



## Norma Waterson: English Folk Singing

### *Rituals and Ceremonies*

#### **NORMA WATERSON:**

We were very very interested in Yorkshire. Our two abiding passions have been Yorkshire and music and ceremonial music. And we were really perplexed when we brought out *Frost and Fire* in 63 or whatever it was that very very few people knew about those songs at all.

because the ceremonies were all in the villages and it wasn't until the revival happened, people came from the outside going into the villages to see that ceremony.

At one time, these islands, all the islands including Ireland too, probably every week had some form of celebration of something. Because they were very superstitious, it would be either in springtime sowing the seeds and very very early there would be sacrifices for that. The lock, the sword lock in long-sword dancing is supposed to be the beheading of somebody.

That's going right the way back to probably the Vikings because the long sword tradition in the North where the Vikings did settle quite a bit, is the same, exactly the same as you'd find over in teams in Belgium, there's teams all over Europe with a few differences here and there. Nearly every town and every village had some sort of celebration.

And they made a ritual round it. Either it was pagan like the Abotts Bromley horn dancers you know, in the early days of the pagan religion. They would wear animal skins and animal horns because they wanted to be swift like the deer or something, it was a transferred magic thing. So that would come down from hundreds and hundreds of years and slowly bit by bit it would change into something that sometimes the villagers don't even know why they're doing it. They just go, oh it's May 1st again, we've got to go and do something.

But Padstow for instance, they know why they're doing it. They know why they do that hobby horse through the streets. Because they're proud of it. It's theirs, it's nobody else's. And the village gets all dressed up for it, they have greenery all the way round, beautiful big maypole and on May 1st, they dance and sing through the streets for the whole day. And it's a glorious glorious. You'll see people holding phones up like this or tape recorders, to their long-lost brother in Australia: "Listen, listen the 'oss is coming", so they're very very proud of that tradition. And in our area in Whitby, we have a little ceremony called the penny hedge and three members of very old families have to go down to the upper harbour and build a hedge with little penny knives that weave it one way and weave it another way and they do it in the upper harbour when the tide is out and it has to last three tides. And if it lasts three tides that's it, they don't have to pay any more penance for the year. Now they reckon that's 800 years old. They don't know why, there's lots of traditions but it's on Ascension Eve every year and they do it, they just go and they do it.

The legend is there were three knights, three very very cruel knights who were chasing a boar, a wild boar and they chased him into a hermit's cave and killed the boar and killed the hermit and the Abbess, at Whitby Abbey, who was Hilda said, "that's it, you've killed a holy man so you're going to have to pay this penance, your families will have to pay this penance and you have to do it, otherwise there's going to be dreadful dreadful things happen. The Lord will strike you", or something like that.

And of course they don't know anything about that but that's where it's supposed to come from. There are other legends about it as well but it's a simple thing, the Lord Mayor is always there, we all get round and look at them. The last downer in, the man gets up and he blows the horn, and shouts "Out on ye! Out on ye! Out on ye!" Then he puts his horn away for

another year. I think it's incredible. I love it. I think "where did all this lot come from?" It came out of the imagination of the working classes. I just love it, I think it's wonderful.