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The Life and Times of **A.L. LLOYD**

DAVE ARTHUR

Foreword by Richard Thompson

Bert

English Folk Dance and Song Society

For over 100 years the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), and its parent organisations, have been preserving, protecting, disseminating and promoting the English folk arts. EFDSS is the national folk arts development organisation for England, aiming to place the indigenous folk arts of England at the heart of our cultural life. Through programmes of performance, outreach and education at its headquarters, Cecil Sharp House in north London, and around the country, EFDSS seeks to support folk artists' and practitioners' development. EFDSS aims to promote the best of folk arts through a range of mediums including dance, music, song, film, exhibitions, and publications. Cecil Sharp House is also home to the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library – the national folk music library and archive – which contains a vast collection of books, manuscripts, films and audio-visual materials, serving as a touchstone for anybody working in the folk arts.

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Preface by the Rt. Hon. Sir Stephen Sedley



in association with the English Folk Dance and Song Society



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*For Rowan, Caitlin and Holly,
Jay, Tim and Lou*

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Foreword

I first saw the name A.L. Lloyd on *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs* in the school library, and thank heavens it was there. Not only did it give the school's budding folk singers better verses for 'John Barleycorn' or 'Banks of the Sweet Primroses', it was consulted by the music department, and spared us having to sing the more prim Victorian versions of our national folk songs in class. Over the next five years or so, I became aware that a sizeable chunk of the repertoire out there on the folk scene, being sung by Anne Briggs, Bert Jansch, Martin Carthy and just about everyone else, owed something to the collecting, interpreting, or just tweaking of Bert Lloyd. In my old band Fairport Convention, as our interest in the tradition grew, *Folk Song in England* was regularly consulted as the standard work, and when we started electrifying old ballads and giving them a backbeat, Bert was one of the few figures from the folk establishment who was open-minded and supportive. When we were putting together the *Liege and Lief* album, rehearsing deep in the Hampshire countryside, working on ballads such as 'Matty Groves' and 'Tam Lin', Bert was on the end of the phone to give us help and encouragement.

I only met him a few times, and I suppose my impression is of generosity – generous with his time, knowledge and voice – such a warm, giving instrument. If you could say a voice could smile, that's my impression of Bert's. Most of what I know about him I learned from Dave Swarbrick, who worked with him on many projects, and I realise what a mere drop in the ocean that knowledge is. I am thrilled to now have Dave Arthur's book to fill in the rest of the story of a quite extraordinary man.

Richard Thompson OBE

Preface

Few lives intersect with so many others, and even fewer with so many lives interesting in their own right, as did the life of A.L. Lloyd. In writing his biography Dave Arthur, whether he set out to do it or not, has found himself mining a rich seam in the history of twentieth-century Britain.

It is a seam which runs from the depression that drove youngsters like Bert Lloyd to the colonies, through the political turmoil of the 1930s which fuelled a migration of artists and intellectuals towards the Marxist left, on through a cold war against communism which followed the military defeat of fascism, to a realigned political culture in which idealism was required to adjust, sometimes reluctantly, to harsh realities.

Bert Lloyd was part of all of this, an autodidact, a polyglot and (in Cecil Day Lewis's view) a polymath who, having somehow traversed the space between the Australian outback and the Bloomsbury Set, moved on into print journalism and radio, pioneering a new form in sound broadcasting and playing a leading role in the recovery and dissemination of Britain's and Europe's traditions of oral song. Not bad for one lifetime, and remarkable for a lifetime mostly spent swimming against the tide.

But what most of us who knew him recall when someone mentions Bert is not this seam of history: it is the amiable, rotund, unfailingly generous dispenser of an apparently bottomless fund of information; the critic who was always kind and positive; and the singer, in a quirky, high-pitched voice, of a seemingly limitless repertoire of traditional songs. Of course there was more to him than this; of course he was a complex man; of course he had and has his critics; and of course not everything his critics say is unfounded. It's pretty clear, for instance, that he couldn't always bring himself to admit that he had rewritten some of the folksongs he sang.

Dave Arthur sets out to paint Bert warts and all. If what nevertheless emerges is at once a remarkable historical figure, a profound scholar and an approachable and decent man, it is because Bert Lloyd, whatever his faults, was all these things.

The Rt. Hon. Sir Stephen Sedley

Acknowledgements

I am well aware that I have probably done those things I ought not to have done, and left undone those things I ought to have done, and that my perspective on Bert's *life* and *times* will not necessarily be how someone else might have done it. This is not an in-depth critique and analysis of his work; I leave that for those more qualified than I to engage in. But I think the articles, both popular and academic, which have been written about Bert since his death have been full of factual errors and false assumptions.

Whether or not you agree with my view of his life, and particularly his part in the folk revival, I believe that the hard facts of dates, places and so on are accurate, and that a few longstanding and oft-repeated myths have been put to rest. I have been especially interested in detailing those areas of his life about which little is known – Australia, whaling, 1930s, the army, *Picture Post*, radio etc. This is as comprehensive a framework of a complex life as space and time allowed and a Lloydian resource for present and future Bertologists.

It has been an exciting and fascinating eye-opener. I hope you find the story as interesting to read as it was to write. I also hope that, wherever Bert is, he won't look down, or up, too harshly on my efforts to tell his story as honestly as I know how. I thank everyone for their patience, especially Malcolm Taylor at the Vaughan Williams' Memorial Library, who initiated this book and argued its case on my behalf. He has been a paragon of patience, help and understanding. Without him it wouldn't have happened.

Also, as Bert would say 'I offer a bow' to his daughter, Caroline Clayton, who generously gave me access to family letters. Without them it would have been a poorer book. A huge thank you, as well, to Malcolm Hay, who agreed to cast an initial judicious editorial eye over the majority of the book.

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To those I've inadvertently missed, my sincere apologies and gratitude for your unacknowledged help.

Finally, a huge thank you and an abject apology to my family and friends who have suffered over several years of Lloydian obsession with good humour and support for a project they (and I) at times feared would never end.

Tunbridge Wells
2012

For further information on A.L. Lloyd please visit www.bertlloyd.org

Introduction

Put in everything you know, and then riddle out the fire and get rid of all the bits you don't need.

Rudyard Kipling on biography writing

These are my friends and my enemies. Start with the enemies, dear boy, and you'll get a better book.

Noel Coward to his biographer, Sheridan Morley

This book has been some twenty-five years in gestation. It has its origin some forty years ago, when I first discovered that A.L. (Bert) Lloyd lived a few minutes away from me across Blackheath, in south London. I wrote to him with all the enthusiasm and ignorance of youth, inviting him round to dinner to talk about my researches into the Anglo-American history of the 'Derby Ram'/'Didn't He Ramble' family of songs. Bert resisted the temptation to tell me he'd been there and done that two decades previously. He courteously accepted my invitation.

Sadly, a trip to Hungary got in the way so we never did discuss the 'Derby Ram'. He did, however, on his return, invite my wife and myself up to his book-lined first-floor study, overlooking Greenwich Park, to share the fruits of his recent expedition. Bert enthusiastically operated his reel-to-reel Revox tape machine, and kept up a running commentary on the trip, while we sat on the floor and listened to exotic epic ballad singers, while attempting to follow the song text (in Hungarian) that Bert thoughtfully provided for us.

From then on, for the rest of his life, our paths occasionally crossed, either at his Queen Anne house at 16 Croom's Hill, at clubs, festivals, concerts, Topic Records, or a couple of times a year in my car when I drove the pair of us up to London for editorial board meetings of the *Folk Music Journal* at Cecil Sharp House.

Bert Lloyd had a huge early influence on what I, and most of my generation of folk music enthusiasts, sang. This came partly from his albums, articles and radio programmes, and partly from his artistic influence at Topic Records, and sometimes from the beautifully written music and song lyrics that dropped through many of our letterboxes, because he felt they 'might suit us' or we had indicated an interest. He also encouraged our enthusiastic delving into the lesser known highways and byways of folk song, folklore, dance and storytelling and later 'electric folk'.

If this looks as if it's shaping up to be a hagiography, don't worry. I see no value in diaries and biographies that only tell half the tale, especially of people in the public eye – the movers and shakers of the world. If a person has affected our lives, then I believe we deserve to know who that person is, or was. A half-cut diamond is no diamond at all. I would rather know all the

facts, or facets, and make my own assessment of the life and achievements of someone who has in their own way changed my world. As Michelangelo knew, it was difficult, if not impossible, to carve a perfect statue before he had taken his block of marble up to the top of the quarry and watched the sun rise behind it to expose any flaws that lay within the stone. We are all blocks of marble, capable of transformation into lesser or greater works of art. Some are flawed beyond redemption. Some are flawless. Most of us are somewhere in between.

Despite Bert Lloyd's public life as a writer, performer and broadcaster, and despite his enormous influence on thousands of lives, most people know very little about the Bert Lloyd behind the round, genial, bushy-eye browed, sometimes quizzical public face. He was a private man, who succeeded in keeping his personal and public lives carefully separate. According to photographer Bert Hardy, Bert never mentioned politics or music in all the ten years they worked and travelled together as a photo-journalistic team. Hardy was very surprised when he eventually found out that Bert was a singer.¹ The folk world knew little or nothing about his earlier writings and political life in the 1930s and 1940s. In interviews he chose to ignore them. For some people, this imbued him with an air of mystery. Had he something to hide? Someone who knew him well once suggested that he might have been a spy – a not unreasonable supposition in view of his avowed communism, and since at least two of his several careers (*Picture Post* journalist and folk song scholar) had given him the opportunity to travel the world, including the Soviet bloc countries which were generally inaccessible to all but trusted Party members and fellow-travellers. The possibility also occurred to the security services who kept an eye on Bert, along with other communist folk music singers and collectors such as Ewan MacColl and the American Alan Lomax, who was working in Britain in the 1950s. One loses confidence in their credibility, however, when in a Secret Service memo dated 31 March 1955 we see: 'Extract from Special Branch Report: re *Daily Worker* Silver Jubilee Celebrations held at the Albert Hall on 27th February 1955. There followed a musical interlude with songs sung by the Choir of the Workers' Music Association, conducted by Bernard Stevens, with A.L. Lloyd accompanying them on the accordion.'

Bert on the accordion? As far as I know, and according to all he said, he played nothing beyond the little keyboard he had in his office for picking out the top lines of tunes, and a bit of closet guitar. The idea of a rather sedate Bert pumping away on a squeezebox is difficult to imagine. In fact he had no love of the accordion. Once, when reviewing a Bulgarian virtuoso accordionist for *Recorded Folk Music*, Bert declared the performance to be 'an education in what the usually beastly instrument can sound like'.

From the 1930s through to the 1950s MI5 must have had their time cut out keeping tabs on the Reds who lurked under so many artistic beds. The majority of creative thinkers in the 1930s and 1940s – poets, painters, cartoonists, musicians, writers, historians – seem to have been on the anti-fascist left.

In 1939 Special Branch noted that when the biologist and science populariser Professor Julian Huxley travelled away from home he ‘invariably takes with him a complete set of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, a code book used by leading Soviet agents’! Some communists and fellow-travellers, such as Victor Gollancz, Derek Kartun (Foreign Editor of the *Daily Worker*), John Strachey, Christopher Hill and Stephen Spender, ultimately became disenchanted with the Communist Party, and many more followed after the brutal suppression of the Hungarian uprising by Moscow in 1956.

Gabriel (aka Jimmy Friell), the *Daily Worker* cartoonist for seventeen years, resigned from the paper when his cartoon comparing the Russian tanks in Budapest to the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt was rejected: ‘I couldn’t conceive of going on cartooning about the evils of capitalism and imperialism, and ignoring the acknowledged evils of Russian Communism.’²

Some, however, like Bert, were ‘100 per-centers’; faithful to the Party in political sickness and health, until death did them part. But this doesn’t make him a spy. He was so busy for the whole of his life that I doubt he could have found time for regular meetings with Soviet spymasters in back-street cafés, or amongst the bushes of Hampstead Heath or Greenwich Park, dropping off the latest folk revival gossip in dead letter boxes.

Barrie Gavin, the TV film director who worked regularly with Bert for the last decade of his life, described him as ‘sheltering behind a sheet of amiable plate glass’.³ I think that sums him up very well. He was always amiable, always friendly and helpful, generous with his knowledge, but usually reticent and self-effacing where his own life and achievements were concerned. A casual remark about children whistling through blades of grass could set him off on a lecture about related musical forms, from Aboriginal gum-leaf bands that he’d seen as a youth in Australia to Romanian pear-leaf virtuosos. Ask about Bert Lloyd, however, and he’d say, ‘Oh no, I don’t think anybody would be interested in me’. On at least a couple of occasions Gavin broached with Bert the possibility of making a film of his life. Bert rejected the idea out of hand, insisting there were a lot more interesting and important subjects than him. He felt that the sort of work they’d been doing together, documenting traditional folk arts and working-class culture, was what mattered – its importance transcended the cult of personality.

It seems likely that modesty, rather than espionage, or more skeletons in his cupboard than is usual, prompted this personal reticence – which maybe also explains his extraordinary funeral, or non-funeral. He wanted no service, nor any ceremony so, according to Gavin, when he died, Greenwich council officials came round to the house, zipped him up in a body-bag, laid him in a zinc container, and took him away for ‘disposal’. He slipped away from life in as unassuming a way as it must be possible to go.

So when Bert’s modest opening words in *Folk Song in England* are ‘This is a book for beginners not specialists’, or, in *The Singing Englishman*, ‘I know there are people better qualified than I am to write a book of this kind ... I know this is a sketchy book.’ Or when he refers to the first edition of *Come All Ye Bold Miners* as ‘skimpy in content, poorly edited as it was’, perhaps

he is being genuinely humble and not indulging in self-deprecation as the subtlest form of vanity.

He could surely have been in no real doubt about his own intellectual and artistic achievements. But possibly, as an autodidact, he suffered from what would be a lack of confidence in a world where an Oxbridge First is the accepted intellectual bench mark, and where self-deprecation spikes the guns of would-be critics. Anyway, despite his protests, he is arguably the most influential figure in the postwar folk music revival in England: the benign godfather of folk song.

Since his death in 1982 there have been major changes in politics and folk music. He missed seeing the break-up of the USSR. He missed the Blair years, so joyfully welcomed in by those on the left in 1997 and ending a decade later in disillusionment for many. He also missed the burgeoning in the new millennium of interest in folk music, especially instrumental music, amongst a considerable number of young people who, while looking back at their cultural roots, were reaching out to new audiences and taking the music on to new levels of musicianship undreamt of in the very early days of the revival when, after English-concertina player Alf Edwards, banjo- and guitar-picker Peggy Seeger, harmonica man Johnny Cole, guitarists Fitzroy Coleman, Brian Daly and Steve Benbow and, a bit later, fiddler Dave Swarbrick, it became somewhat of a barrel-scraping exercise to come up with many other competent accompanists.

Many of today's folk musicians weren't born when Bert died, so this book may, as Bert might have said, 'blow a few cobwebs away' and help put the current folk and world music scene into some sort of cultural and artistic context. As for the earlier generations of folk music performers, enthusiasts, academics (there are now more of *them* than you can shake a stick at), lefties old and young, and general readers who might have picked this up by chance, we can explore together a remarkable life, and pick our way through the myths and apocryphal Bert stories that have been circulating as fact for decades. Some, it must be said, perpetuated by Bert himself.

1

The Beginning

As a narrator my one task is to depict the given events in as accurate and lively a manner as possible.

Georgi Valentinovitch Plekhanov

Some of my friends think that when retelling an event or piece of news, I am inclined to alter or over elaborate. Myself, I just call it making something 'come alive'.

Truman Capote

What do we think we know about Bert's origins?

The BBC folk music catalogue credits Bert with an 'inherited folk song repertoire from his parents'. These included, according to the biographical notes on his 1950s American albums, 'sea songs' from his father. The BBC producer Douglas Cleverdon, who knew Bert well from the 1940s onwards and produced many of his classic radio programmes such as *Songs of the Durham Miners*, *Epic Survivals* and *Voice of the Gods*, reckoned that Bert was the illegitimate son of a Welsh cook and a Greek shipping tycoon! According to Cleverdon, this bizarre pairing provided Bert with a good Welsh tenor voice from his mother's side and the attributes of a Balkan folk singer (whatever they might be) from his Greek father.¹

It's hardly the sort of lineage that you'd conjure out of thin air, so presumably someone (Bert?) had given him this information. Song collector and researcher Mike Yates had been told by Bert that his mother was a Suffolk girl with quite a repertoire of songs. His father was also said to have been a native of Barton-on-Humber, a fisherman who trekked around the country collecting folk songs. So we've got a Greek or Lincolnshire father, and a singing Suffolk lass or a Welsh cook, who was living proof that 'it's the rich what gets the pleasure, and the poor what gets the blame'.

The truth is somewhat more prosaic. Bert's parents were both Londoners. His grandfather, Albert Lloyd, an accountant, married Cornelia Anne McDowell in September 1870. Their first daughter Cornelia Anne was stillborn in 1871, other children came at regular intervals: Albert Frederick (1873), Annie Kathleen (1874), Beatrice Amy (1876), Walter James (1877), Florence Cornelia and Ernest Lancaster (1879), John McDowell (1881), Harry (1883).

Bert's father, Ernest Lancaster Lloyd, was born at 59 Huntingdon Street, Islington. Bert's mother, Mabel Emily Barrett, the daughter of Charles Barrett, a Battersea printer, first saw the light of day a couple of weeks before Christmas in 1881, at 33 Robertson Street West, East Battersea. They were married in St Faith's parish church in Wandsworth on 30 March 1902. At the time Ernest was a despatch manager. Interestingly, Bert's maternal grandmother,

Harriet Hannah Barrett (formerly Baber), was born in 1853 in Allandale, Northumberland, famous for its traditional New Year Tar Barrel burning (but I never heard him mention this folkloric connection). His maternal grandfather, Charles Barrett, born in 1855, was a compositor and came from Winslow in Buckinghamshire.²

Bert said that his father was quite a good singer of comic songs and the more popular folk-type material such as ‘Barbara Allen’ and ‘The Bailiff’s Daughter of Islington’ (quite appropriate, as that’s where he came from). His mother apparently burlesqued the singing of Sussex gypsies during the family’s stay in the county when Bert was young. Of course, in those days most people knew a few songs, because they were accustomed to making their own entertainment. Working-class Londoners were famed for their knees-ups at any seasonal or family celebration when ‘Come into the Garden, Maud’ might rub shoulders with ‘Jeanie With the Light Brown Hair’, ‘To Be a Farmer’s Boy’ or ‘Polly Perkins’, but it didn’t make them folk singers in the narrow sense in which some of us use the term today – unless you go along with Louis Armstrong’s all-encompassing definition: ‘All music’s folk music, leastwise, I ain’t never heard a horse sing.’

Albert Lancaster Lloyd was born on 29 February, Leap Year Day, 1908, in a small late-Victorian terraced house at 93 Trevelyan Road, behind Tooting High Street, in south London. At the time of Bert’s birth his father was a draper’s packer, but according to Bert he’d also been a trawlerman, a dockworker, a failed poultry farmer and an Automobile Association patrolman. The trawlerman claim was probably a bit of romanticising. In 1911 the Lloyds were living on a Sussex poultry farm belonging to Ernest’s brother, and an AA patrolman he definitely was: his army records have his job down as ‘motor patrol’ (cyclist), and on his death certificate he is noted as ‘Ernest Lancaster Lloyd, AA scout and army pensioner’.

Both the Royal Automobile Club and the AA pioneered nationwide patrols, initially by bicycle and later by motorbike, to scout out the roads and to give their members advance warning, by saluting them, of any police speed traps. Eventually, when the AA came under fire from the police for aiding and abetting offenders they changed their methods and the scouts saluted everybody, unless they had seen a police ambush in which case they forgot to salute.

Bert had two older sisters – Beatrice Florence (Trixie), born 8 January 1903, and Kathleen Mabel (Kathie) who was born on 4 September 1904. His childhood as the baby boy in the family was seemingly a very happy one, because he always spoke very fondly of his parents and said what spirited creatures his sisters were and how surreal was their sense of fun.

He remembered being taken up to their bedroom as a small boy and stood at the foot of the bed while they faced him, holding on to the bed rail, and bounced up and down as if galloping on horseback. They would demand to know the time and Bert would solemnly announce ‘Eight o’clock!’, or whatever time he chose, to which his sisters would fling themselves back on the bed crying ‘Too late! Too late!’ Bert never understood the significance of

the game but its surreal quality remained a vivid memory for the rest of his life. He also vividly recalled the time his father rigged up a series of hosepipes to the family gramophone, the ends of which the children held up to their ears in order to hear the music without disturbing the neighbours. Perhaps this was one of Bert's earliest experiences of his favourite word – 'ingenious'. Sadly, with the exception of these tantalising snapshots of his childhood, Bert's references to his early family life are scarce.

An early photograph shows Bert as a chubby, bright-eyed three- or four-year-old child with a mop of blond flyaway hair, dressed in a short-sleeved smock, standing seriously to attention, hands behind his back, with a large St Bernard dog at his feet. Another picture from the same period, taken in an orchard, has him sitting in a small two-wheeled pony cart, peering out from under a large upturned-brimmed, Christopher Robin-type sun hat. Next to him, holding the reins, sits his mother: a very smartly dressed, round-faced woman, wearing a dark Edwardian suit, a high lace-collared blouse, and an enormous flower-bedecked straw hat. She had, according to Bert, once worked in service for a Greek millionaire, where she developed a taste for the nicer things in life. At the pony's head stands Ernest Lloyd, small, thin-faced, dapper, with a moustache, in hacking-jacket, gaiters and flat cap. He could pass for a head gardener or gamekeeper on a large estate. At his feet lies the St Bernard. The photograph was taken on a sunny summer day a couple of years before the First World War cast its shadow over the Lloyd family.

One of the few early biographical snippets he mentions in album sleeve notes is that when he was about eight years old he was attending meetings of a juvenile temperance guild called The Rope-holders (similar to the Yorkshire Band of Hope which was formed in Leeds in 1847 to teach and impress on children the importance of sobriety). At these meetings he remembers lustily joining in the chorus of a popular temperance hymn:

Sign the pledge, brother,
Sign, sign, sign,
Asking the aid of the helper divine.

Later he heard the tune attached to an American Civil War song, a revival hymn, and, in Australia, to the shearing song, 'Click Go the Shears'. But that was all a few years off.

In September 1914 Ernest Lloyd answered Lord Kitchener's call and joined the army. At Shepherd's Bush, West London, he signed a short-service contract (three years with the colours), swore 'by Almighty God to be faithful and to bear true allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth', allotted a portion of his army pay to support his wife and family, passed a medical – 'Physical Development: Fair. Many defective teeth upper jaw (consents to see dentist)' – and was appointed to the Essex Regiment 8th Cyclist Battalion, based in Colchester. He was soon transferred to the Royal Sussex Regiment, possibly with the 6th Cyclist Battalion, whose headquarters were in Brighton.

In July 1916 Ernest was sent to Belgium as part of the British Expeditionary Force (the Old Contemptibles) and was returned to Shoreham Depot two months later with a gunshot wound to his right arm, just one of the 290,461 wounded soldiers evacuated to the United Kingdom for ‘further treatment’ in that year alone. In June 1917 he was back on the Continent to participate in the bloody fiasco that was the Flanders, or Passchendaele, offensive. By August he was in hospital in Sheffield, being treated for nephritis (inflammation of the kidney). By the end of the year he was invalided home as ‘unfit for future military service’ due to ‘debility’. He was discharged from the Royal Sussex Regiment in November 1917 with a disability pension of fifteen shillings and nine pence.³

In the last few weeks of his life Bert reflected on his father and the First World War. He told his family how Ernest had been sent back to fight in France when he was still weak from his earlier wounds and that, so Bert felt, was how TB had arrived in the Lloyd household. He was still angry sixty-five years later at the incompetence of the military authorities who treated their men as cannon fodder, and sad at the repercussions of their stupidity on his and other working-class families.

Ernest was a little man, just five feet five inches tall, with a thirty-one inch chest, and weighing only eight stone (112 pounds). Before joining the army he was, according to the army doctor, ‘healthy in wind, eye and limb’, if not teeth. By the time he’d finished with the army he was far less healthy, although he hadn’t quite completed his service because in November 1920 he was found to be fit enough for the Territorial Force, and was attached to the 7th Auxiliary Middlesex Regiment for a year.

Private Lloyd, E.L. was finally discharged from the army at Hounslow in March 1922, and settled down with his wife, Mabel, and two surviving children, Beatrice and Bert, at 25 Mayfield Road, Hornsey, north London. He had just three years to live.

Here Bert was bright enough to get into the local grammar school, presumably the Stationers’ Company School, which was just at the top of Mayfield Road. In those days the old grammar schools provided clever middle- and working-class children with all the benefits of a classical education. He would have had a good grounding in Latin, as well as in at least one modern language, which in his case was Spanish. Both of these would prove useful in later life.

The Lloyd family were destined to develop an unhappy familiarity with undertakers, a familiarity that carried through into Bert’s adult life. His baby brother Eric, born in May 1916, died in July 1917; both of Bert’s sisters died from tuberculosis, Kathie in the winter of 1917/8, Trixie in 1927. On 17 February 1924, two weeks before Bert’s sixteenth birthday, his mother, Mabel, died of pulmonary tuberculosis in Clare Hall Hospital, South Mimms; she was forty-two years old. Ernest, whose occupation was entered on her death certificate as ‘Book-keeper, Woolwich Arsenal Army pensioner’, was with her when she died.

Bert's father died in 1925. It would be surprising if the loss of his whole family at such a young age didn't have serious repercussions on Bert's emotional development. Would losing one's loved ones with alarming regularity eventually inure you to the pain of loss?

DOWN UNDER

On the ninth day of October
 From London we did steer,
 And everything being safe on board
 We sailed down the river clear;
 And every ship that we passed by
 We heard the sailors say,
 'There goes a ship of clever lads,
 And they're bound for Botany Bay'.
 (Traditional)

With Ernest's poor health making it increasingly difficult for him to look after Bert, and the constant worry that Bert himself might contract the illness that was killing his family, it was decided, with the help of the Royal British Legion, to send him to live a healthier life in Australia.

Eight months after his mother's death, on Thursday, 9 October 1924, Bert left Mayfield Road with his suitcase and made his way to the King George V dock to join the other 914 passengers on the SS *Euripides*, under the command of Captain P.J. Collins, as one of the assisted migrants heading for New South Wales that year. In the ship's register he was entered as: 'Mr Albert Lloyd, male, age 16, scholar, contract ticket No. 491. Destination Sydney.' Some of the other passengers were getting off earlier, to start *their* new lives in Cape Town and Melbourne.⁴ It was a good week to be leaving England and heading for the sun: wet in the south with widespread gales.

Four months before Bert left England, the folk song collector Cecil Sharp, who had also spent some time in Australia, died of cancer in Hampstead, North London. His pioneering *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions*, published in 1907, was to remain the standard analytical work on the subject until Bert's *Folk Song in England* was published some sixty years later.

In the nineteenth century, and the early years of the twentieth, several schemes were tried out to attract agricultural workers to Australia. In the mid-1800s the Family Colonization Loan Society assisted families to emigrate, and charitable institutions and poor-law authorities sent boys and girls from Ragged Schools, and girls and young women from the workhouses, to work as domestics and to help on farms.

In 1912 the 'Dreadnought' scheme was taking British boys between the ages of fourteen and eighteen and training them on Scheyville Farm in New South Wales, while the Child Emigration Society of Oxford sent *very* young children out to an establishment in Western Australia and maintained them until they were old enough to go to work. Henry Freeman took boys from

the English Ragged School Union to a holding farm and from there they were distributed to other farms. Agents in Britain, usually working for the shipping companies, also acquired migrants, for which they received a bounty. Others, like Bert – an assisted migrant, had their passages arranged through philanthropic agencies such as the Royal British Legion.

In 1917 a Dominions royal commission had declared that the development of Imperial resources was being hampered by the unsatisfactory distribution of manpower, and that the success of Empire development was dependent upon the successful organisation of emigration to assist ‘the progress of the immense territories of the Dominions and the increase of power of the Empire as a whole’.⁵ Bert’s ship, along with the other liners, *Sophocles*, *Diogenes* and *Themistocles*, regularly made the six-week trip down to Australia filled with assisted-passage migrants, many of them orphans.

He never saw his father again: the following September Ernest Lloyd died of pulmonary tuberculosis and haemoptysis. It was obvious to the doctors by the coughing up of blood that it was the most common form of active TB – and a post-mortem wasn’t considered necessary. Ernest was forty-six and had been working as a motor scout until he became too sick to continue.

As sixteen-year-old Bert leant on the ship’s rail, along with dozens of other excited and apprehensive emigrants, and watched London and his childhood disappear into the distance, he could have had no idea of the sort of life he’d be living on the sun-baked plains of New South Wales for the next few years, and he had yet to hear the oft-quoted description of the outback as ‘a long agony of scrub and wire fence’. They steamed down the cold, grey, English Channel and headed into the rough waters of the Bay of Biscay, where the plunging of the ship in the choppy waters must have sent many of the town-bred emigrants crawling for their bunks, their stomachs in their mouths.

All the while that it was calm
I felt quite gay and frisky,
But, oh! how pale and ill I looked
When in the Bay of Biscay.
(‘The Voyage to Australia’, traditional)

First stop was a couple of hours’ lay-over in the Spanish port of Vera Cruz on the island of Tenerife, where the passengers could, for a ten shilling return fare, go ashore for a spot of sightseeing in one of the dozens of tiny bumboats, piled high with bananas, and manned by dark-skinned, shouting, gesticulating islanders that swarmed out to the ship. Soon, after a couple of warning blasts on the ship’s siren, they were back at sea and ploughing down the West African coast for a thirty-six-hour coaling stop in Cape Town, and to drop off the first batch of passengers.

Here, sensible travellers took the advice offered them to stay ashore to escape the inevitable clouds of coal-dust that would envelop everything while the bunkers were being filled by the army of African labourers, who ran up and down the gangplanks hauling baskets of coal on their backs. Like the

roustabouts who loaded cotton on the big paddle-steamers on the Mississippi levees, they somehow found enough wind and energy to sing to help them with their work. These must have been the first work songs that Bert heard, although at sixteen, and on his first trip to what was still referred to as the Dark Continent, the singing would have been just one of a myriad of extraordinary new experiences. It was certainly a far cry from a winter's day in Hornsey, and exciting enough to kick-start a lifelong fascination for exotic travel, and, perhaps, subliminally, folk songs.

Finally, on 21 November, after some forty-four days at sea, the *Euripides* rounded North Head, entered Port Jackson, sailed down the deep, 770-foot-wide water channel and tied up at one of the large wharves. Bert had arrived in Sydney. Ranked as the fifth port in the British Empire, it had a population of over one million, electric street lighting, an underground railway system being built and lots of huge impressive Victorian buildings. A new bridge over the harbour had recently been commissioned.

On the *Euripides* 'Incoming Passenger' list, prepared for the Australian immigration officials, Bert, along with a number of other teenage boys without a specific trade, was registered as 'farm labourer' – the 'scholar' on the passenger boarding-list cut no ice once he got 'down under'. After being herded ashore with their luggage, the 'New Chums' were taken to the Customs House (now a branch of Sydney Public Library) at Circular Quay, and given a cursory inspection by the Customs Inspectors, before being marched off to the Immigration Dispersal Centre.

Eventually, along with many of the other young assisted migrants who needed to be placed on farms, Bert found himself taken to George Street, Australia's oldest street, named after King George III in 1810: originally a mere track used by convicts fetching water, but by 1924 a busy road in the Rocks area, at the heart of Sydney, where, in the old Commissariat Stores (demolished in 1930), was situated the George Street North Labour Exchange. Here the new arrivals were registered and given the once-over by a bunch of small farmers or 'cockies' – so called, legend has it, because their farms were considered too poor to raise anything but cockatoos, as Bert explained to the audience at Dingles Folk Club in 1973:

Cockies are small farmers, wheat farmers, nearly always very poor. Over much of Australia unless you owned a lot of territory you starve, and so it is with cockies in many parts. They're called cockies because all they can raise on their farms are cockatoos that, of course, eat all the wheat-seed as soon as you've planted it. Still, you can always eat cockatoo. There's a recipe for it, it says, you take your cockatoo and you pluck it and clean it and put it in the saucepan. You put a horseshoe in the saucepan, too, and fill it up with water. Put it on to boil, and when the horseshoe's soft you give it another ten minutes.

The cockies who gathered, vulture-like (as Bert described them), to grab some cheap Pommy labour were as like as not Pommies themselves, as the National Library of Australia's Kevin Bradley explained:

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