

# SINGABOUT

## DECEMBER 2016

### CHRISTMAS CAROLS

There are few references to Christmas carols in the collections of Folk Songs. However, this could be in part because they were not seen as part of the 'folk tradition'. Therefore of no interest to collectors, who did tend to define what they wished to collect or what they felt was in the tradition of material they considered 'folk'. Also singers would have felt that hymns and songs they sang at Christmas time were religious songs. However, Sally Sloane did sing this carol, 'Christ was born in Bethlehem' for John Meredith who recorded it in the 1950s.

Unfortunately, I have not come across any conversation about it as tape was expensive and machines were turned off for all except the actual song or music. These days collectors are aware that incidental conversation can be very informative; this coupled with inexpensive recording devices ensures extra information is captured for later research.

John Meredith noted that a version of this carol had been printed in the USA as a 'Kentucky song' but the tune varied as did the words. It is fascinating to wonder how Sally came to learn this version.

The first Christmas carols were part of the Byzantine liturgy in seventh century Nativity plays. By the thirteenth century, the Franciscans had encouraged the singing of songs at Christmas in people's own native language. In 1426, the first carols in English by John Awdlay, were recorded at Shropshire.

The apportioning of blame for the crucifixion of Christ has changed over the centuries depending on politics of the day and religious arguments. Initially the violence of the Roman administrators and Pontius Pilate were blamed, then Jewish religious leaders, or Jews gerenerally, then it was argued that Jesus accepted his fate as sacrificial lamb and son of God. Words and painting imagery changed according to the religious theories of the day and I am sure many thesis have been written upon these themes, but I don't know if this helps us date the origins of this carol.

***Dale Dengate***

[Ed: I did manage to find another Christmas item in Trove, which can be seen on page 4 of Singabout. It has quite a different tone.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/58728808> ]



A John Dengate Christmas Card titled "The adoration of the Magi... gifts of Gold, Myrrh and Frankenstein." Image courtesy Dale Dengate.

## Christ was Born in Bethlehem

*Unknown composer*

The musical score is written in G major and 4/4 time. It consists of four staves of music. The lyrics are written below the notes. Chords are indicated by letters G, D7, C, and Em above the notes. The lyrics are: Christ was born in Beth-le-hem, Christ was born in Beth-le-hem, Christ was born in Beth-le-hem and in a man-ger lay. And in a man-ger la-y and in a man-ger la-y Christ was born in Beth-le-hem and in a man-ger lay.

Christ was born in Bethlehem, Christ was born in Bethlehem  
Christ was born in Bethlehem and in a manger lay.  
And in a manger lay, and in a manger lay,  
Christ was born in Bethlehem and in a manger lay.

The Jews they crucified him, the Jews they crucified him,  
The Jews they crucified him and nailed him to a tree.  
And nailed him to a tree, and nailed him to a tree,  
The Jews they crucified him and nailed him to a tree.

Mary she came weeping, Mary she came weeping,  
Mary she came weeping and stole away my Lord.  
And stole away my Lord, and stole away my Lord,  
Mary she came weeping and stole away my Lord.

And finally, a more prosaic view of Christmas by West Australian poet Edwin Greenslade (Dryblower) Murphy first published in the Perth *Sunday Times* 23 December 1934, page 9 and found in NLA's Trove collection:

NOW'S THE TIME

A Christmas Carol

Now's the time the Christmas turkey  
Mutters maledictions murky.  
Or he would if he could speak.

Drives his primus stove on wheels  
Till his radiator squeals  
And the John Hop calls a halt.

Now's the time the chook and chicken  
Who'll provide the supper pickin'  
All bewail the coming week.

Now's the time the dust and heatmen,  
The Golden Mile and wheat men,  
Go to Cottesloe to swim away the dust and  
grit and grime.

Now's the time we get the wood in  
To incinerate the puddin',  
Ditto savories and sweets,

If you'd see why neck-to-needn'ts  
Shocked our wowser antecedents  
Now's the Time.

Now's the time we slice the suet,  
Fill the sugar bowl and cruet,  
Olives, lettuces, and beets.

If you'd know why people normal  
All forsake the clean and formal  
And go picnicking in scrubs,

Now's the time the Christmas card man.  
The ballading and bard man,  
Seek around the shop for sentiment  
and roam around for rhyme.

Go, some sultry day and blazing,  
When these idiots amazing  
Camp amongst the ants and grubs

But if you would ask the question  
What comes after indigestion-  
Now's the Time

Their homes are cool and cosy  
But a picnic isn't prosy,  
So they scramble in the sand,

Now's the time the seaside flapper  
Gets a notion in her napper  
She's the Beauty of the Beach;

Their tea and grub is gritty.  
But it's "better than the city,"  
So they lunch upon the land.

Now's the time her escort gallant,  
Minus balance, brains, or talent;  
Is to loveliness a leech;

They get sunburt, they get silly  
They boil tadpoles in the billy  
Their togs and shoes are ruined by the gravel,  
clay, and lime.

Now's the time the brave beginner  
Who has sluiced his Christmas dinner  
With a modicum of malt,

But. though go again they'll never  
If you'd see those who endeavour  
To kid themselves it's clever -  
Now's the Time!