

## The Ringers of Egloshayle

As recorded by Arthur L. Mata from the singing of William Rickard, Captain of the Egloshayle Ringers in January 1932<sup>1</sup>

♩. = 96.

1. Come all you jov - ial Ring - ers, Come lis - ten to my  
 2. There was Crad - dock the Cord - wind - er,<sup>(b)</sup> He ring the Treb - le

tale; I'll tell you of five Ring - ers bold That liv'd in Eg - los - hayle. —  
 Bell; John El - le - ry was the second man, And few could him ex - cel. —

For ring the ray<sup>(a)</sup> they bore the sway Where - ev - er they did go; — The  
 The third was Pol - lard the Car - pen - ter, And the fourth was Thom - as Cleave, — And

mus - ic of the mer - ry bells 'Twas their de - light to show. —  
 Good - fel - low the Ten - or man, That rung him round so brave. —

Now Cradock was the Treble man and stepp'd 'long with his toe;  
 And casting of his eyes around, commanded them where to go.  
 They pulled away with courage bold, which did their hearts revive;  
 Sweet music then was swiftly heard [with] one two three four five.

They went out to Lanlivery and brought away the prize.  
 They went back to St Tudy, and did the same likewise;  
 [There was] Lanlivery men, St Maby Men, St Tudy and St Kew,  
 But those five lads of Egloshayle did all the rest out-do.

This little core they play so sure, no changes did they fear;  
 No man did ever miss his turn, 'twas joy to see and hear.  
 And people all for miles around did tell o'er hill and dale;  
 The fame of those five ringers bold who lived in Egloshayle.

Amongst the certificates and trophies adorning the wall of the bell tower of St Petroc's Church at Egloshayle is a frame with typed lyrics and fading hand-written music score entitled "The Ringers of Egloshayle". It is attributed "anon circa 1812" and has a footnote: "the words and melody were taken down in 1925 by W.H. Bragg from Mr E.J. Rickard (1864 -1941), whose father knew the ringers Ellery and Goodfellow. Mr E.J. Rickard was a cousin on Mr W Rickard who rang on 65 Christmas mornings consecutively."

Come listen to my story, come listen to my tale;  
I'll tell the of five ringers bold, who lived in Egloshayle.  
For ringing they did hold the sway, wherever they did go,  
The music of the merry bells, twas their delight to show.

Wan, Du, Dree, Vour, Vive  
And opposition grew.  
Yet these five lads of Egloshayle,  
Did all the rest out-do.

There was Craddock the cordwainer, he rang the treble bell,  
John Ellery was the second man, and none could him excel;  
The third man was Pollard the carpenter, and the fourth was Thomas Cleave;  
And Goodfellow the Tenor man That rung him round so brave.

Now Craddock was the Treble man, he titched 'long with his toe;  
And casting of his eyes around, commanded them where to go.  
They pulled away with courage bold, which did their hearts revive;  
Sweet music then was swiftly heard from one two three four five.

They went out to Lanlivery and brought away the prize.  
They went back to San Tudy, and did the same likewise;  
There's Stratton men, San Tudy men, San Issey and San Kew,  
But those five lads of Egloshayle did all the rest out-do.

This little corps they play so sure, no changes did they fear;  
No man did ever miss his turn, 'twas joy to see and hear.  
And people all for miles around did tell o'er hill and dale;  
The fame of those five ringers bold who lived in Egloshayle.

A further note lists: "Humphrey Craddock d 1839; John Ellery D. 1845 aged 85; John Pollard d. 1825, aged 71; Thomas Cleave d. 1821, aged 78; and John Goodfellow d, 1846, aged 80. (Taken from the monuments in Egloshayle Churchyard)."

This list does not completely reconcile with the churchyard plot record and some of the memorials are now quite weathered and lichen encrusted. There is a memorial to Elizabeth Craddock daughter of Humphrey and Mary who died in 1825 aged 22 which makes Humphrey Craddock a candidate for the captain of the ringers in the song.<sup>2</sup> John Ellery does not appear, but we have a Thomas Ellory who died in 1845 aged 85.<sup>3</sup> There is a memorial to John Pollard who died in 1825 aged 71.<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to identify Thomas Cleave but there are several memorials to the Cleave family and a clear memorial to John Goodfellow who died in 1846. The lyrics clearly celebrate real people who were the Egloshayle bell ringers in the early part of the nineteenth century. 1812 is quite a precise date and may be a recollection or received history of a competition dates and does give a starting point for the story of the song.

The term “anon” tends to suggest a composer who either did not put their name to the song or whose authorship has simply been forgotten. One assumes that a local songsmith worked on this but songs in folk tradition have a habit of coalescing and re-coalescing from a variety of sources and inspirations. There may have been an earlier song, poem or melody that was adapted and incorporated. In the versions of the song that appear over the next two centuries the lyrics vary, there is the occasional appearance of a chorus and the song acquires two distinct melodies.

In 1892 folk song collector, Rev Sabine Baring-Gould was sent a set of lyrics and two versions of the tune by a fellow cleric Rev. E.C.C. Wilson, Curate of Milton Abbott. The original correspondence has not survived but Baring-Gould’s notes indicate that lyrics and the melody in a minor key had been taken down from John Martyn, shoemaker of Milton Abbot. He had learned it from his wife’s uncle who died in 1868 and was a ringer at St Kew. A second tune in a major key was taken down by Rev Wilson from an unidentified old man in Tavistock. The song arrived too late to be included in any of Baring-Gould’s major folk song collections but the lyrics did make an appearance in *Cornish Characters and Strange Events* published in 1908.<sup>5</sup> In this publication he uses the verses to illustrate the popularity of bellringing competitions and the way in which the teams travelled from village to village.

#### Tune 1<sup>6</sup>

Egloshayle Ringers melody taken down by Rev Wilson from an "Old Man"



*In Baring-Gould’s rough copy there appears to be a note missing or an eighth note instead of a quarter on the first beat of bar 9. A quarter note has been used to be consistent with rest of tune and versions taken down by other collectors. This bar is completely missing in Baring-Gould’s faircopy manuscript.*

## Tune 2<sup>7</sup>

Egloshayle Ringers melody taken down by Rev Wilson from John Martyn



It is interesting that the song did not come to Baring-Gould's notice during the main period of his folk song collection project which was between 1888 and 1891. During this time, he made several field trips to the Falcon Inn at St Mawgan as guest of Sam Gilbert and his family who ran the pub. The Gilberts were not only singers but folk song collectors in their own right. Sam's son William later sent material to the Folk Song Journal and to the Cornish scholar, Henry Jenner for inclusion in the Celtic Song Book.<sup>8</sup> They introduced Baring-Gould to singers from the surrounding parishes and it seems surprising that they had not come across the ringer's song from nearby Egloshayle when it had travelled as far as Tavistock.

I am indebted to Martin Greabe, Baring-Gould's biographer and leading scholar on his folk song manuscripts, for details of a slight twist in the story of the song at this point.<sup>9</sup> He explains that in the Fair Copy of Baring-Gould's manuscripts kept in Plymouth there is a letter dated 24th March 1898 from the Vicar of Egloshayle. The letter thanks him for providing the music to the song during a recent visit and explains that they are having it harmonised. This may mean that Baring-Gould contributed to the revival of the song in 1898 after a period of being forgotten and explain why it was not known to the Gilbert family of St Mawgan.

It was the Celtic Revival in Cornwall that brought the song to a wider audience. The two organisations driving the revival in the 1930s were Gorsedh Kernow and the Old Cornwall Societies. Arthur L. Mata was enthusiastic member of both, he became a bard of Gorsedh Kernow in 1931 taking the name Mata Lel (faithful companion) and was instrumental in setting up the Wadebridge Old Cornwall Society in 1932.<sup>10</sup> He was, at this time, living in Wadebridge and held the post of organist at St Breock parish church and clearly familiar with bell ringers in the area. In January 1932 he took down three songs from the celebrated William Rickard<sup>11</sup> mentioned above: "What a Fine Hunting Day", a Cornish version of "The Wild Rover", and "The Ringers of Egloshayle".

Mata sent these songs to Ralph Dunstan for inclusion in his "Cornish Dialect and Folk Song"<sup>12</sup> collection published later in 1932. "Cornish Dialect and Folk Song" was a sequel to "Lyver Canow Kernewek – The Cornish Songbook". Between them these two publications included over 70 songs and tunes collected from oral tradition in Cornwall.<sup>13</sup> These publications have underpinned Cornish song and instrumental traditions since then and remain core source material. There are differences in lyrics and melody between the song as it was taken down by W.H. Bragg in 1925 from E.J. Rickard and by Arthur L Mata from William Rickard in 1932. In terms of the natural way in which traditional singers improvise and vary their performance the difference between the two versions is not significant but it is interesting to see the changes. It is William Rickard's lyrics as published in Dunstan's "Dialect and Folk Song" that seems to be the root of later, 20<sup>th</sup> Century versions.

Dunstan was working on a third collection of folk songs when he died in 1933 and his papers, sadly, were lost. Although there was demand for a further collection of Cornish songs there were no major work done until the composer Inglis Gundry, also a Bard of Gorsedh Kernow, was asked to undertake further research by the Federation of Old Cornwall Societies in the 1960s.<sup>14</sup> Gundry eventually published *Canow Kernow* in 1966 and this included an arrangement of the version of Egloshayle Ringers sent to Baring-Gould by the Curate of Milton Abbott as taken down from John Martyn.<sup>15</sup> The original manuscript left by Bragg was set for four parts and both Dunstan and Gundry arranged the song with a four-part harmony but despite this, the song seems to have continued its trajectory as a ballad rather than harmony piece.

Arthur Mata describes William Rickard as a regular singer at local concerts whose party piece was to dress in his hunting costume and sing "What a fine hunting day". After the publication of Dunstan's "Cornish Folk Song and Dialect" he doubtless revelled in the additional fame and kept the tradition of "The Egloshayle Ringers" alive. Certainly, Cornish musicologist Mike O'Connor, was able to take down a version from churchwarden Cecil Osborne in 1998 which was apparently handed down by successive teams of Egloshayle bell ringers.<sup>16</sup>

The song was a favourite of internationally renowned Cornish Singer Brenda Wootton who made great store of the fact that her maiden name was Ellery. She insisted that the John, or Jan as she pronounced it, in the song was one of her ancestors.<sup>17</sup> She eventually included it in her *Starry Gazey Pie* album with Rob Bartlett in 1975.<sup>18</sup> It was also in the repertoire of the enigmatic Charlie Bate of Padstow, doyen of the town's May Day traditions. He was an accomplished accordionist and master entertainer and he improvised around Dunstan's words and tune using part of verse 4 as a chorus. There is a wonderful recording of him singing this for a meeting of the Padstow Old Cornwall Society in 1976 a year before his death.<sup>19</sup> After Brenda Wootton and Charlie Bate the song was embedded in Cornish singing tradition and was also sung and recorded further afield.

The trajectory of the takes us from some early nineteenth century bell ringers, through the notebooks of Rev Sabine Baring-Gould, the Celtic Revivalists of the early twentieth century and the folk scene in Cornwall in the 1960s and 70s. It is embedded in Cornish singing and instrumental tradition and has enjoyed a variety of renderings on vinyl, cassette tape, CD, YouTube and other social media courtesy of performers from Cornwall and beyond.<sup>20</sup> It is an example of the folk process in that the song belongs to a community rather than being the creative work of an individual but every performer who comes into contact with it adds a little of their own into the mix.

"As we wend to St Breock Hill, The Bells of Egloshayle  
Send greeting here to Breock there o'er hill and dale.  
And good St Breock in their turn, their Joyous voices tune,  
To greet the tale of Egloshayle at eve and morn and noon."  
Arthur L. Mata 1932<sup>21</sup>

Merv Davey October 2019

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- <sup>1</sup> Ralph Dunstan Cornish dialect and folk songs, (Truro, Jordan's Bookshop, 1932).
- <sup>2</sup> Churchyard plot list no.15
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid no.115.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid no.73
- <sup>5</sup> Baring-Gould, Sabine. *Cornish Characters and Strange Events*, (London, John Lane, 1908).
- <sup>6</sup> Rough Copy Mss SBG/3/14 Rough Copy Volume X
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid
- <sup>8</sup> Limadie, Graves, Alfred P. *The Celtic Song Book: Being Representative Folk Songs of the Six Celtic Nations*. (London, Ernest Benn, 1928.) p259.
- <sup>9</sup> Telephone and Email correspondence with Martin Graebe August 2019.
- <sup>10</sup> Gorsedh Kernow, *Bards of North Cornwall*, (Camelford, Gorsedh Kernow, 2012) p 27.
- <sup>11</sup> "Ringer for 65 years – Record of Egloshayle Octogenarian" Western Morning News 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1933, p.4: short article on William Rickard.
- <sup>12</sup> Dunstan Ralph. *Cornish Dialect and Folk Songs*, (Truro, Jordan's Bookshop, 1932) pp. 36, 40 and 44.
- <sup>13</sup> Merv Davey "As is the manner and the custom", (Doctoral Thesis, Institute of Cornish Studies, Exeter University, 2011), p.150.
- <sup>14</sup> Inglis Gundry, *Canow Kernow: Songs and Dances from Cornwall*, (St. Ives, Federation of Old Cornwall Societies, 1966), Foreword.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid p.22
- <sup>16</sup> Mike O'Connor, *This Song I'll sing to you*, (Padstow, Lyngham House Music, 1999)
- <sup>17</sup> The Author was privileged to accompany Brenda on one of her expeditions to the Pan Celtic festival in Ireland. He happened to let slip that he also had an Ellery in his ancestry which convinced her that he was also related. There is a wonderful dialect expression referring to remote and improbable ancestral connections: "Their grannies swapped donkeys at Summercourt Fair"!
- <sup>18</sup> Brenda Wootton & Rob Bartlett, *Starry Gazey Pie*, Vinyl LP, Sentinel Records SENS 1031, 1975
- <sup>19</sup> Padstow page, Federation of Old Cornwall Societies website: <http://www.oldcornwall.net/padstow-ocs/4576249869>
- <sup>20</sup> Recent examples: Bryony Griffith & Will Hampsons "Lady Diamond" 2011; Alan Roseveare, You Tube, <https://youtu.be/Wv6VumnmCuo>; Lizzie Pridmore and Emma Packer "Salt and Sky", EP CD 2015 and You Tube, <https://youtu.be/5JXRKlTrH4c>.