

## The Squeezebox Stories

**Key C - Peter Dawson:** 'Me Granny used to say, Aye, ye gan te these dances, she says, everybody's got a fiddle. And she says, tha sitting there, she says, tha just saw away ye fiddle's ya own. Sometimes ye would think tha wa gonna cut them in haff. Tha wa using them ower that strong. But she says, that's what tha was, there was ne music but what people made tha sel.

The same thing, everywhere was different. Ye could gan, ye could have musicians playing here but tha weren't the same as the musicians at Whittingham, or the musicians from farther up the valley, or the musicians at Otterburn. Tha all played different tunes in a different way. Usually the accordion or the squeeze box and always a fiddle, sometimes a drum.'

**Key B - Alastair Hardie:** 'An astonishing number of moothies around. On one occasion playing in the pub, I counted nine; nine moothies! They are very handy little instruments to carry. They usually have to have more than one because each one is in a particular key, so they have to switch keys depending on the piece of music they're playing.'

**Key A - Alan Wilson:** 'Well, the nearest one was Eglingham. The village of Eglingham which was six, seven miles away. We all went there to the Youth Club, and all we had was bicycles, push bikes, but it was quite a community cos you knew everyone there and it was a gathering place, dances and Youth Clubs and course in them days tha was always a pub in the village. Ye went there first.

Well, it was all the dances then, tha was an MC that showed ye how to do them and ye just learnt yerself and ye learnt the hard way to till ye got it right. Depends on how much drink ye'd had before. But they were enjoyable occasions. They were. Everyone knew everyone and people who came into the area were welcome an all. It was good. We still know a lot of people where we've been all wa life, but not as many as we used to. In villages ye used to know the whole lot, but that doesn't happen now.'

**Key G - Andrew Miller:** 'One of my very earliest memories was again something which I've enjoyed all my life, which is the Rothbury Highland Pipe Band. And the earliest memory I have is of the band playing as the last train left Rothbury Station, and that was 1963, I think. Don't remember what time of year it was but I'd be either four or five years old.

At the time, my Grandfather was the Chairman of the band. My uncle, Uncle Jack, was the Drum Major. My father was a piper, my uncle, Uncle Noel, was a piper, so it was very much a family thing. Everything that the band did we always went along to. I can vividly picture standing on the station platform, with the band playing as the last train pulled out of the station. Very sad in many ways, and certainly today I think probably most people regret the fact that those lines were closed.'

**Key F - Alastair Hardie:** 'People will have surely told you about Willie Taylor. Willie would play there. At that stage he would be living at Middleton Dean where he was a shepherd, and by road from there it would be 20, 25 miles, but he used to carry his fiddle through the hills, set up early, be there in time for dancing, play for the dancing, strap his fiddle on his back and then walk back home again afterwards. There would be other musicians doing the same, coming from other directions, I think. Just part of his life.'

**Key E - Anne Dunn:** 'Absolutely loved going to the dances. My parents started taking me when I was 14, and Dad taught us to dance at home. We had an old fashioned gramophone and Dad taught us to dance as soon as were, music's in wa feet sort of thing. Cos they were good dancers, my parents.

And, going to the dances, I loved the dances. All over the place. Well, Windyhaugh was a great dance place. We used to go; we would go to Ingram, we'd go to the College Valley dances, we went over the border to Pennymuir. Whittingham, all the local ones, Netherton and Harbottle, Rothbury Jubilee Hall.

Yes, in the winter time there'd be dances every Friday night and then, as I got older, there was dances started on the Saturday night. That was when more pop music, not really rock n roll, but pop music came along and they got bands more, and where there might be a singer and more guitars, and things like that. There used to be dances at Whittingham and here in the Jubilee Hall. Once a fortnight each one, so that was where you went on a Saturday night.'

**Key D - Jon Short:** 'Nearly every valley had someone who could play the fiddle or the accordion or the drums, and they would all, they would band together. Someone from the Rede Valley would come across, mebbe two, and bring a fiddle with them or mebbe an accordion. And they would join up with the local Coquetdale fiddlers, musicians, and they would make a band.

Archie Bertram was a fiddler man. Quite a few local men learnt to play the accordion. They all banded together and made his band. It worked fine, you know. Willie Taylor was another one. For a special occasion, every anniversary, they would invite a Scottish band, traditional Scottish band, down in for that dance. There would be, what, a hundred and fifty, couple of hundred people at the dance, a proper dance like that. Whist drive beforehand, then they had the dance after. That's the way it went on, ye know.'

**Key C - James Tait:** 'I'm James and I'm a native of the Coquet Valley. My dad and his ancestors came from a farm called Barrowburn, right in the heart of the Cheviot Hills. Back in the days of the dances at the nearby Askew Hall, Barrowburn was once considered as something of a social centre, when musicians and dancers would walk over the hills from the Scottish side to come to the dances, and sometimes they would stay on the floor at Barrowburn. The folk in the valley back then were renowned for their hospitality. It was a crime, for instance, to go past Barrowburn and not call in for a cup of tea and a rock bun.

The Canny Shepherd Laddies of the Hills. This is a very famous local song. There are a few different versions of it, and I'm not quite sure

who wrote the original, but the melody is almost the same as the famous Geordie song 'Keep Your Feet Still, Geordie Hinnie'. This shows how, in traditional music, the melodies are used far and wide in different contexts.

There's songs about oor soldiers and oor sailors by the score,  
Of tinkers and of tailors and of others there's galore;  
But I'll sing ye a song that you've never heard before,  
It's the canny shepherd laddie o' the hills.

Oh the shepherds o' the Coquet, the Alwin and the Rede,  
The Bowment and the Breamish, they're all the same breed,  
Wi their collie dog beside them and a stick with horn heid,  
It's the canny shepherd laddie o' the hills.

They climb oot ower the mountain ere it's turned the break o' day,  
Through the bent and moss hags and round bogs they wend their way,  
Quick tae see a mawkit yin or a sheep that's strayed away,  
It's the canny shepherd laddie o' the hills.

They send the collie around the sheep with a yell o' "Gan oot wide"  
Then whistle with the notes so shrill the dog drops in his stride.  
"Come by Moss! Doon a bit I'll tak my stick oot ower yer hide"  
It's the canny shepherd laddie o' the hills.

If the lambing time is stormy, he will curse and he will swear  
There's a yow that's lost its lamb and I've skinned an auld yow there,  
Some o' them have ta'en the sickness, nae mair trouble can I bear,  
It's the canny shepherd laddie o' the hills.

In the back-end tae the marts he'll gang, if the prices they are dear,  
To celebrate he'll treat his pals tae whisky and tae beer,  
But if the prices they are bad, it taks a dram tae cheer  
The canny shepherd laddie o' the hills.

In the winter when its stormy and drifts are piling high,  
He'll never flinch tae tak the risk that in the snow he may die.  
His first care is his sheep are settled and sheltered safe may lie,  
The canny shepherd laddie o' the hills.

At Alwinton they may turn oot tae see the Shepherds' Show,  
Then into Foreman's for a drink they with their cronies go,

They'll argue and they'll sing and shout, but fecht, well bless me no,  
The canny shepherd laddie o' the hills.

Now if ye've gaun among them as A've done for forty years,  
Nae kinder hearted folk you'll meet if you look far or near,  
The kettl'e set a boiling and they cry "Sit you doon here",  
The canny shepherd laddie o' the hills.

A've said nae words aboot their wives, A'm shair there is no need.  
But, in every house I've been tae yet, they seem tae be the heid,  
And I'm sure you'll all agree with me, it taks a hell of a good wife to breed  
A canny shepherd laddie o' the hills.