loves a Sailor' (6825), '**Life's a Bumper**' (6825), 'Light of Other Days' (6825), 'The Little Gipsy Girl' (6825), 'Lovely Anne' (6820 & 6821), 'Mary of the Moor' (6819), 'Merry Mountain Horn' (6825), 'My Molly O' (6820), 'The Poor Little Fisherman's Boy' (6819), '**The Pretty Ploughboy**' (6825), 'The Rambling Sailor' (6823), '**The Rose of Ardee**' (6824), 'She never blamed him—never' (6825), 'Sitch a gettin up stairs' (6825), 'The Tired Soldier' (6825). (The eight emphasized are common to Clift texts in Madden.)
- 161 Castle Eaton baptism register.
- 162 Census of 1851 for Highworth, §I, schedule 44.
- 163 'Notes on the life of Joseph Ricketts, written by himself, c. 1858', in *Wiltshire Archaeological & Natural History Magazine*, LX (1960), pp. 120-126. *Pigot's Commercial Directory* for 1830 lists Ricketts as: 'bookseller, printer, druggist & circulating library' (reference from Roly Brown).
- 164 An act of Parliament of 1799 requiring registration of printers turned up seven in Marlborough. See *Journal of the Wilts Family History Society*, 68 (January 1998), pp. 25-6.

- 165 Palmer, p. 242.
- 166 For Bristol see Thomson pp. 152 and 274. Also Anon, 'Notes on the First Bristol and Gloucestershire Printers', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, XX (1895-96), pp. 38-51.
- 167 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', Introduction, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 2 October 1915, p. 2.
- 168 Gl 168, unpublished; no instance of Clift's original sheet is apparently extant.
- 169 Gl 171, unpublished.
- 170 Wt 521, first published in 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', instalment XX, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 26 February 1916, p. 3.
- 171 'The song, "Life let us cherish," which I have on the broadside sheet': 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 9 October 1915. The text is presented as sung by the 'Howse family' (note to Wt 418).
- 172 Ox 238, first published in 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', instalment XXI, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 4 March 1916, p. 3.
- 173 Lecture notes (WSRO, 2598/36). Williams had texts of 'Maria Martin' (Mi 628) and 'The Drunkard's Catechism' (Mi 559).
- 174 Private correspondence. Interestingly, Ivor Clissold floated the same idea: 'Some 234 songs however have no source given and some of these may well be copies of broadsides, etc.' 'The Alfred Williams Folk Song Collection', unpublished typescript sheet (no date but c. 1970), Clissold papers. Other texts likely to derive from a printed source include 'George Ridler' (Gl 169) and 'The Hawkesbury Volunteers' (Gl 170).
- 175 Wt 420 and Gl 120.
- 176 Cricklade Museum collections, #6818-6852; Ramsden-Binks, curator of the museum, volunteering information incidental to an initial enquiry concerning "Wassail" Harvey, private letter 29 October 1995. The report began: 'The Museum recently acquired a bundle of ballad-sheets, some of which were printed by W. Clift of Cirencester. Do you happen to know when and where he flourished?'
- 177 Private letter, 30 May 1996.
- 178 'Four Seasons', Cricklade Museum Collections #6826.
- 179 Assembly furnished opportunities transgressive as much as transactive, pickpockets being a problem from the outset, as for example 'the old-time ballad-singers, ducking the pick-pockets in the pond at Wadley Fair' (*Villages of the White Horse*, p. 265).

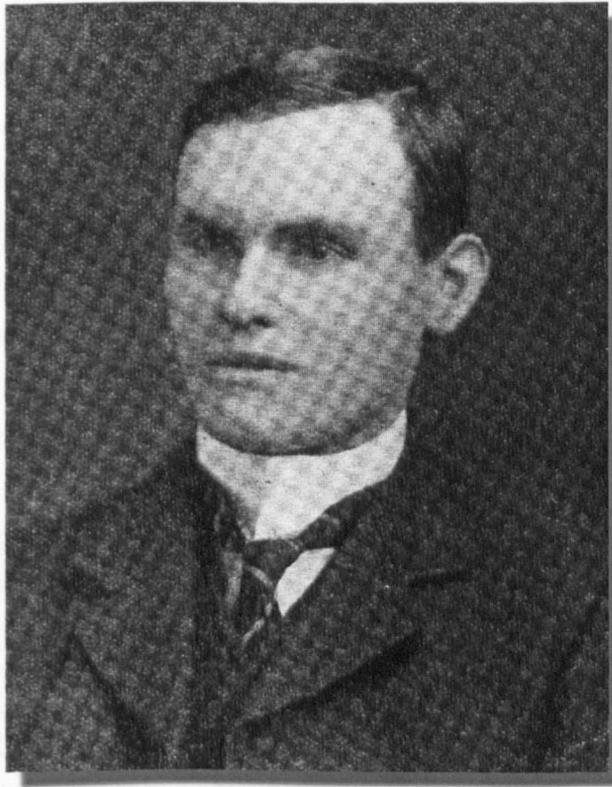
- 180 *Round About the Upper Thames*, p.7 (preface).
- 181 *Ibid*, pp. 38 and 118.
- 182 *North Berkshire Herald*, 2 October 1925, p. 7.
- 183 *Villages of the White Horse*, pp. 104-5. The context is life in 'the considerable village' of Chiseldon, Wiltshire. The passage in bold is strongly echoed in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, p. 12: 'We know that enormous quantities of the sheets were sold up and down the countryside: hundreds, if not thousands, were commonly disposed of at a single fair-time.'
- 184 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', Introduction, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 9 October 1915, p. 2. He cites no source for this information, but the context of the following passage suggests it may have been a memory of Alfred Howse. The passage is quoted in Leslie Shepard, *John Pitts* (London, 1969), p. 45 and in Harker, *Fakesong*, p. 223.
- 185 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, p. 11. Robert Bell makes this point in a note to 'The Lincolnshire Poacher' in the 1862 edition of *Ancient Poems, Ballads and Songs of the Peasantry of England* (p. 216) which Williams had on his shelf.
- 186 Thomson, p. 274.
- 187 Purslow, *Folk Music Journal* 1, 5 (1969) p. 304; Baldwin, *ibid*, p. 323.
- 188 The copies are, respectively, Johnson 217, Harding B 11 (4230), Harding B 25 (1101), and Harding B 28 (125).
- 189 Palmer, p. 243.
- 190 'Round About the Upper Thames', Chapter V (part 2), *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 27 February 1915, p. 2—passage excised from book.
- 191 'Round About the Upper Thames', Chapter XVII (part 2), *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 14 August 1915, p. 2—passage excised from book.
- 192 *Ibid*. The text of the untitled skit follows. (It has not been incorporated into the song collection.)
- 193 Bodleian collection has two references, but these are to a tune of that name to which other words are directed to be sung. 'To the tune of Molly Mogg': [1768] 'The Draper dup'd. A New Song' (G A Warw.b.1(149)) apropos Parliamentary elections, Coventry; and 1742 'Labour in Vain. A song, an hundred years old' (Firth c 11(32); Johnson Ballads fol 159).
- 194 Baptisms Highworth, baptisms and marriages Kempsford, South Cerney records passim. This supposes the 'grandfather' to be paternal.
- 195 David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 16.



CHAPTER III

ALFREDIAN PERSONÆ

The Questing Subject



 PORTRAIT OF ALFRED WILLIAMS ACCOMPANYING
AN ARTICLE IN *GREAT THOUGHTS* (JANUARY 1915)



ALFREDS WILLIAMS (PSYCHOBIOGRAPHY)

VIEWED IN PERFUNCTORY OUTLINE (**PRÆLUDIUM**), THE STORY OF WILLIAMS'S LIFE suggests the banality 'a man of many parts', a comfortable concord of conditions conferring membership of more than a single tribe. More decisive for an investigation of the cast of his mediations, though penumbral by definition, is the inner self and its instruments of purchase on the world. What are the salient traits of character? What are the determinant equippings? What are the objects of preoccupation? What finally are the terms distinctive of a *Weltanschauung*? (The divisions are an expository convenience: what is ethos if not the formalizing of proclivity?) The tenets of Williams's credo must, in the absence of any studied formulation, be (re)constructed from pronouncements scattered throughout the scribblings. These are the contents of a consciousness shaping response to the world. Closer inspection uncovers, inside the story, a clutch of personæ which jostle and collide as much as they collaborate. Each persona—ploughboy, hammerman, autodidact, poet, chronicler in prose, moralist (and song collector)—enacts a manful negotiation of a province of experience or knowledge, but the ensemble is entangled more than it describes simple chronological progression. Enabled by self-instruction, it is ultimately *letters*, taking into its greedy maw quotidian enterprise, that confers access, retroactively. This opportune accumulating of apprenticeships is the expedient by which Williams levers himself to a certain modest prominence. His sojourn in the Great Western Railway works at Swindon furnishes an inaugural meeting place: a parochially well-trodden novitiate to titanic manufacture modulates unwontedly to *observation*—many thousands *experienced*—its enduring outgrowth, in the shape of *Life in a Railway Factory*, a form of unengineered (*sic*) proto-industrial ethnography.

It was there I found contact with the soul of the world. There I learned the lessons of life. There I became linked with humanity. There, also, I consolidated my studies, and, while working at my steam-hammer, peered through the world and out into the universe beyond.¹

On the far side of these confident coalescings lie the peculiarities of a riven self: apparent concord gives way to fracture; proclaimed propinquity turns to remove.



§I (1877) : THE MAN

GLADIATOR | QUERIST | OUTSIDER

*Les traits les plus marquants d'un caractère se forment
et s'accusent avant qu'on en ait pris conscience.*
Gide, *Si le grain ne meurt*

Of the temperamental array constitutive of Alfred Williams three characteristics are salient: combativeness, inveterate curiosity, and standing apart from the flock.

I. *Alfred Agonistes*

He was always a most unusual boy, very adventurous, full of a *High* courage and spirit of adventure.
Ellen Williams to Leonard Clark

There are no suggestions that Alfred Williams, a callow country lad, set out in the early 1890s to conquer the GWR works at Swindon. Only as his symptomatic autodidactic-gladiatorial proclivities unfolded did the emblem of battle acquire primacy: a progressive realization that he had signed up for a school of hard knocks that was much to his taste and which he could turn to his advantage. There is to Williams a primordial prickliness. The device that drives him (apposite in the light of his hellenic sympathies) is *agon*, the need to pit himself against the world, a kind of fruitful friction. He is Alfred Agonistes, riposting with fighting talk. The correspondence is spattered with declarations of belligerence, he often bristles with the obduracy of the born gladiator. To the poet Jonathan Denwood he wrote apropos his collection *Nature and Other Poems*, 'remember that the author is an uneducated fellow, fighting for life against great daily odds'.² His lengthy confessional poem 'The Testament', the most considerable piece in this volume, elevates proclivity to the status of a tenet: 'All the joy is of battle, that is the gate of inspiration'.³ And this:

I often consider what would be a good thing to do, that is, to write about, but at the end of it all I allow myself to be led by the natural inward resolve, or tendency, believing that that will direct me to the job most fitting for *my small powers to do battle with*.⁴

Here, too, familiarity with the classical canon supplies him with a heroic model, a parallel which betrays much of his self-conception:

“Moriatur et in mediis armis ruamus” Virgil says. “Let us die, and perish, fighting in the midst of battle”.⁵

On the publication of *A Wiltshire Village* in the autumn of 1912 he expects, almost relishes, the resentments of the philistine host:

I hope the Works folk will chew it well! I am expecting a little more attention at their hands, than I have had, but I am fully prepared for a combat.⁶

To his credit, Williams possessed the courage to match his principles: never one to shy away, he confronted undaunted any hostility encountered in field and factory and barrack: ‘I have associated with artillerymen during the last few years, and have held my own with the best of them’; and, ‘More than once Williams had to stand up for himself with his fists’.⁷

The frowns of fortune, initially a given of birth, became in later manhood self-inflicted. In the face of an unpromising tangle of conditions (physical toil, exacting self-education and inveterate scribbling, subjection to the anathematic machinations of resentful officialdom), Williams needed to enlist unusual reserves of tenacity, a species of enabling resilience of which the celebrated photograph at the steam hammer is the iconic embodiment, defiance personified and frozen as image.† In that his *mentalité* is adversarial, goaded to action rather than discouraged by the hostility of others, he endured the harsh crucible of the GWR works to positive not negative effect.‡ In the literary domain, he affected to embrace the beneficial force of criticism.§ Yet in practice, perhaps unsurprisingly, he was not disposed to be corrected, such that the gladiator instinct is not unfailingly mobilized to constructive ends.¶

□ This is Aeneas’s exhortation to his loyal band of followers as Troy is put to the sword: ‘pectora, si vobis audentem extrema cupido | certa sequi—quae sit rebus fortuna, videtis: | excessere omnes adytis arisque relictis | di, quibus imperium hoc steterat; succurritis urbi | incensae; moriamur et in media arma ruamus. | una salus victis nullam sperare salutem.’ *Aeneid*, Book II. (Thus Fitzgerald: ‘You defend | A city lost in flames. Come, let us die, | We’ll make a rush into the thick of it. | The conquered have one safety: hope for none.’) Karl Kappes (Teubner edition, Leipzig, 1914, p. 62) helpfully glosses: ‘wir wollen sterben, aber unser Tod soll den Feinden teuer zu stehen kommen.’ Contextualizing a citation customarily reveals ironies: industrial production at Swindon is singularly unheroic against the fall of Troy; and Williams was not to know how deary his life was eventually to be sold to the enemies of literature.

† Reproduced on the cover page to Chapter VII, *infra*.

‡ This is, of course, a perfectly classical-Nietzschean credo: *In crescunt animi, virescit vulnere virtus* (‘the spirits increase, vigour grows through a wound’), cited in the Preface to *Götzendämmerung* (1888).

§ Apropos reviews of his books, Williams wrote to J B Jones: ‘one must not expect all praise: I have had more than my share of that. A few blows would do me more good!’ (18 November 1913. See also 13 January 1914. Both WSHO 2598/74.)

¶ He could react with aggressive defensiveness towards unwelcome corrections to published works, as when, during serialization of *Round About the Upper Thames*, a letter signed ‘Observer’ picked him up on cereal prices in the *Hungry Forties*, to which he replied: ‘When “Observer” ... said I was “dead wrong,” he was guilty of exaggeration: I am not dead but living.’ There follows a lengthy defence. (*Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 10 April 1915 p. 5 and 17 April 1915 p. 6.) J B Jones was alive to this tendency: ‘Everything he put his hand to failed, and failed dismally so far as a livelihood was concerned ... but he never flattered; the brave heart within beat defiantly till it broke.’ (*Williams of Swindon* (1950), p. 15.)

The counterpart to prickliness is the urge to compete. In all things better-than-you, there is something viscerally combative about Williams (admirable or distasteful depending on sympathies): he relishes the contest, indulges a need to master all that falls in his path. In the stamping shop he makes neater forgings:

As, when a boy, I embraced the cattle in the field, so I afterwards embraced my steam-hammer, and rejoiced in striking the perfect blow. ... at the age of fourteen I left the farm for the factory; at seventeen I was made chageman over three steam-hammers and six men; for the following twenty years I was head drop-stamper, and I held every record on the ground for speed stamping in heavy or light metals, for producing bright and clean work, and for the greatest length of life of the dies used in the steam-hammer.⁸

At home he masters unaided the complexities of classical grammar; with the colours he shines the pots brighter, keeps his fieldpiece cleaner, wields the bayonet more adeptly; and as *literator*, though scribbling uneasily in the shadow of Richard Jefferies, he yet presumes to claim the palm.⁹

When ill health finally brought the long occupational contest to a close, enough of the gladiator remained in him to claim the victory, after his singular fashion:

Before he left the forge he wrote on the iron plate of the furnace, unobserved of any, the single word, "Vice," [*sic*] i.e., "I have conquered"—referring [*sic*] not to any material advantage gained but to the spiritual enjoyment he derived from the consciousness of his success in study and production.¹⁰

Vici: with this parting shot—the autodidact's hallmark, triumphalist graffito emblazoned on the body industrial, at once defiant and deluding, portentous in its sub-Caesarean resonance—the temper of the man is epitomized. It was also, tellingly, one more hostage to fortune: in that the life story may be read indifferently as exemplary or cautionary, the valedictory proclamation enacts a classic Alfredism.¹¹

⁸ Did this last chalking up come back to haunt him? The valiantly borne hardships of the remaining 15 years or so render it increasingly difficult to portray Williams's post-factory life as any kind of victory. The literary formulations and citations, many of them laying claim to some sort of triumph, with which he seeks to shore up his condition against hostile circumstance easily turn to unwitting, self-ironizing prefigurings. 'Life is full of perils and pitfalls. We little dream, in days of childhood, what the future holds in store for us. If we knew, indeed, how many would face the ordeal?' he writes in *A Wiltshire Village* (p. 165), haplessly portending what lay in store for the inseparable pair, asceticism endured more than willed. (See *Praeludium*.) In his eagerness, particularly, to appropriate the dicta of classical literature, Williams often proves distressingly deaf to its carefully laid messages. The footnote on page 215 *infra* furnishes an instance from Horace. Caesar's insight might have been framed with Williams in mind: *Consuesse enim deos immortales, quo gravius homines ex commutatione rerum doleant, quos pro scelere eorum ulcisci velint, his secundiore interdu res et diuturniore impunitatem concedere.* (*De Bello Gallico*, Book I: 'When the gods intend to make a man pay for his crimes, they generally allow him to enjoy moments of success and a long period of impunity, so that he may feel his reverse of fortune, when it eventually comes, all the more keenly.') What Caesar, famously the source of the graffito emblematically perpetrated here and the author who had provided Williams with his first taste of Latin composition (see §2 *infra*), further understood was that one of the keys to victory is to take hostages, not offer them up to implacable fortune.

2. QUERIST

I have never known a child with such an active brain as his. It was an ordeal to be with him, out of school hours, he was always a steam engine—snorting, whistling, puffing, travelling, shunting.

Elizabeth Williams to Leonard Clark

If the gladiator was intent upon confecting a carapace against the world around him, the enquirer was determined to explore it and those who peopled it (or some of them). *Agon*, which might so easily have translated into bloody-mindedness, he turns to productive account via a consuming restlessness. Williams's instinctual curiosity for the world around him, its works and denizens, informs all his deeds and writings. When in Swindon works, notoriously parochial in its internal disposition,¹¹ he makes a point of exploring the sprawling site; finding the downland of north Wiltshire to be the stuff of poetry, he communes, dilates, rhapsodizes; he harbours a protective affinity with the agrestic life of the neighbourhood; and India fully awakened in him a sense of the exotic.¹² None of this, importantly, is accidental: he has his eyes and ears open, avowedly cultivating observation as virtue.

If a person, as he becomes older, does not perceive himself to have advanced his powers of observation, then his earlier education, and his experiences, have been of no considerable service to him. What has he gained? ¹²

Without question, Alfred Williams was a driven personality. Running as a thread through all his endeavour is the need to strive, to occupy every waking moment. It is, conceivably, this privileging of *intensity* (his elective gloss: both in his own endeavour and that of others) that marks him out in all his singularity.

At present I am not at all settled. There are so many threats of things at Swindon works, and so much unpleasantness, that I am half inclined to change the whole course of things and seek other and simpler employment, but I do not want to do anything which would lessen my *intensity*.¹³

¹¹ Little of Williams's sizeable literary output suggests a person of 'dour' disposition, as Ivor Clissold has it (*Folk Music Journal Symposium*—see Chapter IV.3). Frank Howes, reviewing Leonard Clark's life, notes a 'somewhat dour temperament' and an 'absence of humour' (*Journal of the English Folk Dance & Song Society*, 4, 6 (1945), p. 255). Williams's niece, born 1915, recalled from personal acquaintance: 'several people I knew said that he didn't have any sense of humour—well he didn't have much to laugh at, it's true, but on the other hand he had a great sense of fun, because he would dress up in all sorts of gear and act around for us like Charlie Chaplin and a scarecrow and things, you know, and amuse us, so he was great fun for us children'. (Private interview with Doris Ellen Claridge, Long Burton, Dorset, 18 October 2004.)

(The fruits of this curiosity are inspected more closely in §3 *infra*.)

The inquisitiveness which spurred him round the Upper Thames villages was fed by the opportunities of military service. Whereas he had for years striven to extend the horizons of the mind, his geographical and cultural perspective had remained narrow: coming now face to face with the wider world, his delight is evident, culminating in the transformative encounter with the sub-continent. Despite unfavourable first impressions he soon becomes a convert. (He still blows hot and cold a bit; India of course blew mainly hot over him.) Notably, he makes it his business to find out, indulges the joy of discovery. Thus before the end of his two-year stint his horizons had been well and truly broadened (what do they know of England: 'spurred by an intense interest, he learnt far more in two years in the country than many—indeed most—would learn in forty years'),¹⁴ but this was to prove as much curse as blessing, making it harder to readjust to life in post-bellum Wiltshire and tending to deepen the well of disillusion. It was a short-term solution which merely exacerbated the long-term problem.

Whether the wind-swept downs of Wiltshire, the flooded water meadows of the Upper Thames, the grimy spectacle of industrial production, the poignant embers of vernacular song at the humble hearth-side, the lonely landscapes of Erin, the dusty plains and luxuriant hills of Uttar Pradesh—Williams thrills to the world around him in all its multitudinousness.

3. OUTSIDER

Well he was always apart from the other boys in
his love of roaming alone through the fields

Ellen Williams to Leonard Clark

From his very advent, the gods had evidently decreed that, amid the rich grazing grounds of north-east Wiltshire, Alfred Williams would not be like the other sheep. Henry Byett cites further instances of this perception among ordinary people: the boyhood recollection of an unidentified former Swindonian, at whose house Williams used to store his bicycle: 'I remember him as one who spoke in a soft musical manner, and not, my boyish mind thought, like other men'; and a 'villager' speaking to his urbanized brother:

"I seed'n to'ther night walkin' down 'Poor Meadow' wi' his 'ands behind 'n an' gawkin' up at the sky fer all the world like a—lunatic." To which the town brother replied: "Ah! s'know, Jack, he can see things wher' thee an' I can't." Then in comment to myself: "S'know our Jack couldn't see no sense in lookin' up at the sky, cos he were out fer a bit o' poachin'. What he wanted were on the ground—not in the sky—an' Alfie Willums being ther were spoilin' his game." ¹⁵

Williams evidently sensed for himself this apartness at an early age, as this revealing moment recounting a first visit to Highworth Michaelmas Fair demonstrates:

In the evening, though very small, I stole away from my mother and companions, and made tracks for home alone in the darkness; I did not appreciate the hubbub and confusion of the fair.¹⁶

This root instinct to flee the madding crowd duly receives expression in the nature poems, in which he celebrates the hills as refuge from clamouring humanity: 'the solitude of numbers', 'Though I am in great company | Yet walk I in deep solitude'.¹⁷ Husbandry, suitably, supplies the metaphors: he is the ploughboy ploughing a lonely furrow, the sheep standing apart—'above' is a matter for dispute—from the flock. Despite the later urge to claim for his chronicles a grounding in propinquity (see §3 *infra*), egregiousness marks out the man if any proclivity does.

Potentially, the mixture is unstable. The fervour impelling him to (seek to) connect sits alongside an exceptionalism which prompts a turning away from tumult. For the purposes, however, of the heroic project of self-instructed book-learning inaugurating his *Sonderweg*, this amalgam of traits subsists in fertile concert:

I am so glad you were not bored that evening at the Mec. Institute. I must confess that I enjoyed myself exceedingly though I fear I must have impressed the company present as being a very prosaic individual. For I cannot claim to be a great lover of society. The student is never a very entertaining personage. His habits of reticence must naturally cling to him. He is generally very full: and at the same time very uncommunicative. He has a large burden, perhaps, but is very awkward under it. He would rather think than talk: and generally prefers his own world to that around him.¹⁸

The persona of *student* (modulating duly to *author*), negotiating, cloistered, the abundance of print, conjoins solitude with endless room for inquisitiveness and the occasion of deploying competitive instinct, a cerebral claim to superior prowess.



§2 (1897) : THE AUTODIDACT

POETRY | CLASSICS | RHAPSODY

I have had no school but my own thoughts, no other pedagogue,
But several books for my tutors, my own staff to lean upon.
Alfred Williams, 'The Testament'

Whereas the apprenticeships of agriculture and industrial production had been visited upon him, Alfred Williams devised for himself the first of concomitant apprenticeships to language (the second being authorship, §3) upon which he embarked as a young man, herculean improvisations defining the cast of his exceptional achievement. There is nothing in childhood or adolescence to herald the indefatigable autodidact he would mutate into. Ten years were to pass between leaving school and developing a thirst for knowledge all but unslakeable. The embrace around 1897 of book-learning stands as the decisive vicissitude, a moment less than Pauline as recounted (purportedly) *ipsissima verba*:

"For some years," to quote his own words, "all my spare time was taken up in fishing the brooks and bird's-nesting in the woods. As I grew older, however, I turned my attention to learning shorthand, and also taught myself to paint in oils. I sold a few pictures locally, but did not pursue my taste in this direction, as about the age of 20 I became interested in literature through reading some extracts from "Sweetness and Light," by the late Mr W. M. Thompson. I procured copies of Shakespeare's works, and, of course, I soon fell in love with the subject of my study."¹⁹

The shibboleth 'context' suggests a reading of Williams as caught up in a wider Victorian and Edwardian ethos of 'self-improvement' for working people through part-time study. University extension was inaugurated by Cambridge in the 1870s, while new universities were later established at Birmingham (1900), Manchester and Liverpool (1903), Leeds (1904), and Sheffield (1905). The only institutional vehicle readily available to Williams at this time, the GWR Mechanics Institute in Swindon founded in 1844, he seems not to have frequented. With the WEA, founded in 1903 but not represented in Swindon until 1908, he had some dealings but as luminary rather than beneficiary. Structured direction to his initial gropings was in the event confined to a correspondence course in English Literature over four years at newly founded Ruskin Hall (later College), Oxford, which he began in 1900 (see *infra*).

From there, Williams's aptitudes and propensities ensured that he required little in the way of institutional support in juggling bookwormery with manual labour, a forging of the mind alongside railway castings which he carried off in the face of hierarchical hostility.¹⁹ 'As for general culture, it may at once be said that the educated man is not wanted in the factory', those who pursue self-improvement being marked down, as when his own knowledge was dismissed by 'a manager' as 'worthless'.²⁰ Some domestic anxiety was, however, occasioned:

Of course he used to study a lot, all the time he was working, that was when I was home, before he was married, he used to study a lot and when he was working overtime he used to walk up the line, you know, home at night and didn't get home till nine o'clock at night because they had to walk, at that time, that was before bicycles were involved, you know, that anyone could buy when they were working—hard-working people couldn't afford a bicycle! But any rate he used to walk up the line home from work at night, and before I went to bed mother used to be so worried and she used to say how worried she was in case he got in a brown stud [*sic*] because he was always studying, you see, and got killed. And she used to look at me and send me off to bed and you know I never went to sleep till I heard Alf come in! ²¹

Little detail remains of the specific twists and turns in the long and arduous scholarly path Williams trod for himself. Of the Ruskin Hall course no records survive of adjudication of his work, or even of syllabus content, save that it covered the established canon.† The substantial remnant of his library (according to Byett extending originally to 'over 500 books')²² preserved at Swindon confirms Williams's province, overwhelmingly, to have been literature, in the form largely of the works of the canonical poets in English, along with several overviews (histories and selections). Editions survive of Chaucer, Spencer, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Shelley, Tennyson, Swinburne and Whitman. By contrast, there is little theatre, and fiction is scarcely represented. Of other topics, philosophy is confined to Locke's

¹⁹ To some extent his scholarly proclivities may be atavistic. On the Williams side of the family, Alfred's father reputedly chose a pocket edition of Pope's *Iliad* as *vade mecum* (Clark, p. 2). The son, typically, went one better and read his Homer in the Greek. On the maternal side, his grandmother, Ann Hughes, ran a school, 'what they called a "dame school" ... I don't know whether she took little boys or not but she took girls, and they paid the noble sum of three pence per week each.' Filmed interview with Williams's niece, Doris Ellen Claridge, Long Burton, Dorset, 7 September 2005.

† The Librarian of Ruskin College (private letter, 29 July 1997) writes: 'I regret that we do not have any of Williams' work surviving in our archives.' Nor was he able to supply details of the contents of the syllabus. He could offer only early publicity material, such as *Announcement of the Correspondence Department, Ruskin Hall, Oxford* [?c. 1900], the Introduction to which notes a need to readjust institutions in the face of the massive changes of the nineteenth century: 'The sense of ever-increasing civic responsibility is intensifying in the people the consciousness of their need for higher training in the powers and duties of citizenship.' There were 14 courses on offer, slanted towards politics, society and economics, of which English Literature was numbered 12 (embracing 'aids in the formation of a good literary style'). The courses were based on a monthly essay 'of not less than 700 words', at a fee of 1s a month. Two brief letters from Arthur Hacking, Williams's Ruskin tutor, are preserved in the Williams Collection: 25 August 1902 (a testimonial for a library post, WSR0 2598/60) and 20 March 1910 offering congratulations on his former pupil's poetic success (WSR0 2598/63).

Essay Concerning Human Understanding and a translation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the matter of politics, an abiding interest in current affairs (he was a great reader of newspapers) is manifested in John Bertram Askew (ed.), *Pros and Cons: a newspaper reader's and debater's guide to the leading controversies of the day* (1897), the date of publication of which coincides with his awakening to the allure of the book. Most useful in understanding *how*, as opposed to what, Williams read is a heavily annotated copy of Emerson *Works ... comprising his essays, lectures, poems and orations* (volume 1 of 3). The passage, 'It is only as a man puts off all foreign support, and stands alone, that I see him to be strong and to prevail' (Essay II 'Self-Reliance', p. 38) is underlined and bears the marginal citation: '*A man must stand erect, and not be kept erect by others. (Marcus Antoninus)*'. Against the pronouncement 'every burned book or house enlightens the world' (Essay III 'Compensation', p. 51) he scribbled '*My own Wiltshire Village, which the poor parson burned here*'.²⁹ The two instances serve to show that Williams marked out passages chiming with his own situation, the first a point of conviction (§1 *supra*), the second a biographical *contretemps*.

The most considerable, most pregnant with import, portion of the collection, however, derives from what is conceivably the true Damascene flash: discovery and exploration of the Latin and Greek authors in the original. Too numerous to list *in toto*, the 'A' section of the library alone yields: Æschylus, *Agamemnon*; Æsop, *Fables from Æsop and myths from Palaephatus*; anon, *Anthologia Graeca ad Palatini Codicis*; Rev F St J Thackeray (editor), *Anthologia Graeca*: passages from Greek poets; Apollonius (Rhodius), *The Argonautica*; Aristophanes, *The Knights* and *Scenes from Aristophanes: The Frogs*; Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* (Latin and English versions), *Treatise on Rhetoric* and *The Poetics*; and Antoninus, *The Thoughts of the Emperor M Aurelius Antoninus* (on which he presumably drew for the annotation, *supra*). The prodigious linguistic effort required to broach Græco-Latin texts in their original glory, growing out of reading in English, is described in a series of three articles Williams was commissioned to write in early 1909 for *Young Men Magazine* detailing his endeavours.

²⁹ The melodramatic event he reported to two correspondents at the time: 'My "Village" was burned by the parson here. He entered the village library by night and burned two copies, and banned it from the reading room!!!' (Letter to William Dowsing, 6 February 1913, wsno 2598/56), and, 'Never mind what the Marston folks say of the book. It has succeeded. Of course you heard that [Revd] Macdonald burned his and the reading room copy. At the same time I am told the work may rank as a classic in time to come.' (Letter to an unspecified sister, 9 February [1913], wsno 2598/45.) Byett recounts the episode in some detail (p. 35).

I could not well say what determined me to learn Latin, which was my first step in tasteful literature. Perhaps it was by reason of the Latin footnotes you meet with so frequently in many of the old volumes dealing with the literature of the Elizabethan and Caroline periods. No one advised me to do it or not to do it, for I had neither guide nor critic; but one day something said to me, "You must learn Latin," and without further consideration I acquired the elementary text-book and began. I had no particular end in view at the beginning, but I soon obtained one. Something said, "You must make haste and read Cæsar." My heart leapt at the thought of reading Cæsar in the original, and, spurred with this hope, I worked cheerfully away at my book, though I was able to spare but an hour a day for five days. This, you see, was only five hours a week. [...] And one day I asked myself seriously if it were not better to get to the literature and read, instead of continuing with the drudgery of writing, which I thereupon did, and I shall testify that in two months I had read the first book of Xenophon, the first book of the "Iliad," the first book of the "Odyssey," a whole book of prose and poetical extracts, and the play *Hecuba*.²³

Significantly, it was with classical extracts that he chose to declare his defiance of philistine petty authority in the railway works at Swindon:

At the forge, however, the steady persistence of my efforts towards self-improvement was not appreciated. Day after day the foreman of the shed came or sent someone with oil or grease to obliterate the few words of Latin or Greek which I had chalked upon the back of the sooty furnace in order to memorise them. Even my tool-boxes and cupboard, always considered more or less private and sacred, were periodically smeared with fat and the operation was often carried out in a very offensive manner. The plan was not successful, however, and I was often more amused than annoyed, though it was seriously intended by the overseer, who always said he was acting under the manager's orders. At one time he had caused the furnace back to be tarred. Before the tar had completely dried I innocently chalked upon it several words that figured in my studies for the day. By the next morning the characters had become permanent. The colour of the chalk had set, and as often as the overseer or his agent came with the oil-pot and removed the dust and soot, thinking to baffle me, he was confronted with the Horatian precept, *Nil desperandum*, a quotation from the *Hecuba*, and $\Sigma\tau\alpha\upsilon\rho\omega\sigma\sigma\omicron\nu\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\nu$ (Crucify him) from the New Testament.²⁴

In this appropriating of plant to scholar's tablet[Ⓞ] (as with the farewell *vici, supra* §1), this private fitting up of workshop to seminarium, the gladiator most flagrantly seconds the autodidact. (It is a vignette that has passed into Alfredian mythology, in so far as such a thing can be said to obtain.) In this last sentence is a glimpse inside his carpet bag of print-derived archetypes: crucifixion of Christ; Horatian defiance; Euripidean tragedy. *Crucify him!*—more uncircumspect reflex than megalomaniacal

Ⓞ The determined child or autodidact could always improvise, with chalk replacing pen and ink, and the wall of a barn a sheet of paper. David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750–1914* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 10.

self-comparison with Christ—betrays a sense of persecutionism, of being a man set apart, enduring a kind of industrial passion, the forge as cross.

Yet amid the striving and the conflict, importantly, there is *joy*, felicity attending the burning desire to *know* clinched in Virgil's celebrated line: *felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas* (*Georgics* II: 490). Williams knew the exhilarations of the page, his propensity to fervour carrying over into the realm of the book. Lending a copy of the *Greek Anthology* to an officer while serving in the artillery, he observes to his wife, 'He seemed quite elevated at sight of the Greek—you know how I am myself'.²⁵ This enchantment is conveyed in the references strewn liberally and quirkily among the published writings and, to a lesser degree, in the correspondence. An especial favourite is Homer, whose influence is possible in at least one of Williams's poems: 'Soon our lives are sped | Like the mountain heather, | Throng we to our bed | With the leaves that wither.'²⁶ The leaf / life analogy recalls the moment in Book VI of the *Iliad* when Glaucus responds to a challenge from Diomedes:

Very like leaves
upon this earth are the generations of men –
old leaves, cast on the ground by wind, young leaves
the greening forest bears when spring comes in.
So mortals pass; one generation flowers
even as another dies away.
(Fitzgerald 1974)

A further Homeric allusion occurs in *Villages of the White Horse*, the baroque detail of old farm machinery reused as ship's ballast serving as somewhat tenuous pretext for citing 'the many-twinkling smile of ocean' of 'the incomparable Greek poet'.²⁷ In *A Wiltshire Village*, Williams, drawn to the encapsulated wisdom of the fable (as later in his translation of the Sanscrit *Panchatantra*), finds a parallel between country life in north Wiltshire (South Marston) and an instance in Æsop:

does not Æsop tell us, in the fable, of the boy roasting snails in the coals of the fire, as they do to this day in the village here? ... I once knew a man, a rough farm-hand, nicknamed "Happy," who ate snails raw, shells and all; but he did not attain to a great age; he died rather young, and in the workhouse, of consumption, though the eating of snails is considered to be a safeguard against that complaint.²⁸

²⁸ The reference is to 'The Snails': 'A ploughman's child was baking some snails. Hearing them sputtering, he said: 'Stupid creatures! Your houses are on fire yet you sing! This fable shows that everything one does inopportune is reprehensible.' (Æsop, *The Complete Fables*, translated by Olivia and Robert Temple (Harmondsworth, 1998), p. 127.)

The impression Williams conveys by this associative scatter is of a triggering of treasured moments wedged in his capacious memory rather than of schematic literary cross-referencing. More sententiously, he inclines to cull the moral(izing) maxims in which classical writings abound. The virtues of toil:

In all things duty before pleasure; work first and play after; that intensifies the relish a hundredfold. "Labor ipse voluptas" (Labour itself is a pleasure), saith the sage.²⁹

The repudiation of appearances in favour of virile candour:

This is all! I chose years ago, this motto from the writings of Sallust, and I hope for nothing beyond it. "Esse, quam videri." "To be (a man) rather than to appear one."³⁰

This favoured device he later attaches to a piece from Philemon, 320 BC, one of a number of translations from the Greek with which he concludes his second poetry collection, *Poems in Wiltshire*:³¹

"Esse Quam Videri"
Count him not just who merely doth no ill,
But him that, having power, lacks yet the will;
Not who rejects the slightest offerings made,
But who puts great bribes from him unafraid,
When he might safe receive them every hour,
Firm in his strength and mighty in his power.
Not he is just who merely thus abstains
In passive sort, from adding to his gains,
But who, from taint and guile by nature free,
Seeks never to *appear* just but *to be*.

His head thus generously, though unsystematically, stocked with canonical texts, Williams gleans exempla and drops them into the works as a means of investing his world with meaning.³² By extension, these protruding textual effects render visible *uses* to which his reading is enlisted: drawing of parallels with country ways as he had

³² Expropriation on occasion leads to a mistaking of sources: 'Horace's *mane difficilis* ("continue obdurate") is an excellent motto; would that more had it in them to cultivate the virtue!' (*A Wiltshire Village* p. 167.) Yet in this case he either mistakes, or perverts to his own ends, Horace's ode (III vii) in which the lovers Asterie and Gyges are enjoined to resist the temptations of inconstancy in favour of greater pleasure in ultimate reunion (*prima nocte domum claude neque in vias | sub cantu querulae despice tibiae, et te saepe vocanti | duram difficilis mane*). Thus the obduracy here proposed is a temporary means to a harmonious end, distinct from the permanent moral condition of refusal advocated by Williams. A further instance of a misreading from the same author is the translator's trap, *simplex munditiis* (*Odes* I v: *cui flavam religas comam | simplex munditiis?*). The local setting to which Williams transfers the phrase is a passage contrasting metropolitan and rustic canons of female beauty, enlisting Horace's concentrate in support of the guileless idiom of the countryside. (*A Wiltshire Village* p. 150, where the gloss interpolated—'plain in its neatness'—derives, directly or indirectly, from Milton, though Williams had previously devised his own rendering in the verse translation included in *Poems in Wiltshire* (1911): 'For whom these braided locks, | O artless in attire!') In its original context, however, the phrase surely denotes (connotes) calculating female wiles, brought out in Duff Cooper's 'set with coy simplicity the trap', the very inverse of what is innocent?

known them in north-east Wiltshire is evidently designed to suggest the timeless virtues of life lived close to the soil, an endorsement of the parochial by assimilation to fabled antiquity; and assembling moral tenets lends canonical voice to his own scale of values. In specifically literary terms, native and classical traditions instilled in him a set of criteria for evaluating poetry, and led him to develop decided notions of *taste*. He was determinedly backward-looking in his ideas, as this to Dowsing:

I have lately been reading up a little of contemporary verse, Bridges, Hayes, Yeats, Philips, Binyon, Hardy, Gallienne, Maddox Brown, Norman Gale, etc, etc, and this has produced in me a veritable disgust of modern "tack". 40 LINES OF DRYDEN CONTAINS MORE POETRY THAN 12 LARGE VOLUMES OF THE MODERN MUDDLE. I cannot help it one bit, but I can get more pleasure out of a page of Ovid than out of a bundle of our moderns.³²

In the same letter, he states a fondness for Cowper's *The Task*:

I used to like Cowper very dearly but this was 10 years ago or more. Though I still treasure the kindest thoughts for him and his natural poems, especially the "Task", I fear I may never get the time to read him through again.³³

A further avowal of this preference for authors of earlier times is cited by Jones:

"At least once a year ... while I was in the forge working at the furnace and steam-hammer, I went to London and bought a few books which, somehow or other, always seemed to be poetry. At that time I was fond of reading the lesser Elizabethans, I mean such as Peele, Greene, Nash, Lyly, Marlow, Massinger, Dekker and Ford."³⁴

Perhaps the nearest he comes to a statement of poetic credo occurs in response to a rebuke from Dowsing apropos judgements made in the letter cited above:

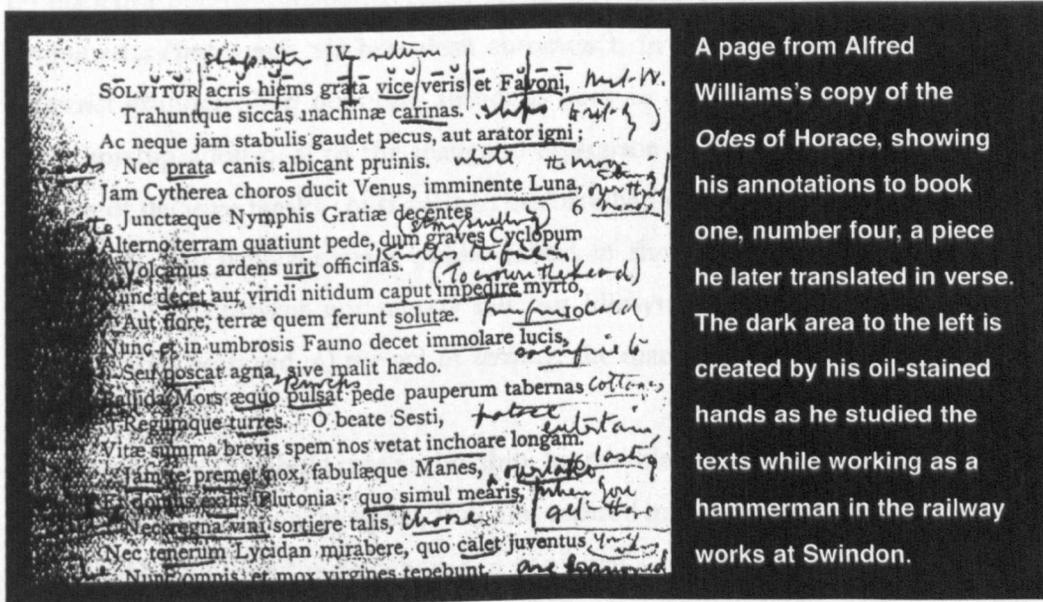
My own opinion of poetry, though I fear it is but sparsely evidenced in my own work, is that it should be plain and strong, and apparent—to express the idea manfully rather than musically, and to avoid the winding metrical effect as far as possible.³⁵

More generally, Williams had by this time (1909) evolved an unequivocally elite paradigm of poetic creation: poetry is the privileged product of exceptional individuals; classic forms are superior to modern; it is the domain of the written (print).

Duly, as classical references cited above demonstrate, the laborious accumulation of intellectual baggage is deployed in Williams's own compositions, figuring the

transformations to which extensive book-learning must needs give rise (it could not *not* make a difference). Transition from literary student to practitioner is an obvious one, epitomized in many verse translations from classical poets, primarily his cherished Horace. This is Williams's version of the opening stanza of *Odes* I iv:³⁶

Sharp winter is melted away with glad Spring, and the
breath of the Zephyrs,
Rollers draw the keels to the waiting waters;
No longer the cattle delight in the stall, in his fireside the
ploughman,
Nor do nipping frosts whiten the meadows.❸



A page from Alfred Williams's copy of the *Odes* of Horace, showing his annotations to book one, number four, a piece he later translated in verse. The dark area to the left is created by his oil-stained hands as he studied the texts while working as a hammerman in the railway works at Swindon.



❸ *Solvitur acris hiems grata vice veris et Favoni, | Trahuntque siccas machinae carinas. | Ac neque jam stabulis gaudet pecus, aut arator igni; | Nec prata canis albicant pruinis.* A slightly less stiff rendering comes from Lewis Evelyn Gielgud (1951): 'Bitter winter melts away. | Spring's delicious breezes blow. | Little ships on rollers go | Down the beaches to the bay. | Now the ox disdains the stall, | Now the ploughman leaves the fire, | Now the frosts that whitened all | From the meadowlands retire.' (*Horace: The Odes*, edited by Antony Lentin (Wordsworth Classics, 1997), p. 13.) Alongside translations, close scrutiny of Williams's original poetry would reveal classical influence, to the point of pastiche as in his 'Ode to Spring': 'Pleased with the garment Beauty wears, | The rosy-sylvan Nymph appears, | And naked Graces, nightly seen, | Sporting on the tufted green. | Immortal Hebe leads the dance, | And round the merry ring they prance, | With choral pomp and mirth the hours employ, | And crown the victors with a wreath of joy.' (*Nature and Other Poems*, 1912.)

§3 (1909 / 1911) : THE WRITER

POET | BELLETRIST | ETHNOGRAPHER

By this progression, the most telling (*sic*) of the capital personæ is added to the *atroupement*: the writer, subdividing as poet (linking with student of canonical verse, native and classical) and prose writer (drawing on occupational and investigative experience). This is the modulation which seals his fate, the *cacoëthes scribendi*—scrib-ler's itch he would spend the remainder of his life obsessively scratching—which principally generates the materials on which access depends. So it was that in the summer of 1911, season of composition of *Life in a Railway Factory*, temperamen-tal gladiator-querist-outsider, refugee ploughboy and heretic hammerman became conjoined à l'improviste, via herculean autodidact, in the sub-persona of author-as-belletrist-ethnographer, doubling author-as-poet in print from 1907. This variant of authorship additional to the inaugural aspiration to poet all but completes the fascicle of decisive masks constituting the Alfredian condition. The resultant quali-tative shift into language-made-public ushers in the central issue of *mediation*: an intersection of domains not merely felt but idiosyncratically bodied forth in (its idiosyncrasies betrayed in) the act of *writing*, the maelstrom of formal language.

POET

Crossing the threshold into authorship, his predilections formed through immer-sion in the poetic canon (as *supra*), Williams aspired initially to the condition of poet. A creditable published output between 1907 and 1915 (not counting *Selected Poems* of 1926) earned him some apparent recognition at the time, and drew around him influential supporters such as the critic John Bailey.³⁷ He had contrived for himself an apprenticeship of sorts, had experienced the *affres* of composition, wrestled with the obstinacies of language in the face of prosodic intricacy. He knew how *hard* it all was. Sensitivity to technical difficulty he confided to Byett:

I have a keen appreciation of metrical effects, whether in a modern sonnet or lyric, in Greek or Latin hexameters, or in the various Sanskrit measures.³⁷

³⁷ John Cann Bailey (1864-1931) was a regular contributor to *The Times Literary Supplement*, for which he did much important though anonymous work. He was also deputy-editor of the *Quarterly Review*. See *Dictionary of National Biography, 1931-1940*, edited by L G Wickham Legg (Oxford, 1949), p. 29.

BELLETRIST (CACOËTHES | GRIST): Williams's overlapping attempt on prose, begun in 1911 and largely over by 1915, is more engagingly unpremeditated, by his own account broached with facility (p. 222 *infra*). The shift in genre brought with it—*est-il besoin de le préciser?*—no diminution in his exalted conception of authorship:

Had I ever any desire to make money I should never have started on literature. I knew too well that money was not to be obtained by writing poems, I write for the reason that the birds sing, because I am bound to, and I hope to produce something that will live after me.³⁸

If I had only been a bricklayer and plasterer, instead of interesting myself in literature, I should never have worked half as hard ... I hope soon to get on with some new publication or other when I can find time to put things in order.³⁹

He does not, accordingly, see his efforts in prose as merely functional. His aspirations are unashamedly belletristic, valued in opposition to a philistine world:

a new spirit is abroad, in all ranks; really, the only people who do me any good or show me any consideration and respect, and those who ordinarily are looked upon as the "parasites". This I do find more and more; the democratic classes, in the south at any rate, have no use for poets and writers of belle-lettres [*sic*]: the prevention of these would prove the extinction of art, to a large extent, and the death of poets especially of such as ourselves.⁴⁰

Consonant with this, he proposes all his writings, including local chronicles, as *literature* in an exalted sense (not hack work), as in this declaration to Byett: 'This, Harry, is journalism, as apart from "literature" '.

The difference between journalism and literature is that the first is a *trade*, and the second is an *art*. The tradesman gets paid, but the artist may want bread. At the same time, art is art.

Now I had tea with Mr Watts at W. Gough's house in the summer and we had an interesting talk. But I am bound to say that it is now hardly opportune to continue explorations of the old sort on the lines I followed when writing my books. The trouble is lack of public interest: work of the kind is quite unprofitable. What is happening is rather the publication of *LOCAL HISTORIES*, precluding the *literary* treatment. Of course, this does not appeal to me; because, when you have printed, no one will buy. And *Wiltshire* never would buy. That is the reason I cannot publish as I ought: it is want of supporters.⁴¹

In all this he aspires to a small niche among the foothills of Parnassus: protestations of *humilitas* aside, he hankers after literary celebrity and the prestige it confers. The blunt version is glory-seeking; the kinder version is aspiration, a legitimate

determination not to be a sheep. It certainly fuels his monomania, and skews his self-conception: by dint of striving in words, he is not plain old Alf, or even Gunner Williams, but *Mr Williams the author*, intimately bound up with the play of identity.

As I have definitely decided never to dream of literature as a means of daily sustenance, I can look forward with a calm mind, and a spirit of resignation, and by this means, I hope, by the help of God, in the course of my life, to establish a very quiet, small, unpretentious, unassuming fame.⁴²

(ITCH) The obsessiveness Williams brought to all undertakings is fully engaged as writer. To satisfying the itch the rigours of military life, for instance, were no sort of impediment—quite the reverse: finding a quiet corner for scribbling was one of his first concerns on joining the colours. On occasion he is capable of absorption that demolishes all perspective: *noli tangere circulos meos* (Archimedes' Syndrome).⁴³

(GRIST) Prose also permits the itch to be more variedly scratched. In the restless drive to perpetrate the next book, everything potentially became grist to the mill: industrial conditions (*Life in a Railway Factory*), country life (three prose books plus *The Banks of Isis*), the vicissitudes of military service and its attendant *déplacements* (life in the battery, a passage to India, native mores and milieux).⁴³

Many thanks for yours, which reached me yesterday. We are continually on the move; and I have but little time for correspondence. As for *writing* (literature) it is out of the question. But I am "living the life," and getting plenty of experiences and impressions, which I hope to record some day.⁴⁴

I would much prefer the colours, if it were not that I feel the call to literature in civil surroundings. Nevertheless, I shall make copy out of this.⁴⁵

Yet if the form of his prose was studiously literary—the tablet erected to his memory in Swindon Town Hall† lists *master of English prose* among his achievements, precisely the verdict he sought—the contents were grittily quotidian. This construal lends his work its peculiar slant: affecting *sub specie aeternitatis*, for example, leads him to neglect chronological specificity in what purports to be historical record.

© At Winchester, the great military adventure, the mobilizing of a mighty empire against the Teutonic jackboot, all suddenly becomes a massive distraction to the completion of his account of Army life. To his wife he writes (5 September 1917, WSRo 2598/62): 'I asked [the Section Officer] the favour of not being disturbed for a fortnight. I explained to him that I was very busy, completing a new book, and I showed him the letter from Sidgwick & Jackson concerning Harold Williams's book. ... I did not even want to come home for my leave as it would have interrupted me & I didn't want to have to be writing all the time I was at home with you, dear. You understand this don't you? I've got about six more chapters to do, and if I can get the luck I'll finish them in about a couple of weeks.' But events intervened, and he sailed for India.

† Now removed to STEAM (Museum of the Great Western Railway) at Swindon.

ETHNOGRAPHER: CHRONICLE | DIAGNOSIS | REMEDY || THRENOS

The four main prose works divide as two pairs (dates for *completion*, not publication): *Life in a Railway Factory* (1911) and *A Wiltshire Village* (1912); and *Villages of the White Horse* (1913) and *Round About the Upper Thames* (1914). The first pair is made from knowledge already possessed, the second is founded on conscious fieldwork.

I URBAN-INDUSTRIAL AND RURAL

CHRONICLE (AN INSIDER'S VIEW) The manful negotiating of a passage through book-learning had been conducted, in part, concurrently with a negotiation in a more evident sense manful of the social-occupational. In the context of the confluence of these endeavours in lengthy prose composition, the adhesive sobriquet Hammerman Poet turns more appositely to Hammerman Belletrist-Ethnographer. Williams now weaves belletristic proclivity, artisanal entanglement, the sovereign urge to *know* into an idiosyncratic fabric which reveals his attitudinal set as much as it documents the world around him. His starting point is unabashedly proclaimed:

I cannot conceal my love of the countryside, and a boundless admiration for, and sympathy with, the humble folk who till the soil, harvest the crops, and tend the cattle; who are free from the shackles of town life, and content to dwell in peace away from the din and turmoil, the strife and battle, of the streets and factories. It has been my lot to labour in the fields and in the factory, too, to be both rural and urban, to have a knowledge of two spheres, and two sets of conditions. I have driven the plough, milked the cows, made hay, and harvested the corn with the farmer and his men, and I have toiled and groaned long years at the furnace and steam-hammer, in the midst of ten thousand workmen; but though in it, I was never of it, and, try as I will, I cannot find many good words to say for the manufacturing life.⁴⁶

Trumpeted insiderdom notwithstanding, the irreducible peculiarity of Williams's position does not reside in the dual experience of rustic and artisan (a condition shared locally by many hundreds in the period, sucked from bucolic hinterland into a hypertrophying industrial maw) but in an impulse to enquire, an exceptional intellectual apparatus, an itch to capture in language. If he is participant rather than fingernail-parer by circumstance he is observer by election, with predilection worn squarely on the sleeve alongside an artisan-author's self-conscious need to justify the ground from which he pronounces. The fruit is richly detailed textual magmata betraying a dislocated outsider as much as an integrated citadel-dweller (temperamentally, as we have seen, Williams was not an insider): 'though in it, I was never

as emblem of his varied intercessions. In the event the instituting confluence of personæ in *Life in a Railway Factory*, an account of the Great Western Railway works at Swindon, was painless: 'I wrote the book in twelve weeks, in summer, at night, after leaving the forge, but I held it for three years before publication.'⁴⁷ The work forms a pair, diptychic by design, with *A Wiltshire Village* (1912), setting dystopia on the doorstep, where he toiled and avowedly did not belong, against a vision of arcady where he always dwelt and supposed himself to belong.

(URBS) The factory book's *raison d'être*, famously, is to expose the iniquities of a harsh regime. Williams conducts an insider's tour of the sprawling site, indignantly detailing harrowing cases of workmen broken on the wheel (*sic*) of railway production, victims of an unforgiving system. Forthrightly, he pleads the case for improved conditions, higher pay, increased leisure time. The jeremiad, significantly, is not unstinting: frequently, almost involuntarily, Williams neglects to indict as thralldom prevails. He thrills to the spectacle of heavy industrial making, unable entirely to withhold an admiration for contemporary *homo faber* founded in part on a personal quest for the perfect forging; and celebrates the resilience of the human frame, in his own case lived as much as written. The multifarious panoply of occupations passes before our eyes—coal-heavers and ash-wheelers caked in sweat and dust, pettifogging watchmen, refined carriage finishers and rowdy washers-down, rod-wielding rhythmic cushion-beaters rendered redundant by vacuum cleaning,† brawling rivet boys, glistening burly smiths, high-status fitters and boilersmiths, punctilious forgemen (Williams among them), pococurantist pen-pushers, bearers of mysterious monikers: 'Kekky Flapper', 'Blubber', 'Wormy', 'Nanty Pecker'—in a brutal, clangorous artisanal carnival. A doctrinaire urbophobe, he could not help in an odd way enjoying it. This characteristic ambivalence resonates: inquisitiveness; a valuing of demotic prowess; fascination at the baroque practices which accrete wherever congress obtains, a grime-laden variant on *what people do for themselves* which might efficiently have been dubbed (industrial) 'folk'.

⁴⁷ This assertion invalidates Lovelace's verdict that Williams found writing about everyday life 'unexpectedly difficult.' If anything, *Life in a Railway Factory* gives the impression of flowing a little too readily from the pencil. See Martin Lovelace, 'The Relevance of the Rural Tradition', *Lore and Language* 15, 1-2 (1997), p. 71.

† For the benefit of his benighted readership, Williams supplies a gloss on this new-fangled device: 'Now the dust is removed from the cushions by means of a vacuum arrangement. This is in the form of a tube, with an aperture several inches in diameter and having strong suctional powers created by the exhaust steam from the engine in the shed. It is passed to and fro over the surface of the cushion, and the dust is thereby extracted and received into the apparatus.' *Life in a Railway Factory* (1915), p. 41.

(**RUS**) In this improvised industrial ethnography, exploring the emergence of a distinctively urban sensibility generally passed over in the body of record, Williams presents himself as singular retributive variant on the yokel-interloper of GWR mythology.^o Where, however, 'A chiel's amang ye takin' notes, | And, faith, he'll prent it' (Burns's minatory couplet posted defiantly as epigraph to *Life in a Railway Factory*),[†] announces a work intended as *exposé*, Williams's mood modulates to apologia when his attentions are turned, in *A Wiltshire Village*, to the adjacent countryside, a chronicle of life in his native South Marston and immediate environs. Become now the most gracious of dragomans—'Perhaps you have not all had the opportunity of accompanying the reapers at their task, and following the machine round and round the corn-patch'⁴⁸—Williams takes the reader gently by the hand and shows her farm and church and school, venerable characters and rustic custom poignantly withering on the vine.

DIAGNOSIS (VALUE SCHEMATA, BENIGN AND MALIGN) This reversal of tonality—critic into apologist—is emblematic of a *Weltanschauung*, the voicing of an apparently manichean *urban-bad / rural-good* polarity which orients a whole *oeuvre*. Yet, paradoxically, the very experiential propinquity conferred by sudatory participation also works to blur the schism: condemnation tempered, almost involuntarily, by a degree of honouring; panegyric of the rustic qualified by an edge of remove. Williams is clearly not serving up disinterested transcription of what fell under his nose. These reports from the provincial front line are shot through with unfeigned adjudications, amounting to a quirky diagnosis of perceived social virtues and ills.

Hierarchical rigidities of industrial organization of labour, into which Williams the hammerman was tied, had poisoned working relations with its pervasive tingodery. Overseers are 'cowardly' in their determination to hold the inventive workman resentfully in 'subjection': 'This is one of the worst ills of the manufacturing life, and has crushed many a brave good spirit, and smothered many a rising genius.'⁴⁹

^o Many of the town workmen, and especially those of the more highly skilled classes and journeymen, though village born themselves, show considerable contempt for the country hand newly arrived in the shed, and even after he has worked there many years and proved himself to be of exceptional ability. They consider him at all times as an *interloper*. *Life in a Railway Factory* (1915), p. 279 (emphasis added).

[†] The whole verse reads: 'If there's a hole in a' coats, | I rede you tent it: | A chiel's amang ye takin' notes, | And, faith, he'll prent it,' from Robert Burns's poem, 'On the late Captain Grose's Peregrinations Thro' Scotland'. (Francis Grose peregrinated to collect materials for his *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, 1785.) The original sense of this classic outsider's device is routinely inverted: a warning protectively issued against a third party interloper is turned into a threat from the crusading note-taker, as here. Instances occur in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, Orwell's *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying*, R W Seton-Watson *et al.*, *The War and Democracy* (1915) in Williams's possession, and as epigraph to Chapter Three of *A Cotswold Village* (1898) by J Arthur Gibbs, a work known to Williams and his most likely source.

Complicit with this is a deplorable submissiveness in the workers:

In brief, the average overseer dislikes you if you are a tip-top workman, if you have **good carriage** and are **well-dressed**, if you are clever and cultivated, if you have friends above the average and are well-connected, if you are religious or **independent, manly, and courageous**; and he tolerates you if you creep about, are rough, ragged, and round-shouldered, a born fool, **a toady, a liar, a tale-bearer**, an indifferent workman—no matter what you are as long as you say ‘sir’ to him, are **servile and abject**, see and hear nothing, and hold with him in everything he says and does: that is the way to get on in the factory.⁵⁰

Most important is independence of spirit as exemplified in the healthier labour relations of the countryside (not concord all the way, but greater honesty):

Their shoulders were broad, their bellies round, their legs short and stout, their faces round too, robust and red, and jovial-looking; not pinched and thin, haggard and ghastly, like the townfolk. And, mark you, they were independent with it—village folk never were so generally abject and slavishly obedient to every precept and nod of the “maaster” as is usually represented; it is an insult to the rustic population ever to suggest it.⁵¹

This concern with *franchise* in the conduct of workplace relations, the *de facto* interpersonal contract, is reiterated in *Villages of the White Horse* (1913):

The time soon slips by out in the open with the downs and valley in view, and there is a lack of that high tension which is so distressful a feature of the manufactory. It is not unusual, indeed, for the farmer and his men to disagree, and I have known them even to indulge in a hand-to-hand fight, and to go on working as if nothing had happened; but there is never the dreadful hatred and long-pent-up smouldering passion about the farms as there is in the factory sheds; it is altogether unnatural and dehumanizing there.⁵²

The gloss which falls to hand for this primary *urbs / rus* dichotomy is Biblical:

In the towns are fever and fret, galled hearts and feelings, ceaseless agitation, classes and sects, furnaces and wheels, pushing and shoving, trampling under foot, very hell upon earth. ... Freedom from it is like the primal state in the Garden of Eden, before Adam and Eve plucked the forbidden fruit.⁵³

But the salient disparity of town and country is attitudinal-moral:

There is often a great temperamental difference between the two, and they differ widely in their ideas of and adaptability for work in the shed. The country workman is fresh and tractable, open to receive new ideas and impressions of things. ... The town workman, on the other hand, is often **superior, disdainful, and over-dignified**.⁵⁴

These extracts, exhibiting a tendency to *insist*, create a clear picture of Williams's forthright ordering of moral values, positive and negative. The dominantly hostile experience of industry furnished him with a ready-made foil for his founding moral scheme, a kind of inverse deontological standard against which to evaluate other domains, most immediately rusticity (it was, in that negative way, decisive).⁵⁵ Notably prominent is a revulsion for the related evils of injustice and the exercise of dominion over others. Principally, it is clear in all this that country life is equated with all that is wholesome and virtuous, urban life with all that is noxious. His instincts are, unabashedly, philo-rustic: he is firmly on the side of country folk. The village schoolchildren are 'a very rustic and sequestered lot—Nature's own offspring';⁵⁵ and he confesses 'partiality' for the 'very poorest of the farm-children':

for something or other, in spite of other considerations of judgement, brings the balance of interest down on their side. I think, in my heart of hearts, that I care for them most of all.⁵⁶

His maternal grandfather, Josh Hughes, he associates with 'the artlessness and simplicity which is virtue itself'. There, *in nuce*, are the primary tenets of a credo: the repudiation of all that is affected and brash, glossed in moral terms ('virtue').

PASTIMES WHOLESOME AND DEGENERATE As epitome of perceived social ills stands Williams's visceral antipathy to contemporary urban leisure pursuits, hateful commercial-technological counterpart to the 'enslavement' of labour.

Others I know who toil under conditions little short of degrading, racked with pains and torments all the week, spending their precious life-blood foolishly and wantonly to enable them to sit with their wives in the stalls at the theatre at six shillings the two.⁵⁷

When I see men for ever crying at the foreman's heels—and it is universal in the works—to be allowed to work quarters and weekends—which is always happening, in my own gang—and then after the dreadful punishment of a week in the smut and stench, spending a crown and more at the theatre, or putting half a sov. on a horse—and losing it—this is more than the honest old carter has to keep his wife and family on—I cannot help thinking that it is wasted energy.⁵⁸

There is little that is really manly and vigorous in roller-skating, and many of the cinematograph pictures serve only to indulge the craving for the novel and sensational. Half the boys of the shed ... can think of little but those ridiculously stupid and often debasing entertainments.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Military service offered a further realm in which to make this comparison. 'I like the Army life very well. It is 20 times better than Swindon Factory. We have discipline, as you know; but the discipline of the R.F.A. Sergeants is much better than that of those sneaking cowards at the Works. We get smart orders; we do our best to obey. If one continues to be awkward, he gets called something—perhaps, not always. But there is no slyness in the trade. As far as I can see, the sergeants are *strait, curt, open, and sufficiently honest*.' (Letter to A E Withy, 26 November 1916, WSR0 2598/2, his emphasis.)

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What is more, this creeping perversion of the mores had begun to infect the countryside. Gossip at the Blue Lion, Chiseldon, was no longer of agriculture but:

of football, of the cinematograph shows, the theatre, "Sacco" the fasting freak, and a good deal of other sickly mess and rubbish, not half as manly and interesting as the hearty speech and ready wit of the independent crowd of cheerful rustics.⁶¹

(Note both passages invoke the core criterion 'manly': see §4.) He is in no doubt as to the cause of these changes—'The nearness of the railway has been responsible for the transformation of things at the inn'—extending, in a rare early musical mention, to the death of country songs, 'replaced by the idiotic airs of the music-hall'.⁶²

A putative poisoning of *taste*, which the depredations identified by Williams generically bespeak, lies at the root of social discontent:

It is this cultivation of the false and superficial taste that is largely responsible for dissatisfaction with rustic conditions, and the rush that is made from the villages to manufacturing centres.⁶³

In all this the puritan speaks. The distaste Williams avows for modern leisure pursuits—a baroque litany of football and roller skating, theatre, cinematograph (apocope had yet to take hold) and gambling—is forthright. Altogether less categorical are his thoughts on how these modern evils might be corrected.

REMEDIES (POLITICS AND CULTURE) To lament the effects of this tilt towards the urban is scarcely exceptional in the period.⁶⁴ *Grosso modo*, two options beckon: tergiversation (recovery, if it had ever existed, of a world of compleat craftsmen and peasant smallholders), and confrontation (political and philanthropic action

⁶⁴ In these concerns Williams adds a ready voice to the national conversation: 'Towards the end of the century the labourers' flight from the land' became a public issue which attracted a good deal of attention from writers and politicians. A variety of investigators inquired into wages, working conditions, housing, and allotments.' G. E. Mingay, *Rural Life in Victorian England* (1976), p. 193.

directed at amelioration of conditions as they stood). *In nuce*, back-to-the-landism and militant protest. While the first of these responses, a multifarious backlash in progress from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, would seem to fit closest the predilections—philo-rustic, urbophobic—paraded in the early writings, Williams announces himself emphatically no back-to-the-lander:

There is a great deal of talk, chiefly with a political bias, about the sheds, of getting back to the land. ... Those who, most of all, use the cry of 'Back to the Land' are they that obtain the highest wages in the sheds, and who are themselves the least likely to set the example. [*He knows of only one instance of a GWR man who conducted the experiment—and that ended in ignominious failure*] After five or six years of hard labour, trying in vain to prosper, he returned to the shed, a disappointed and ruined man: he had spent his savings and lost the whole of his small capital. ... The class of men to secure for the land is the pick of the agricultural labourers, those who are uncontaminated with the life of the town; it is useless to think of reclaiming those who have once entered the factory and become established there.⁶⁴

the familiar cry of "back to the land" [is] mere political clap-trap and humbug ... The townspeople are especially urgent in their desire to see *you* go back to the land, but have no intention whatever of making the experiment themselves.⁶⁵

Thus, vigorous advocacy of the superiority of country ways notwithstanding, he emphatically dispels any suggestion that his mapping of the moral high ground prescribes a redemptive readoption of rustic mores by the urban(izing) populace. Concluding from observation that, while you can make a townee of a yokel the process is not reversible, Williams proclaims the conviction that the flowing tide of history must be confronted, not turned away from:

[Villagers] *Jemmy Boulton and Dudley Sansum were happy in their day, though they were low-paid; but times have changed considerably since then, and every succeeding generation brings fresh conditions and new hardships with it.*⁶⁶

Conscious of the retrophile slant of his writings—'what I have described is chiefly the immediate past'—Williams exhibits concern to pre-empt imputations of *passéisme*. He several times rules out any attempt to 'set back the hands of the clock', such as this on the demise of country ways generally:

The change is psychological, and, I fear, permanent. Never mind, if they benefit in other directions. It is our duty to see that they do benefit, and that the loss of the old life shall be compensated by something as good, if not better.⁶⁷

(In that his sympathies quite clearly *did* lie with past ways, these statements may represent more self-protective nod than article of faith.)

With reversion ruled out, solutions in the strictly material realm (politics proper) would seem clear cut: wages should be increased, working hours shortened, and proletarian conditions generally improved, a nostrum apparently aligning him with the goals of emergent organized labour. Here too, however, there are complications. He declares himself, in letters to his patron Lord Fitzmaurice, antipathetic to the related movements of Socialism and Trade Unionism:

They [Socialists] have no historical knowledge, no 'large' knowledge; they are bitterly anti-Christian, they are Republican to a man, they want the nationalisation of everything; an eight hour day is their present demand, immediately after obtaining it they aver that they would commence an agitation for seven hours, and so on. They are without sympathies, without scruples, and without a decent sense of justice at all; they are very materialist.⁶⁸

My views of the labour position are quite unorthodox: I mean, the Trade Unions would not accept them. I do not care too much for Trade Unionism, for the reason that it is materialistic: nevertheless, we all acknowledge the sterling work it has done.⁶⁹

If 'materialism' (anathema in the Alfredian scheme) is the reservation cited in both cases, the undertone is an instinctive baulking at militancy in any form, a revealing resistance to political direct action as instrument of change.⁷⁰ The note of hesitancy distinctly audible at this point thus arises not from the question of goals, clear enough as far as it goes, but of *means*. Of the characteristic ambivalence marking his response to these pressing political issues Williams at least proves aware:

My own position, I confess, is somewhat illogical. Frankly, I cannot subscribe to the extreme views held by the Socialist-Labour people. Of late years I have inclined to the moderate view, though this again is not compatible with true progress.⁷⁰

Similarly, his diagnosis of the condition of agriculture is consistent with this drawing back from the partisan-political: in place of high politics—essentially, the debate over protectionism—he sees (in)capacity of individuals. Drawing back from class-driven strife as ameliorative mechanism, Williams gestures instead at a kind of unsolicited philanthropy, eminently civilized but manifestly politically naive:

⁷⁰ This distaste for militancy is confirmed in his disapproval of industrial action. During the miners' strike of 1926, he was moved to submit a letter to *The Times* (14 August 1926, p. 12), reprinted in the Wiltshire press. This, of course, is what lends his politics the reactionary cast that so galls commentators such as Clissold and Harker—see Chapter IV.3.

Until the labourer rises and resorts to drastic measures he is never recognized at all. This is the hypocrisy of the whole situation in the labour world. Nothing is conceded spontaneously, nothing is done voluntarily. How much bitterness might be avoided if, instead of having to wring concessions from this or that one, they were anticipated and yielded gracefully! That would be something like a politic arrangement of differences. But human nature says otherwise; and so dispute after dispute arises, and seldom or never reaches an amicable settlement.⁷¹

This pious hope is expressed in the context of labour relations in the countryside, his especial concern lying naturally with the dislocation created by a decisive shift in the socio-economic balance of town and country. Recognizing the practical difficulties rural labour faces in organizing, he assigns the onus of amelioration to individual farmers, and, if necessary, government intervention.⁷²

Refusal of proletarian concert signals a shying away from the political proper, if that province is understood as collective action to master fate. The position to which this points is that, politically, Williams willed the end (amelioration of conditions for working people, urban and rural) but drew back from the means (militant congress, or any kind of adversarial negotiation); but if politics is mobilization to means, the indications are that he was not, fully, political. His engagement with conflicts of the moment is a flirtation, no more than a half-hearted embrace: he cares, but havers before the problem. Perhaps more precisely, his genuine *indignation at injustice* is conceived in terms ethical more than political; that is, of relations between people at the individual level rather than collectively.

A letter to Fitzmaurice captures the uncertainties of his position: the way advocacy of material measures sits oddly with his avowed credo; the genuine concern he feels; the recognition of difficulties involved; the inspecific expression of hope:

I have tried, too, to dispel a little of the glamour that, to the eyes of many, attaches to the factory condition. I want to show that higher wages is not the greatest *desideratum* in life, for these are not obtained in the factories without terrific effort, or corresponding inconveniences. At the same time, I should never advise the farm labourer to 'lie down' and be quiet, though, as his position is, he is nearly bound to do so. The farm labourer's position is an extremely difficult one to remedy, as all know, but his case is not hopeless, and I believe that the day will come when it will be possible to do something for him.⁷³

At this point, tensions within Williams's hesitant proposals become apparent: the case for higher wages collides with the perceived evils of money-forged manacles,

frequently 'squandered' on vulgar pursuits: affluence exacerbates the problem.

On what are these higher wages to be spent, and how is this greater leisure time to be filled? With what are contemporary tastes and leisure activities, of the frivolity of which he expresses such visceral disapproval, to be replaced? These corollaries present Williams with greater problems of proposal in that the domain of mores (*values*)—which most occupies him—is more evidently resistant to 'correction'.

The aim of the working classes should be not altogether for the highest wages, which must often be procured with terrific effort, but for more leisure, more rest, more time for study and thought, more time to *live*; a greater freedom, good health, a clear conception of themselves and things, and a truer sense of the real independence with it.⁷⁴

I hope—and believe—that the day is coming when the workmen of Swindon will have greater opportunities than they at present enjoy, for cultivating the superior being, and that they will rise to the occasion, and help themselves to the good things of life. I do not mean that I should like to see them omnivorous readers, and all that sort of thing, but with a greater share of independence and general well being, more leisure, good health, hope, manhood, and the rest.⁷⁵

When he thus comes to pitch on the far side of the merely material—'the highest wages'—Williams collapses into benevolent woollinesses ('good things of life', 'hope', 'manhood') the tenor of which is naive. Irresistibly, he invokes the cultivation of the mind ('time for study and thought'), the arduous path he had chosen for himself.

'EDUCATION': REMEDY OR SCOURGE? A spectre stalking sections of this early rumination, 'education' (in the received, highly normative sense of *book-learning*, typically visited upon the quiescent masses by the forces of conformity: many of those memorialized by Williams were *educated* after their fashion—farm workers and industrial artisans, formed in the schools of field and workshop) is a conspicuous locus of Alfredian ambivalence. He is sceptical of its efficacy as remedy to dissatisfaction with country life. His chief disquiet in the rural sphere, however, concerns the administering of formal primary education in its post-1870 state-sponsored guise. Chapter Seven of *A Wiltshire Village* dwells on the matter, taking issue with established practice (*infra*) and setting out unusually distended prescriptions for a more felicitous syllabus and displaying in the process the stripe of his ideology:

records of human life, of heroic deeds and actions, by land and sea, in war and peace, at home and abroad, knowledge of the world and its ways, knowledge of life, knowledge of Nature, knowledge of humanity, knowledge of ourselves, and of one another are what we want.⁷⁶

He champions the great man view of history, with its ethos of exemplarity; to this he adds 'the lessons of Nature': nature rambles 'would assist character' in representing 'a purer, and sweeter, and healthier recreation than dancing, roller-skating, or football'; and finally, pictures of the agricultural year.

That is my idea of national education, such as would keep the mind soul in unison with real life and Nature, and counter-check some of the deplorable and alarming tendencies of the times.⁷⁷

Poor retention of school fare among GWR apprentices confirms errors he presumes to find in the village.⁷⁸ As for established manual workers, any cultivation of sensibility is deemed to militate against the inuring required for industrial struggle:

Where the cultured person does exist in the shed he must generally suffer exquisite tortures. There can be no culture without a higher sensibility, and he will be thereby rendered less able to endure the hardships of the toil, and the otherwise brutal and callous environments of the place. As for the view, held in some quarters, that education will make a man happier at work and better satisfied with his lot and condition, that is pure myth and fallacy, and the sooner it is dispensed with the better. On the other hand, it will most certainly produce dissatisfaction, but such, perhaps, as will speedily wake him up to his real needs and requirements—a larger freedom, and the attainment of a fuller and better life. Any kind of education that tends to make the workman at all subjective to his lot is worthless and retrograde; he must be roused up to battle towards perfection of conditions and must himself be prepared to make some sort of sacrifice towards the accomplishment of that end, unless he is content to occupy the same level for ever. Nor will it be sufficient for him to have obtained higher wages and greater leisure if he does not attempt to derive something more than a mere physical or material benefit from them. Whatever advantage is gained in the future must be turned to sterling account—to the acquisition of useful knowledge and the increase of mental strength and fitness, otherwise the battle will have been fought greatly in vain.⁷⁹

A passage of this kind, with its evident personal resonances [§2], exemplifies the vagaries of Williams's thinking. The nebulous counter-material aspirations of *A Wiltshire Village* (*supra*) are echoed in order to be dissociated from 'education'. At the same time, he deplores the hostility of the hierarchy in the works towards self-improvement, the dispensers of 'exquisite tortures'. Finally, he tacitly condemns those who have aptitude and opportunity for study and decline it:

Very few clerks, in spite of their leisure and opportunities, are bookish or endowed with a taste for literature; out of over a thousand at the factory, less [*sic*] than twenty are connected with the Literary Society at the Works' Institute.⁸⁰

For the masses, especially rural, institutionalized book-learning is deemed more scourge than panacea. Naively or otherwise, he accounts the proper office of education to be a cossetting of innocence, not its well-meaning destruction. 'The chief thing to be developed in children is character, and not the intellectual merely.'

Brains now are taking the place of pure intelligence, which operates very well without them, and is much more closely akin to character. ... In a word, we want cheerful and ready doers, the unspoilt virgin character, simplicity; and that is just what we do not get when every effort is made to cram the child's mind up with a thousand and one brainy subjects. I am chiefly thinking here of the town output, and I have had ample opportunities for studying that branch of the matter; it is a pleasure to think that in the villages there has not been so much tampering with and faking the natural part of the infant, though, as I have said, there are steps that way; the leaven of the towns is working out to the country districts, making one and all uniform and consimilar, or, at any rate, trying to. It is this cultivation of the false and superficial taste that is largely responsible for dissatisfaction with rustic conditions, and the rush that is made from the villages to manufacturing centres.⁸¹

The passage ends with the condemnation of 'false and superficial taste' cited above, casting 'education' as complicit in the (urbanizing) corrosion of rural life.

As the classic instrument of intrusion—exogenous disturbing of endogenous modes, of *what people do for themselves*—formal instruction is a culprit in the Alfredian advocacy of 'folk' (in all positive senses). Yet, in an obvious way, the tenor of Williams's ruminations on institutional education runs counter to his unconscionable endeavours. Unsure if it would redeem the townees from their materialism, concerned that it corrodes the 'virgin' character of rustics, aggressively vaunting the things of the mind for himself: there is a suspicion of pre-eminence jealously guarded. Here lurk the cracks of a divided self; a glimpse of Jekyll and Hyde.

EGREGIOUSNESS: GROPPING FOR A SOLUTION

Conducting his quest *à tâtons*, Williams is able finally to prescribe no more than pious palliatives to the aggressive materialism he so despised. Where diagnosis comes up against solutions, conviction turns, revealingly, to hesitation. While in the realm of toil he can claim propinquity (ploughboy and hammerman), in the realm of culture (subsuming *print*) differences poke through the surface. The veneer of affiliation peels away, and that is the whole point: at issue is *not* how he was an ordinary working bloke among thousands, but precisely the ways he was not. His defining *egregiousness* obtrudes not occupationally but in the cultivation of the mind and its

off-shoots, enacted in the uncogency of his line on popular culture: a conviction that emergent demotic pursuits are aberrant, his elective alternative (the cultivation of the mind), and awareness that that alternative is unsuitable for the masses. He is left occupying a cul-de-sac created by his own inexpugible difference: extra-materially, Williams the single-minded ascetic is simply not attuned to the contemporary vulgar *mentalité*; and this inhibits the possibility of any cogent proposal in solution.

2 THRENOS (BUCOLIC BACKWATERS)

From here, Williams's idiosyncratic ethnography unfolds as a more serene pre-occupation with landscape and bucolic habit and curio. The tableaux of local country life which follow, *Villages of the White Horse* and *Round About the Upper Thames*, retain apologetics as their dominant idiom—they are *his* people in *his* district—but shed the edge of ardent *plaidoyer* in favour of a certain mildly threnodic fondness. Jeremiad, including the supposed evils of formal instruction, issues now in more colourful form from the lips of the natives, as this downland farmer:

“You caan't get a decent man, nor a bwoy, nor nothin' else no good on. You caan't ship-shape 'em a mossel. Tha gets this heducation an' tha be as useless as a log. Tha caan't cut a 'edge, ner thatch a rick, ner milk a cow, dreeve plough, ner nothin' else.”⁸²

A sketch of the venerable singer Elijah Iles, found at Inglesham (Wilts), possessor of a vernacular wisdom owing nothing to book-learning, marks this tonal shift:

“Oh, sir, he's very dull of understanding!” cried the middle-aged daughter, appearing in the doorway.

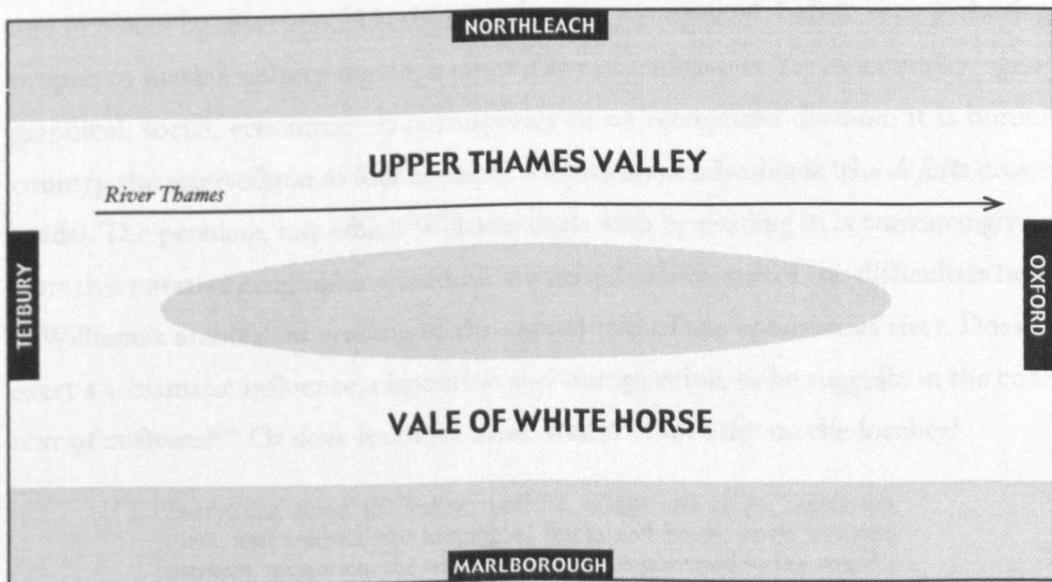
There was no need of apology. A man of ninety-five, and a rustic, of no school education, who can talk intelligently for hours about the farm, the passing of Laws and Acts, electioneering, historical events and great national movements, who can explain many of the phenomena of the heavens and describe the equinox, discuss local topics, from the old Priory of St John to the British village on Badbury Hill and the Hannington “Liberty,” and finish up with singing a score of songs remembered for sixty or seventy years, is not dull of understanding.⁸³

'UPPER THAMES' (2), OR A TALE OF TWO VALES The modulation to regional argosy entails a more concerted conduct of fieldwork: in that a territory must be staked out, and contact established *ab ovo*, Williams now more overtly assumes the mantle of querist. The outline of country life around the upper reaches of the Thames

set out in the previous chapter now becomes the object of his chronicling attentions. The filtering of working life already practised is now progressively extended, initially along the northern edge of the Wiltshire and Berkshire downs (*Villages of the White Horse*) and subsequently around the fabled river (*Round About the Upper Thames*). It is this latter zone which gives him his trademark rubric, a homeland-as-protagonist constituting a sort of non-fictional version of Hardy's Egdon Heath. Propædeutic to his peregrinations, he is at pains to delineate the extent and topographical hallmarks of this resonant domain:

the valley of the Upper Thames, near to where the four counties of Wiltshire, Berkshire, Gloucestershire, and Oxfordshire come into conjunction.

The Upper Thames Valley, roughly speaking, comprehends the whole of the ground between the base of the Cotswolds and the northern extremities of the Wiltshire and Berkshire Downs, running from Swindon to Wantage. This tract of country is more commonly known as the Vale of White Horse, since it is dominated by the huge chalk hill upon which the ancient figure of the White Horse is graven at Uffington. But the actual bed of the Upper Thames, or Isis, is really much smaller in extent, and covers no more than half that ground. This begins near Cirencester and continues eastward towards Oxford, bounded on the north, past Burford and Witney, by the Cotswolds, and, on the south, by a low ridge of stone hills running in an almost direct line from Purton, past Highbworth and Faringdon, to Cumnor and Hinksey.⁸⁴



Williams's 'Upper Thames' figured as parallel vales, showing, to the north, the Cotswold foothills, to the south the Wiltshire-Berkshire downs, and the 'low ridge of stone hills' running between, extending to the outskirts of Oxford

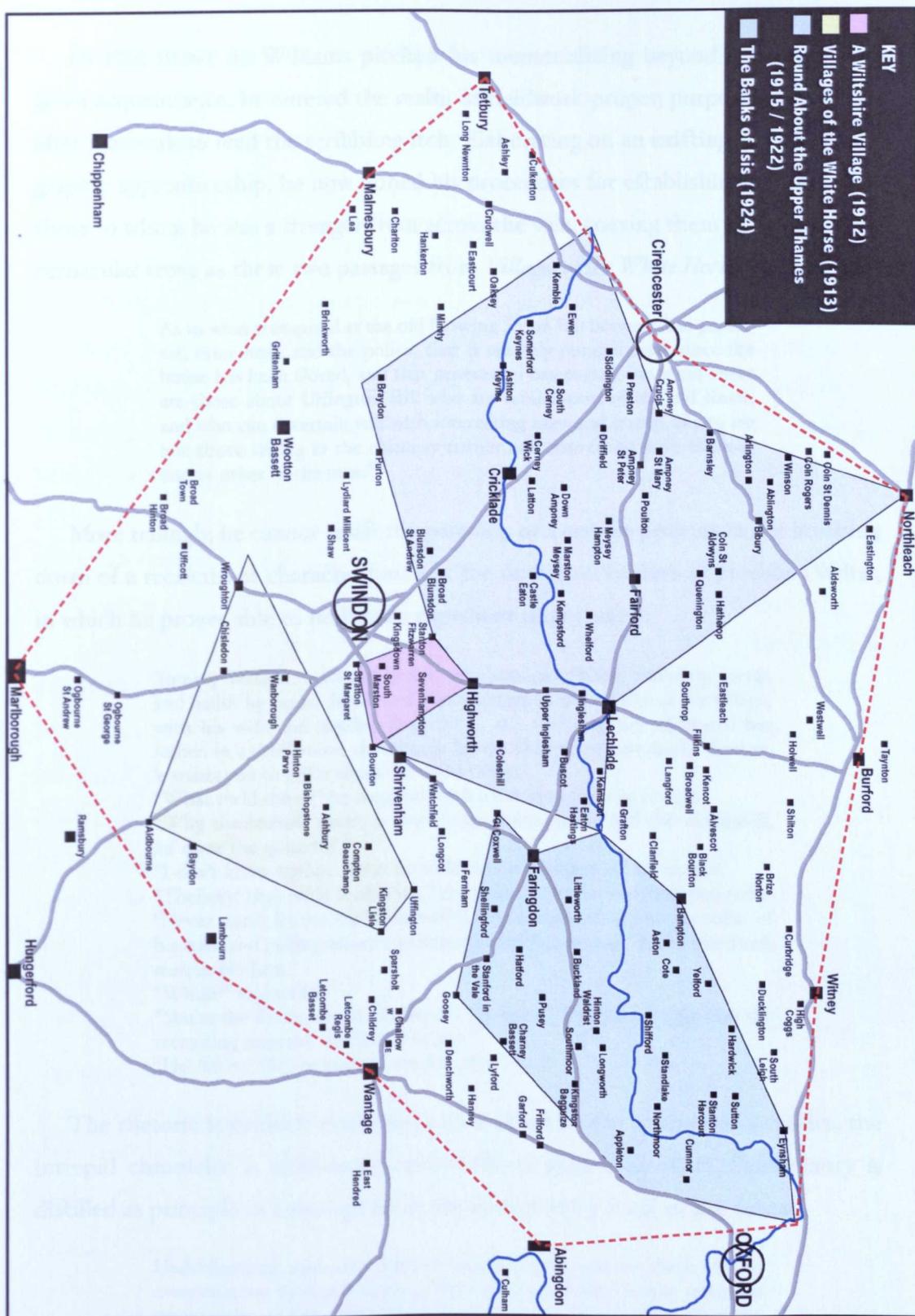
In his (heavily revised) preface to the work, Williams seeks to tie in this *ens geographica* with forms of life, essentially the connection to people and their habits:

~~The district [ground] covered by the chapters, notwithstanding that it embraces parts of several counties—the ground is divided between Wiltshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, and Gloucestershire—is generally homogeneous in its life and characteristics, and [is, roughly speaking, that lying between the Thames Head and Radcot Bridge, i.e. the first twenty-five miles of the river's course, and it embraces portions of three counties—Wiltshire, Berkshire, and Gloucestershire. This] represents a distinct locality, with a common speech and [folk]lore, a similarity of customs and traditions, credences, sports and amusements. The river Thames was instrumental in bringing [brought] about this. [for it had through the ages a unifying effect on those dwelling within the sphere of its influence.] As all the rainfall between the near Cotswolds and the northern slopes of the Wiltshire and Berkshire uplands gathered into the channel of the Thames, so, until recent times, the principal life and commerce of both sides of the valley flowed down to the river's banks, and people, differing widely in many [several] respects, came to be blended and united in their characteristics by the processes of intercommunion and close association. Further north, as we penetrate into the heart of the Cotswolds, prevailing features of the villages and their inhabitants are more narrowly typical of one county, and the same may be said of Berkshire as far as Wantage in the east, the Wiltshire Downs beginning with Wanborough in the south, and the valley of the Avon to the west of Swindon.⁸⁵~~

Most significantly, the Thames is construed as a central unifying force, creating a putative 'homogeneity' that begins to break up at the periphery. By implication, and in places by assertion, this theatre of enquiry is deemed, before song gathering proper, to mark a unitary region, a *raison d'être* of endeavour. Yet as an entity—geographical, social, economic—it corresponds to no recognized division: it is border country, the intersection of four counties with its hub on Lechlade (the *de facto* crossroads). The problem, one which Williams deals with by evading it, is convincingly to *show* this putative geographico-cultural integrity. Emblematic of the difficulties here is Williams's ambivalent reading of the capital role of the eponymous river. Does it exert a schismatic influence, cispontine and transpontine, as he suggests in the context of customs?⁸⁶ Or does it confer some stamp of identity on the locality?

Everything about the valley—pasture, tillage and crops, vegetation, birds, and animals, the keeping of flocks and herds, work, business, pleasure, recreation, the whole life, in fact, is governed by the river.⁸⁷

Adjudication is of lesser moment than the fact of what Williams *believed* to be the *differentia specifica* of his bucolic object: not Englishness but (*most*) *UpperThamesishness*.



'Upper Thames' as improvised extension: the map shows, within the area Williams was later to delimit for the purposes of song collecting (red dotted line), the zones covered by the four country books, three of which pre-date the pursuit of song proper. The effect is of an unplanned patchwork, pushing progressively outwards from his base at South Marston, and stitched together *post hoc* to form the definitive domain he celebrates as 'Upper Thames'.

IN THE HUNT As Williams pitched his memorializing beyond the diptych of given acquaintance, he entered the realm of fieldwork proper, purposively questing after materials to feed the scribbling itch. Elaborating on an existing *de facto* ethnographic apprenticeship, he now honed his procedures for establishing contact with those to whom he was a stranger from across the vale, coaxing them to divulge their vernacular trove as these two passages from *Villages of the White Horse* exemplify:

As to what transpired at the old Blowing Stone Inn between the poachers, mine host, and the police, that is scarcely remembered, since the house has been closed, and that generation has passed away; but there are those about Uffington still who are reminiscent of the old times, and who can entertain you with interesting tales and gossip, if you are not above sitting in the chimney-corner and conversing with them at one or other of the inns.⁸⁸

More tellingly, he cannot resist the parading of a certain prowess in the breaking down of a recalcitrant character found at the downland enclave of Hodson (Wilts), in which he proves able to muster an expedient importunity:

Tommy Weston, aged eighty-five, who was ploughboy, sheepboy, carter, and bailiff by turns, dwells in a small cottage in the middle of the village, with his wife and maiden daughter ... she [*the daughter*] addressed her father, in a shrill voice, shouting in his ear [*both parents are deaf*]: "Faather, 'e wants you to tell 'e about the owld times."
 "What owld times?" he inquired, with a merry twinkle in his eye.
 "Why, the *howwld* times, as used to be, when you turned the windmeell, an' done the grinndin'."
 "I don't know nothin' about no owld times; I forgets it," he replied.
 "Thelleky! tha's what 'e allus ses," the daughter exclaimed disappointedly.
 "Never mind, let me try," I answered. Then tugging hard at the collar of his coat, and pulling his ear towards my mouth, I began: "You're the finest man in Hodson."
 "Whuh?" replied he.
 "You're the finest man in Hodson," I repeated. "If you don't take care the recruiting sergeant will have you, yet."
 "Ha! ha! ha! He's too late bi seventy year."⁸⁹

The rhetoric is evident: extending a patient ear to the testimony of rustics, the intrepid chronicler is sufficiently resourceful to gain their trust. Particularity is distilled as principle in a passage from the final country book of the 1920s:

Understanding, sympathy and intimate conversations are alone able to overcome the habitual reserve of the rustic and induce him to relate his experiences, or talk freely of his kindred and acquaintances. Then the whole inner history of the place, its families and individuals, the qualities, virtues, and eccentricities of this and that one are to be known, together with any quaint local incident, humorous remark, or repartee.⁹⁰

By extension, this means that the bulk of the extensive materials placed before the reader are empirically derived, being drawn from conversations in the lane and at the hearth-side, a grounding in personal experience he is at pains to proclaim:

The scope of the book is principally nature and life, speech, story, tradition, and humorous incident. Whatever of this is contained in the chapters was gleaned on the ground, and is, I believe, for the most part original.⁹¹

This claim to veracity through lending an ear exclusively to the horse's mouth will stand some testing. Although most of the information clearly could only come from talking to old characters in the field, some of it must derive from documents. Williams's playing up of direct experience and observation is intended to sustain his claim to *propinquity*, self-presentation as a countryman amongst country(wo)men.⁹²

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION? (ETHNOGRAPHY *SUI GENERIS*) The mixture created by Williams particularly in the country works is *sui generis*. Based predominantly on fieldwork, these writings embrace a form of oral history *avant la lettre*, though not in a manner which exhibits scholarly rigour: he tends to disguise rather than parade his sources; there is little anchoring in time; the tenor is genial, unsentimentally elegaic tending in places to rosiness. Instinctively (that is, with no formal grounding), anecdotally, he contrives to hit many of the received rubrics: work, custom and belief, costume, diet, transport, master-man relations, with admixture of botany and ornithology (he was a keen and knowledgeable amateur naturalist) and an impressionistic response to landscape. The informing agenda is dominantly apologetic, a celebration of vernacular proficiency—what 'people' (those not decisively shaped by rarified instruction) *do for themselves*, enacted in forms of *making*—which has as its obverse elision of any account of what working people could *not* effect. If Williams achieves a certain *envergure*, it is rooted in a unique embodying of the founding matrix of *participant observation*. Juvenile communion in agriculture and the barely productive market gardening of the final phase framing brute physicality of toil at the industrial

⁹¹ Williams's writings are dotted with expressions of this putative propinquity, subtending oral testimony as guarantor of veracity: 'My intention was, before everything else, to be faithful, to write what I have seen, and to tell that which I know.' 'I have lived it [country life], and wrought it, and felt it, and know what I say to be true.' (*A Wiltshire Village*, pp. vii and xi.) Responding to a reader's challenge over Chapter VIII of the newspaper serial of *Round About the Upper Thames*, he affects merely to be the mouthpiece of his subjects: 'Throughout these chapters the villagers are speaking: I am merely interpreting and handing on their knowledge and experiences. ... Let it be remembered that we have this upon the authority of people still among us: I, at any rate, would rather believe a living man than a dead document.' (*Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 17 April 1915, p. 6.)

forge—‘I have several times been struck with pieces and been brought to the ground as a consequence’⁹²—lends a peculiar piquancy to the category of ‘participation’. Williams, too, was a maker: in iron and steel, in the soil, in brick and stone—and, egregiously, in words (he makes his own ethnography). Importantly, the monuments he made from language cannot, finally, be a straight transcription of the real, but must pass through an improvised paradigm of attitude and belief.⁹³ Ultimately, the problem bears on conceptions of *knowledge* proper, a hermeneutic realm beyond the particularities of information, in place of which predilection here largely serves. The resultant chronicles are anything but disinterested. Remove is built into the act of recording as much as into the stance adopted. Evaluation overlays ‘observation’, as the commonplace trajectory from figure in a decaying landscape to industrial citadel-dweller becomes egregious modulation to disgruntlement tempered with poignancy. For all his disavowal of *passéisme*, Williams instinctively turns back to a ‘better’ world, as in contrasting the rustic miller’s life with industrial conditions:

Mark this, you who toil and slave in towns and factories, whose daily life and labour are embittered by the iron laws and rules of ruthless system, and where the conditions are such that no additional effort is ever made voluntarily, and even the ordinary quota has often to be dragged from the individual by force, this man labours for love, pure love. What a change! What a contrast! What we have lost! What individuality, simplicity, content, and well-being!⁹³

A country of the clanking bicycle turns, inexorably, into a landscape of the mind, a *glissement* which will become more pronounced in the period of song collecting. The territory he mythologized as ‘Upper Thames’ was no more of itself a land of lost content than was Wenlock Edge. As with Housman, the contentment that had been ‘lost’—or, perhaps more significantly, never properly possessed—was all the memorialist’s. Dramatized in this string of rueful exclamation marks is Williams’s lament for the squandered wealth of serenity: the incorruptible Alfredian ululation.



⁹² Usefully pursuing the idea of a practice of ethnography operating outside of the disciplinary citadel, Martin Lovelace makes much of Williams as just such a practitioner. His piece (see footnote to page 222 *supra*) is, however, shot through with the customary empiricist naiveties. The distinction at issue is not that the endeavours of extra-institutional instances are ‘paradigm-free’ (p. 66): unpossessed of some ensemble of postulate and tooling, we simply cannot proceed. The naivety ‘paradigm-free’ should read something like: ‘working within a paradigm—the constituents of which are not fully conscious—of one’s own constructing, independent of formal instruction’. An idiom confectioned to document what ‘people’ do for themselves—the sign language created by GWR boilermakers being a case in point (*Life in a Railway Factory*, p. 115—itself becomes what (some) people do for themselves. The analyst’s task, which Lovelace appears to miss, is to tease out the terms of that homespun paradigm. This is one way of construing the line clutched at here.

§4 (1877-1930) : THE MORALIST

ALFREDISMO, OR RECTITUDE RULES

The aspects explored above—temperamental, intellectual, empirical-scriptural—show Williams's native predisposition drawing confirmation from immersion in high literature (the habit of culling aphoristic precepts, especially from the classics) and given formal expression in finished literary works: a distinctive ethos-cum-credo is discernible, much of it a formalizing of temperamental proclivity (striving, courage, and so forth), orienting his response to the world about him. His early prose works, especially, set forth with characteristic certitude a value scheme turning on the town / country axis (§3.1). This essentially moral edge constitutes a fourth capital dimension, woven into and informing all other conditions to form the insistent motifs of a quirky *Weltanschauung*.

STRIFE: TOIL AS VIRTUE / RESTLESSNESS Pre-eminent within the Alfredian pantheon of virtues is toil, clinched in the precept *labor ipse voluptas* (§2 *supra*), a propensity to remorseless activity which furnished him with a whole *raison d'être*. He wanted to be doing all the time, which supposed good health—and, so far as much of his enterprise was alfresco, good weather. (So dwelling, in the letters, on the related topics of health and weather represent more than the usual banalities.)

And finally, remember, there is nothing really useful gained without some amount of labour, and as the work is yours, so also will be the pleasure of the prize when you have attained it, and also the joy of getting it.⁹⁴

By labour he intends both physical and mental, clinging to manual employment even as—deceptively—literary celebrity promised to beckon:

“Some people have thought,” he remarked with a quiet smile, “that I should begin to wear a collar and tie to my work. But I can tell you that I am not in the least ambitious to make a name for myself, and (with an emphatic gesture) I am not attempting to play to the gallery. I think it is my duty to go on working as I am doing. If you do not do your accustomed work you become dormant; you are like a pool of stagnant water.”⁹⁵

Physical toil he thus construes as complement to the exactions of intellect, a uniquely *lived* accommodation of extemporized seminarium with hostile workshop.

Hand in glove here, oddly, with the things of the mind is a species of machismo, a fascination with physical prowess which recurs throughout his oeuvre and for which 'manly' is the favoured term.⁹⁶ His distaste for music he glosses in these terms:

I have this objection also to music, or at least, to certain kinds of music, that they deceive the hearer by playing upon the emotions and obscuring the reason. After all, I really doubt whether music is a fitting entertainment for men, unless it be of the spirited measure, since it may make one become tender and effeminate, and unfit him to face the hard and stubborn facts of existence.⁹⁷

Psychologically, the effect is almost of compensating for something, of labouring (sic) to disguise some root anxiety or phobia. Indomitable, Williams rehearses an ethos of resistance—for the nurturing of which industrial life at Swindon could scarcely have furnished more unknowingly collaborative conditions—designed to develop inuring to the hard knocks of rude enterprise. He does not in this regard neglect to deploy the handiest of all classical clinches from his favourite Horace: *nil desperandum*.⁹⁸ By these linguistic (literary) means does he confect for himself a preceptive carapace against a hostile world. *For all his capacity to resilie, we may question whether he was quite as pachydermatous as he would affect.* There is importantly, as corollary to hard labour, a paraded contempt for material gain, for which a certain exalted conception of literature furnishes the perfect occasion (§2 *supra*). Counterpart to Williams's operose cultivation of literary powers is a fierce clinging to their deployment. Independence—in this case of thought and utterance—is a cardinal Alfredian article, one which marks the dignifying of a viscerally gladiatorial disposition into a defiant refusal to temporize:

I am not anxious to quarrel with any man; at the same time I am not disposed to be fettered, smothered, gagged or silenced, to cower and tremble, or to shrink from uttering what I believe to be the truth in deference to the most formidable despot living.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Cited in *Life in a Railway Factory* (1915), p. 290, and in four letters: to William Dowsing, 22 October 1911 and 12 November 1912 (WSRO 2598/56); to Reuben George, 21 December 1911 (WSRO 2598/67); and to J B Jones, 20 October 1912 and 29 October 1913, the second of which reads: 'I more and more realise how desperately determined I must be to keep alive, in any form: everything seems to be continually working so as to claim me for something other than the hobby of literature. *Nil desperandum* and *nil summittendum!* that is what I tell myself.' (WSRO 2598/75/2/3) This talismanic device is without question a product of his classical reading—and translating: *nil desperandum Teucro duce et auspice Teucro; I certus enim promisit Apollo I ambiguum tellure nova Salamina futuram. I O fortes peioraque passi I mecum saepe viri, nunc vino pellite curas; I cras ingens iterabimus aequor.* (Horace, *Odes* I vii, the last six lines of a lengthy piece.) This Williams the poet renders in *Poems in Wiltshire* (1911), p. 102: 'Never despair while Teucer's your guide and Teucer your ruler, I For surely hath promised Apollo I A Salamis in a new land, with the parent city confounded. I O valiant heroes and comrades, I Who often worse ills have borne with me, now banish all I cares with the winecup, I Tomorrow, re-plough the deep waters.' More apposite to his condition might be the cod form *nil carborundum* or, properly, *illegitimus non carborundum*. See Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Catchphrases*, edited by Paul Beale (2nd edition, London, 1985).

Thus, for all that he was at pains to resist self-indulgent monkishness—‘it seems to me that books alone, though powerful agents, are nevertheless not altogether of themselves sufficient’⁹⁹—Williams’s yearnings yet found their most fertile ground in unflinching autodidacticism and the literary production it enabled. The vast domain of print, and attendant intricacies of language native and foreign, afforded the perfect challenge for increasing the length of his intellectual stride.

The inalienable mechanism is productive discontent, whether in a banal industrial milieu—‘Strength is in action. When I hear of a man’s being satisfied I know that he is done for.’¹⁰⁰—or the more exalted twistings of the soul, as set forth, veritable cascade of defiance, in his confessional poem ‘The Testament’:

There is no peace in life, it is not joy to be comfortable;
 And to be satisfied with anything is worse than all diseases and deaths.
 I myself will not rest, I will not lie down meekly.
 I will arise like a giant, and shake myself; I will proudly lift up my head.
 I will swear an oath to myself, and call all things in earth to my witness,
 Never to rest while my heart beats on this side death [*sic?*], never to be humbled.
 I will excel in my labour, I will leave nothing unfinished,
 I will understand myself before I die, and this round frame, I will search
 deeply.
 I will chisel my name—how small soever—in the rock, I do not fear greatness;
 I can look into it, and above it if I will, there is nothing greater than life.¹⁰¹

This sovereign *intensity*—there is, conceivably, no Alfredism more emblematic—impels his own endeavours and informs his valuing of the world about him.

Well, I must say that there is much in literature that is queer and comical. But I’ve no time to look back much, for every fresh year and every fresh experience demands a new attitude and one must at all times be susceptible to his changed circumstances.¹⁰²

This passage, concluding the first of the *Young Men Magazine* articles, substantially encapsulates the components of Williams’s credo, his single-minded project:

Finally, the need is to work, to be consistent, and yet various; to observe everything, without exhausting enquiry; to take a little from each, to collect, add, compare, and distinguish; not over-reaching nor yet under-estimating; choosing the good, rejecting the useless, or that which appears so; working, not for profit’s sake, but for love of knowledge, and improvement; looking, learning, striving, hoping, patiently, earnestly, humbly, and entirely for the greatest of all rewards, the consciousness of having in some manner “defied Fate,” and stolen a little from the jealously-guarded hoard of Time.¹⁰³

In this passage he reveals himself: more than merely temperamental contingency,

this unremitting striving was a perfectly studied (*sic*) agenda to seize time by the forelock. He was telling himself he could win the victory.

The formulating of beliefs with writerly deliberation, assembled above, derive from the period of Williams's maturity. His founding values are modesty, honesty, truth, justice, openness, courage, anti-hypocrisy. It is a credo ostensibly forged from productive, self-protective strife in the world and from unremitting bookwormery. Certain convictions lie deep in the self, notably an implacable pursuit of justice:

He was always [*sic*] a remarkable boy, *noble hearted*, always righteously indignant at other people's oppressions. ... He was always gentle and courteous to anyone weak or poor or suffering.¹⁰³

Yet the main roots may be sought in inculcation at the hearth-side. Indisputably, the most decisive of the forces which formed Williams in infancy was his mother, left to rear the brood single handed.¹⁰⁴ Testimony to this early shaping is, necessarily, retrospective; the occasion of retrospection being in this instance death. (Williams's mother died whilst he was *en route* to military service in India. Not long after, a brother also died.) The appearance thus at his shoulder of the forces of darkness lends a note of solemnity to his reflections, a momentary lengthening of perspective:

So I suppose, dear mother, that I shall not see you any more on this earth, but I live in hope of meeting you in heaven. You have been a great sufferer all your life and it is bitter to see you as you are, and not be able to help you. If it hadn't been for this cruel war I should have been at home near you to help you, but I am separated from you and cannot see you any more. **You've been a good mother to us all, and taught us to be upright and honest**, and if we have turned out rough and bad it was not your fault.¹⁰⁴

She loved us all with a deep and a **wise** love, and we can never forget the great **debt** we owe to her who laboured always for us, when we did not know it, and set us such an example of **modesty, virtue and honesty**. *Generally*, she was always right, and now, more than ever, I acknowledge how much I owe to her **teaching and example** to us all.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Williams's sisters supply valuable independent testimony to the forceful personality of the mother: 'We had a splendid home training. Also our mother encouraged no false pride, her pride was in self-help. ... "We must put our shoulder to the wheel." And we continued wheel-barrowing! ... When in my teens, I first studied the Proverbs of Solomon the Wise I read for the first time: He that is slothful in his labour, is next to a thief & a robber; also: commit thy works to the Lord, & thy thoughts shall be established. I rubbed both into my heart & brain, & I shall not be ashamed to meet God or any employer for judgement. I have always felt I would rather give than take.' (Elizabeth Williams to Leonard Clark, 22 July 1937, wsno 2598/43.) Her influence evidently extended beyond the moral: 'My mother had a very Poetical nature. Also a gift of expression. She would write a verse or two at Christmas time in her letter to me I remember. And such a lover of Beauty in nature and such an eye for it. I consider my brother inherited it from her to some extent.' (Ellen Williams to Leonard Clark, 29 June 1937, wsno 2598/43.) J B Jones (*Williams of Swindon*, p. 43) elaborates: 'She was an ardent lover of nature. A walk with her—always through the fields if possible—was an adventure. She ever saw something fresh to draw our attention to. She had a love for good literature. Also she had a gift for story-telling that her son lacked. She could have written a much more artistically attractive "Wiltshire Village" of her own time than Alfred Owen.'

The founding Alfredian precepts are thus epitomized, and ascribed to infant years: *upright, honest* (twice), *modesty* and *virtue*. Worth noting also are 'debt' and 'wisdom', and 'teaching' and 'example'. Teaching connotes learning, receptiveness to sources of wisdom; while *exemplarity* he invokes at least once, adduced in justification of financial support for his literary strivings:

but there is one reason I will mention as to why a fellow in the ranks of workers should be recognized—in my opinion—and that is that recognition serves to stimulate emulation in others. Plenty of people have said to me—"What's the good of you killing yourself. You don't get anything for it." But where recognition is given the tone is changed, and encouragement is most certainly supplied for those who have ambitions for getting on in life.¹⁰⁷

Robert Bridges, cited on the memorial tablet to Williams originally in Swindon Town Hall, takes up and endorses the point: 'His achievement is an abiding spiritual example to the workmen of this country.'¹⁰⁸

Psychobiography

If the mother's role was decisive, what of the father? Is there a legacy, despite absence? Conceivably Williams père et fils were akin in character as they were in countenance—a certain obduracy, entre autres, may be patrilineally derived—and there may be legacy as reaction. What lurks deep in the crevasses of the psyche, to which we have access only through the veiling partialities of what is written? How to explain this consuming need to strive? In fulfilling—beyond expectation, hyperbolically—the moral prescriptions of the mother does he subconsciously compensate for the failure of the feckless father, betrayer of the brood, an amendatory desire to fill with honest graft a phallic absence? In the spectacle of Alfred Agonistes do we detect a hint of persecution mania; at least, that he had something to prove? (Inferiority of the autodidact-in-deprivation.) With unimpeachable trumpeted rectitude he atones for the sins of the father. The sudatory operations of industry, pounding hammers-as-sign-of-virility which do service for the male component lacking in the domestic hearth, balance the gentle delights of nature for ever associated with the mother (she it is has the dedication of Folk Songs of the Upper Thames). The psyche insidiously (per)forms its anxious equations: nature = mother = womb (the enfolding hills) \ macho making = father = virility (GWR). There is in all this, crucially, an undertone of yearning, a hole which he strives to fill. Later, he will seek a corrective to psychological carence in folk song, a domain to which the scholar-poet is unable, finally, to accord innocence...



PART 5 : JEKYLL & HYDE (A STRANGE CASE, INDEED)

every Victorian had two minds ... the best
guide book to the age [is] very possibly
{*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

The dominant tonality in all this is *disaffection*, a fundamental lack of sympathy with the temper of the times as he perceived it, discernible from the very outset of his scriptural intervention. In that Williams found this point of view, essentially moral rather than political or socio-economic, congenial to his writerly posture, diagnoses of modern ills become intelligible as expressions of *parti pris*. *A Wiltshire Village* most uncompromisingly elaborates what he took to be the deleterious correlation between material grasping (*urbs*) and abandonment of elemental virtues (*rus*):

I should like to sweep it all away at a stroke, to wipe out this supersensitive regard for means and appearance, and to teach a more simple and sincere manner of life, dress, and amusement ... [*in contrast to rustics he knew, who*] had good appetites, ate, drank, and slept well; laughed, sang, danced a jig occasionally; were **simple, open, hearty, spontaneous,** and **generous**. Their clothes were artless, inexpensive, strong, sensible and serviceable.

I would far rather live in Betsy Horton's or Jacky Bridges' bare old plaster cottage, eat simple food, dress poorly, and be free with it, than to wear away body and soul in the senseless effort to keep a fine house, to strive to be that I never can be, to ape my taskmasters and superiors, or to excel them in style and dress with my small means—in a word to live a life of extreme discomfort, of foolish self-sacrifice, and endless misery.¹⁰⁹

This early work further deploys a characteristic lexicon, a categorical language in which the Alfredian value scheme is articulated (references to *A Wiltshire Village*):

- **SIMPLICITY**: 'that jewel, so easily lost and hardly recovered—simplicity of taste' (p. ix); 'stark stern simplicity' (p. 22); 'What we have lost! What ... simplicity' (p. 53)
- **SWEETNESS** which proceeds from the **HEART**: what affords 'sweeter' recreation (p. 135); 'thought itself is fresher and sweeter, more pure, and untainted in the open air.' (p. 287); the term 'heart' is not used but is implied in the 'anti-brains' line on education
- **OLD-FASHIONED**: 'an old-fashioned agricultural village' (p. vii; also pp. 17, 176, 195)
- **GAUDINESS**: 'Do you think we are happier today, in our brick-and-tile houses, stuffed up with gaudy furniture and trappings' (p. 17)
- **WITHOUT SOUL**: industrial workers are 'hopeless, helpless, soulless, and spiritless' (p. 19).

APPETITE AND ALIENATION

At the resonant juncture of 1914, a personal watershed coincident with international cataclysm, this is the sum of Williams's negotiations of the world as it found him (as much as the reverse): a medley of apprenticeships, equipplings conferred and improvised, marrying proletarian participations with literary scholarship, and having as monument a creditable diversity of published writings. Temperamentally, a distinctive amalgam of traits—gladiator, enquirer, outsider—informs all his undertakings: the manful grappling with harsh reality (urban and rural), the embrace of book-learning which joyously engages his tenacity, stimulates a need to *extend* and sets him apart. Embrace of elite poetry, native and classical, furthermore confers canons of literary taste and value arduously confirmed in practice as poet. Adapting these expressive powers to parochial annals in prose, Williams finds a vehicle for articulation of his partisan ideology, modulating to the mapping of a cherished bucolic backwater ('Upper Thames') and elaboration of ethnographic fieldwork methods. Subtending these manifold intercessions is an unshakeable scheme of values, the foundation of all that he felt and believed and strove to frame in language: a *moral grammar* in which the world(s) about him could be apprehended. It is the story of one mastering everything in his path by a determined lengthening of stride.

The fascicle of characteristic habits of mind thus assembled creates a mediating *modus* which slants as much as it straightforwardly registers. Williams's defining condition as enquirer and loner, at once inquisitive and a man apart, sets up a dynamic peculiar to him: he engages but then draws back, an effect of *appetite and alienation* (saving that his appetite is preponderantly for what is past or passing) which enacts the ambivalences of his position. The trajectory Williams's gropings describe runs, accordingly, from a semblance of social sameness to quintessential *difference*. Where he might have gone roller-skating or visited the cinema, he determined, visceral outsider that he was, to cultivate the mind and commune with the countryside. This egregiousness was not lost on a reviewer of *Life in a Railway Factory*, noting that much of the grievance Williams sets forth

does not touch the bulk of the men, who are truthfully described as apathetic, fond of the factory and the town, given to artless merriment, and on the whole enjoying life more than those who pity them. ... It is the superior and intellectual man of his [Williams's] type who suffers in the factory; and the reason is that he is a fish out of water.¹¹⁰

In that his mental apparatus is less conceptual than judgemental, intent as he is upon projections of *value* determined by personal *enlisement*, he offers up response spun from impressionism and predilection in place of rigorous analysis, a failing he freely concedes in a letter to William Dowsing:

Now, I'm hanged if *I can think*. When I write very well it's because the stuff flows into my pen. Do you compris? But when I stop to ponder, to squeeze out a thing, I've got to shut up shop, and suspend operations.¹¹¹

When moral gloss does service for knowledge-as-understanding the result is something akin to allegory, exemplified in a tendency to seek culprits rather than ponder solutions. Less than doctrinally, Williams had constructed an idiosyncratic, primordially axiological prism—a *peculiar mixture* indeed¹¹²—through which the world he confronted was refracted and distinctive Alfredisms generated. Engagement-withdrawal (unbelonging), knowledge substitution (unrigour of thought)—these are the characteristic slippages of the Alfredian psyche, in which clarification of a problematic cedes place to sleight of mind symptomatic of a baroque estate.

LETTERING / UNLETTERING

Far from the concordant *man of many parts* suggested by his biographical synopsis (PRÆLUDIUM), Williams emerges as a divided—or, at least, *multiple*—self set apart from the aggressively proletarian milieux in which he lived and worked. *Alfredismo*, in all its truculent singularity, is hence emblematically a meeting place of disjunctions: the insider-outsider (artisan-autodidact), (dis)affiliation along the *urbs / rus* axis, a constant rumble of *disenchantment* amid the fervour. Yet up to the *tournant* of 1914, the heteroclitic jostle of personæ to which circumstance (*aris et focis* of family and occupation) and (self)cultivated mental prowess (embrace of formal uses of language, as consumer and producer) collectively give rise subsist, in their permutations and declensions, in expedient collusion, where they might be expected to collide. This may be explained in terms of a division *within* the capital persona of author. The clash inherent in the duality of self-anointed improvising ethnographer (bound through harsh experience to hammerman and ploughboy) and aspiring poet (subsuming the chief burden of autodidacty, that is, the scholar of the poetic canon,

¹¹² This is, precisely, the sense of *idiosyncrasy* (a compound from the Greek): 'One's idiosyncrasy is the way one's elements are mixed' (Fowler, *Modern English Usage*).

native and classical) remains latent as long as the objects of the second are absent, by chance, from the subject matter of the first. In that neither industrial production nor agrarian life apparently incorporated any significant component of literature, the root fracture remained commodiously concealed. On this reading, the polarity imperilling negotiation was not ultimately *urbs / rus*—Williams admired industrial workers' prowesses as much as those of rustics—but lettering / non-lettering; or, more exactly, variant ends to which Williams enlisted this exceptional equipping. This is the schism effected by high linguistic contrivance: literary Jekyll and Hyde.

A CONJUNCTION OF ABSENT MAKINGS

Thus far, to the point of composition of *Round About the Upper Thames* and at the very threshold of occupational flux, Williams's strivings describe a providential, victorious progression hammered (*sic*) resourcefully out of a medley of projects and participations (Dr Jekyll). The question he faced in the hot summer of 1914 was how successfully his paradigm of improvisations would permit him to negotiate folk song, a domain it had not been designed to embrace. Whereas none of the heterogeneity of proletarian makings—in iron and steel, in agrarian materials, in brick and stone—commemorated in the writings was entirely foreign to Williams the ardent participant, two more rarified dimensions remained fortuitously blank: the extra-functional, scriptural making constituted by poetry, and the making in sound we know, problematically, as 'music'. In elite forms of the first he hopefully participated at an obdurate remove from quotidian endeavour, while the second lay in any form beyond his horizon. The conjunction of these elements in *song*, hitherto unsuspected but duly stumbled upon among denizens of the Upper Thames, was to occasion instructive difficulties of accommodation, as fissures and lacunæ in the literary sub-persona (Mr Hyde) were exposed in collision with ethnic melodico-verbal practice stranger by far than appeared. Emblematically herculean autodidactic-redactive strivings had ensured that the earnest stranger about to present himself at the rustic doorstep in quest of the district's decaying minstrelsy was as much emissary from the republic of letters as he was clodhopping kinsman. Herein lay the seeds of the partial defeat Williams was destined to suffer in the imminent folk song adventure.



A PRODUCTIVE COLLISION

THE RUSTIC TOILERS OF THE DISTRICT NEIGHBOURING THE HEADWATERS OF THE THAMES lived out their hard lives in tranquil obscurity, agents of an evolved repertory of vernacular aptitudes which chanced to include music-making, mainly song. Their social and occupational contracts—networks of relations, orders of knowledge distinct from book learning—were by 1914 in mutation, though less dramatically than commonly conveyed. At the edge of this slowly atrophying world stood Alfred Williams, curious and committed. Auto-lettering empowered him to chronicle the habitat of which he was at once, by birth, part and from which he was set apart. What he could not know was that the accumulations, not to say exhilarations, of intellectual aspiration would impede as much as enable his self-inflicted efforts to negotiate the song (singing) upon which he stumbled in the mouths of country people. Immersion in literary canons, the labour to be a poet, indifference towards music shading into antipathy, these furnished the touchstones against which he was to measure the quality of a song (text). Importantly, ‘folk’ song is not a notion (value judgement) built into the conceptual entooling of either party, but the less-than-self-evident outcome of their undesigned, largely serendipitous embrace. Although Williams was already entangled with country life as self-appointed chronicler, his belated broaching of song throws up especial difficulties. *When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail ...* The superannuated artificer was wielding much more than a hammer, yet deficiencies in his array of tools ensured that, in parts at least of his account, song would resemble a nail. He was to find that the improvised belletristic-ethnographic idiom through which country ways had with some distinction been memorialized in the prose works could only imperfectly be extended to encompass the specifically musical element. A prickly autodidact on a bicycle manifestly not travelling light, a tract of country if not remote exactly then assuredly a backwater, and 200 ageing rustics, lingering custodians of a moribund practice of (rural) music-making: elective subject and non-elective object thus crystallize, on the eve of apocalypse, in a microcosmic enactment of the instructively opaque mutation which comes to be known as ‘folk’.



NOTES TO CHAPTER III

- 1 *GWR Magazine*, XXVIII, 3 (March 1916), 'Life in a Railway Factory', p. 71 (Williams's response to a critical review of *Life in a Railway Factory* which had appeared in the previous issue).
- 2 Letter to Jonathan Denwood, 4 December 1911 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 3 'The Testament' in *Nature and Other Poems*.
- 4 Letter to A E Withy, 10 February 1914 (WSRO 2598/2, emphasis added).
- 5 Letter to William Dowsing, 22 December 1911 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 6 Letter to J B Jones, 20 October 1912 (WSRO 2598/74).
- 7 Byett, pp. 80-1 (*propos cueillis*); Leonard Clark, p. 86, writing of life in Swindon works (no source for this assertion has been found).
- 8 As note 1.
- 9 Letters to his wife, 13 November 1916 (WSRO 2598/59) and 23 January 1917 (WSRO 2598/61); letter to an unspecified sister, 3 July 1918 (WSRO 2598/45). In a letter to Henry Byett of 18 April 1923, Williams considers that *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* is 'likely to make a stronger claim than any of R[ichard] Jefferies' local books.' (WSRO 2598/38/2).
- 10 Byett, p. 25. "Vice" should, of course, read *vici*.
- 11 *Life in a Railway Factory*, p. 43.
- 12 Byett, p. 17 (*propos cueillis*). Also p. 18.
- 13 Letter to William Dowsing, 18 September 1910 (WSRO 2598/56, emphasis added).
- 14 Byett, p. 53. See also p. 54 for Indian theatre incident in detail.
- 15 Byett, pp. 20 and 21.
- 16 *A Wiltshire Village*, p. 238.
- 17 'The Testament' in *Nature and Other Poems*, and 'My soul is free as ambient air' in *Pomes in Wiltshire*.
- 18 Letter to J B Jones, 2 March 1910 (WSRO 2598/74).
- 19 'A Wiltshire Workman and Poet', *Salisbury Journal*, 23 January 1909, p. 2.
- 20 *Life in a Railway Factory*, pp. 288-9.
- 21 Williams's sister Ada to Bob Arnold, *As they roved out ... songs collected by Alfred Williams*, BBC radio broadcast, 31 December 1959.
- 22 Byett, p. 9.

- 23 'The Art of Study', *Young Men Magazine*, 80 (May 1909), pp. 117-118.
Cuttings are preserved at WSRO 2598/65. No copies at British Library.
- 24 *Life in a Railway Factory*, pp. 289-90.
- 25 Letter to his wife, 23 January 1917 (WSRO 2598/61).
- 26 'The Brook', *Songs in Wiltshire*, p. 77.
- 27 *Villages of the White Horse*, p. 96.
- 28 *A Wiltshire Village*, pp. 72-3.
- 29 *Ibid*, p. 282.
- 30 Letter to Frederick Rockell, 28 October 1908 (Wiltshire Archæological and Natural History Society, Devizes).
- 31 *Poems in Wiltshire*, p. 94.
- 32 Letter to William Dowsing, 1 May 1909 (WSRO 2598/56, author's capitals).
- 33 *Ibid*.
- 34 Cited in Jones, p. 72.
- 35 Letter to William Dowsing, 26 July 1909 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 36 *Poems in Wiltshire*, pp. 99-100.
- 37 Byett, p. 13 (*propos cueillis*).
- 38 Byett, p. 15 (*propos cueillis*).
- 39 Letter to Fitzmaurice, January 1922, Clark, p. 149 (original not extant).
- 40 Letter to William Dowsing, 22 November 1922 (WSRO 2598/56). The solecism 'belle-lettres' is probably an error of transcription.
- 41 Letters to Henry Byett, 30 January 1920, 17 January 1926, 3 November 1929 (WSRO 2598/38/2).
- 42 As note 30.
- 43 *Boys of the Battery, Round the Cape to India, Indian Life and Scenery* (unpublished).
- 44 Letter to J B Jones, 18 February 1917 (WSRO 2598/74).
- 45 Letter to Henry Byett, 28 December 1916.
- 46 *A Wiltshire Village*, Preface, p. viii.
- 47 *GWR Magazine*, XXVIII, 3 (March 1916), 'Life in a Railway Factory', p. 71.
- 48 *A Wiltshire Village*, p. 114.
- 49 *Life in a Railway Factory*, p. 7.
- 50 *Ibid*, p. 240.
- 51 *A Wiltshire Village*, p. 21.

- 52 *Villages of the White Horse*, p. 256.
- 53 *A Wiltshire Village*, p. 163.
- 54 *Life in a Railway Factory*, p. 278.
- 55 *A Wiltshire Village*, p. 135.
- 56 *Ibid*, p. 141.
- 57 *Ibid*, p. 19.
- 58 Letter to A E Withy, 6 November 1912 (WSRO 2598/2).
- 59 *Life in a Railway Factory*, p. 299.
- 60 *Villages of the White Horse*, p. 94.
- 61 *Ibid*, pp. 94 and 95.
- 62 *A Wiltshire Village*, p. 233.
- 63 *Ibid*, p. 131.
- 64 *Life in a Railway Factory*, pp. 295, 296, 298.
- 65 *A Wiltshire Village*, p. 303.
- 66 *Ibid*, pp. 304-5.
- 67 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', *The Highway*, VIII, 94 (July 1916), p. 166.
- 68 Letter to Fitzmaurice in Clark, pp. 47-8 (late 1911, original not extant).
- 69 Letter to Fitzmaurice, 'November' 1915, in Clark p. 81 (original not extant).
- 70 Letter to Fitzmaurice (autumn of 1911), in Clark p. 47 (original not extant).
- 71 *A Wiltshire Village*, p. 298.
- 72 See *A Wiltshire Village*, pp. 297 and 304.
- 73 Letter to Fitzmaurice, spring 1912, in Clark, pp. 48-9 (original not extant).
- 74 *A Wiltshire Village*, Preface, p. x.
- 75 Letter to A E Withy, 10 October 1912 (WSRO 2598/2).
- 76 *A Wiltshire Village*, p. 133.
- 77 *Ibid*, pp. 134-5.
- 78 *Life in a Railway Factory*, p. 287.
- 79 *Ibid*, pp. 290-1.
- 80 *Ibid*, p. 135.
- 81 *A Wiltshire Village*, p. 131.
- 82 *Villages of the White Horse*, p. 45.
- 83 *Round About the Upper Thames*, pp. 88-9.

- 84 *Ibid*, pp. 19 and 21 (emphasis added).
- 85 *Ibid*, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 2 January 1915, p. 3 (1922, pp. 8-9).
- 86 See, for example, *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 26.
- 87 *Round About the Upper Thames*, p. 24.
- 88 *Villages of the White Horse*, p. 283.
- 89 *Ibid*, pp. 83-4.
- 90 *The Banks of Isis*, Chapter IV, *North Berks Herald*, 16 October 1925, p. 7.
- 91 *Round About the Upper Thames*, Preface, p. 9.
- 92 *Life in a Railway Factory*, p. 172.
- 93 *A Wiltshire Village*, p. 53.
- 94 'The Art of Study', *Young Men Magazine*, 80 (May 1909), p. 118.
- 95 'A Wiltshire Workman and Poet', *Salisbury Journal*, 23 January 1909, p. 2.
- 96 See notes 50, 59, 60 *supra*.
- 97 Byett, p. 13 (*propos cueillis*).
- 98 *Life in a Railway Factory*, Preface, p. x.
- 99 'Self-Culture', *Young Men Magazine*, 78 (March 1909), p. 81.
- 100 *Life in a Railway Factory*, p. 4.
- 101 'The Testament' in *Nature and Other Poems*, p. 32.
- 102 Letter to his wife from India, 4 December 1918 (WSRO 2598/64).
- 103 'Self-Culture', *Young Men Magazine*, 78 (March 1909), p. 82.
- 104 Laura Pill (née Williams) to Leonard Clark, 18 June 1937, and Ellen Williams to Leonard Clark, 29 June 1937 (WSRO 2598/43).
- 105 Letter to his mother, 13 September 1917 (WSRO 2598/45).
- 106 Letter to Bess (sister), 15 December 1917 (WSRO 2598/45).
- 107 Letter to A E Withy, 13 November 1914 (WSRO 2598/2).
- 108 The full inscription may be found in Jones, p. 33.
- 109 *A Wiltshire Village*, pp. 19 and 23.
- 110 Unsigned review of *Life in a Railway Factory*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 November 1915, p. 425.
- 111 Letter to William Dowsing, 10 July 1918 (WSRO 2598/56).



INTERLUDIUM

A LAND OF GIANTS? Notable in Williams's chronicle of working life is a celebration of the manifold forms of vernacular mettlesomeness, resonating with accounts of the classical world with which he was familiar as self-taught scholar.

Of pure feats of strength there are many worthy of quotation. It is on record that one "Jimmy" Whorl, a carter of the downs, and an old gamester, was a veritable lion in strength. What he must have been like in the wrestling may be left to the imagination of the reader; he certainly was a dangerous customer. It is related that, one day, when in the field at plough, with a team of four horses, because they failed to obey his order to "Come hidder," he struck them, one by one behind the ear with his naked fist, and felled them all to the earth.^{Ⓒ 1}

In place of brute acts of violence, Stanton Fitzwarren boasted a party piece:

Tom Fowler, the carter, [was] noted for an extraordinary feat of strength which he often performed for the entertainment of the villagers. Of him it is related that he would lie on his back beneath a farm waggon, place his feet against the hind axle-tree, lift up the waggon with the strength of his legs and back, and turn the two wheels round simultaneously with his hands.^{† 2}

Acts of this kind were also to be found in the railway works at Swindon, as with

[an ex-Hussar, named Bryan who] was nearly seven feet in height and he was very erect. His arms and limbs were solid and strong; he was a veritable Hercules, and his shoulders must have been as broad as those of Atlas, who is fabled to have borne the world on his back. It was striking to see him lift the heavy headstocks, that weighed two hundredweights and a quarter, with perfect ease and carry them about on his shoulder—a task that usually required the powers of two of the strongest men.³

Bucolic vigour might more usefully be harnessed to husbandry, as Giles Draper:

He was able to cut two acres of grass a day and to keep up the effort for a week at a stretch. Such extraordinary exertions naturally made him very hungry and thirsty, and it is not to be wondered at that he discovered an enormous appetite, though it is difficult to believe that he really ate a quartern loaf and two pounds of bacon and drank a gallon of fresh beer at a meal.^{‡ 4}

Williams found abundant tales of prandial prowess, some perfectly rebarbative:

Ⓒ Entellus, triumphant at the games in commemoration of Anchises: 'He set himself to face the bull that stood there, | Prize of the battle, then drew back his right | And from his full height lashed his hard glove out | Between the horns. The impact smashed the skull | And fragmented the brains. Down went the ox | Aquiver to sprawl dying on the ground.' *Virgil, Aeneid, Book V* (Fitzgerald).

† Odysseus, goaded by Leodamas, 'grasp'd a stone, | A little graver [*heavier*] than was ever thrown | By these Phaeacians in their wrestling rout, | More firm, more massy; which, turn'd round about, | He hurried from him with a hand so strong | It sung, and flew, ...' *Odyssey, Book VIII* (Chapman).

‡ Odysseus incognito, responding to the goading of Eurymachus: 'I wish at any work we two were tried, | In height of spring-time, when heaven's lights are long; | | a good crook'd scythe that were sharp and strong, | You such another, where the grass grew deep, | Up by day-break, and both our labours keep | Up till slow darkness eas'd the labouring light, | Fasting all day, and not a crumb till night; ...' *Odyssey, Book XVIII* (Chapman).

Here is a feat said to have been performed by “Rat-Catcher Joe,” of Blunsdon, near Swindon. First he drank a pint of shoe-oil. Next he ate one pound of tallow candles, two pounds of boiled fat bacon (hot) and a large cow-cabbage, cooked with it. Then he swallowed the greasy pot-liquor, and finally drank a quart of ale, completing the whole within half-an-hour. It sounds inexpressibly crude—even barbarous, and indecent; but how many there are who would envy him a portion of his amazing digestive ability! ⁵

More commonly, under the insouciant rubric of ‘sport’, brutality was visited on fellow gamesters, often with disfigurement as enduring prize:

I once knew an old Wiltshire wrestler who had two crooked thumbs, caused by dislocation, and after neglect. It was an extraordinary business, but the details are interesting, in a sense. There was a trick in wrestling that was known as “reining-up.” This was, to get your two thumbs into your opponent’s mouth, one each side, and then to force his head backwards by this means. Judging from the dislocated thumbs, it must have been a difficult feat. But what about the other’s lips, and his cheek? † ⁶

In lending prominence to colossi of the field, Williams invests his ‘Upper Thames’ with a quasi-mythological quality, a territory graced within living memory by toilers of herculean strength and gargantuan appetite, their contestatory feats inter-ludic. The classical connection is made apropos rough sports at Hannington, ‘witnessed and countenanced by the local squire and the parson, who admired the Greek nature of the games’.⁷ Yet the tableau of bucolic life painted in these somewhat *outré* terms remains in one signal respect incomplete. When Hephaestus, divine lame artificer, fashions the pictorial great shield for Achilles, he is at pains to depict, alongside toilsome warfare and husbandry, the timeless pleasures of dance and song:

on a resonant harp a boy among them | played a tune of longing, singing
low | with delicate voice a summer dirge. The others, | breaking out in
song for the joy of it, | kept time together as they skipped along.⁸

In acknowledging locally-occurring dance, he cannot resist voicing his doubts:

The morris was exceedingly attractive, but there was something so stout, manly, and valiant about the back-sword play as to appeal to me with greater force than the music and rhythm of the dancers. Both were Greek—the one Lydian, the other Spartan: privately I should prefer the vigorousness of the latter to the softness, if not voluptuousness, of the former.⁹

5 Penelope’s suitors are enjoined to eat: ‘This said, all left, came in, cast by on thrones | And chairs their garments. Their provisions | Were sheep, swine, goats, the chiefly great and fat, | Besides an ox that from the herd they gat.’ *Odyssey*, Book XVII (Chapman).

† Aias Telamonius and Odysseus engage in a wrestling match during the funeral games for Patroclus: ‘Wearing their belts, the two stood toward each other | in the arena, and with oaken hands | gripped one another’s elbows. Think of timbers | fitted at a steep angle for a roof | a master-builder makes to break the winds! | The bones in each man’s back creaked at the strain | put on him by their corded thews, and sweat | ran down in rills. Around their ribs and shoulders | welts were raised by the holds they took, all scarlet | where the blood gathered.’ *Iliad*, XXIII (Fitzgerald).

It is in the domain of vocal capacity that music-making is accorded its proper place in the parochial pantheon of endowment. Standing alongside the exemplars of main force were Goliaths of song, the arena for whose idiom of bodily stamina was furnished by the singing contests that once punctuated the rural round.

It was common, years ago, during wet weather, when labour out of doors was at a standstill, for the rustics to assemble at the inns and have singing matches, in order to see—not which could sing best, but which could sing most. There were seldom more than two competing upon any one day. And usually there was no chance for but one of them to sing. He commonly issued a challenge to the village, or the neighbourhood, and declared himself able and willing to sing continuously for twelve hours—from morning till night—and to have a fresh piece each time. It consequently took two days to decide the match. Of course, the inns were full of spectators. They were the daymen on the farms. Under the influence of Apollo they left their work, and had no thought of returning until their musical appetite had been satisfied. All the pieces were to be sung from memory. It was something of a treat for the audience. Many of them strained their ears for new pieces and went not away disappointed. Doubtless the singers got very tired, and the music grated, before the twelve hours were up. But they were very strong and had voices like organs, while their throats were lubricated with frequent draughts of ale. That they did the feat is beyond question. Four such champions I myself knew and will mention their names: John Pillinger, of Lechlade; David Sawyer, of ~~Stratton St Margaret~~ [Ogbourne]; William Warren, of South Marston; and Gabriel Zillard, of Hannington. Of Zillard it is said that he would unbutton his shirt-collar at six in the morning and sing for twelve or even eighteen hours, if necessary, with the perspiration streaming down his cheeks. From what I have heard of his songs, they were very quaint and comical; unfortunately, by reason of his infirmity, I was unable to obtain possession of any of them.^{Ⓞ 10}

Under the aspect of demotic prowess diverse provinces are conjoined. Cherished Alfredian canons of virility thus inform the modulation from country chronicle at large to a privileging of song. Roaming this landscape were giants of *singing* as well as of occupational endurance and ingestive capacity. It was to these discovered musical titans, alongside mortals of lesser stamp, that Williams duly directed his attentions.



Ⓞ Lest music seem a somewhat effete mode of pitting, the presumption was already embedded in the ancient world that singing represented a primary measure of prowess. Damoetas responds to the taunts of Menalcas by proposing, impromptu, a vocal contest: *Vis ergo inter nos, quid possit uterque, vicissim | experiamur?* (Virgil, *Eclogues* III. C Day Lewis renders: 'All right! Let's have a match, each singing in turn, and try out | Each other's skill.') William Barnes's poem 'The Best Man in the Field' is a nineteenth-century west country adaptation of this text, in which Sam and Bob mock each other over their prowess at husbandry—'That's slowish work, Bob. What'st a-been about? | Thy pooken don't goo on not over sprack'—but which, disappointingly, omits music from the competitive set. Cecil Sharp summarizes the testimony he gathered of what is an otherwise neglected topic (*English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (1907), p. 107).

NOTES TO INTERLUDIUM

- 1 Alfred Williams, 'Hardy Wiltshire Worthies', *Wiltshire Times*, 21 September 1929, p. 9.
- 2 *Round About the Upper Thames*, p. 270.
- 3 *Life in a Railway Factory*, p. 73.
- 4 *Round About the Upper Thames*, p. 277.
- 5 'Hardy Wiltshire Worthies'.
- 6 'Hardy Wiltshire Worthies'. The gamester in question is conceivably Jonathan Keen of Wanborough: see Chapter II, p. 86.
- 7 *Round About the Upper Thames*, p. 276.
- 8 Homer, *Iliad*, Book XVIII (translated by Robert Fitzgerald).
- 9 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 26.
- 10 *Ibid*, Introduction, pp. 14-15.