

(from: English Dance & Song July/August '87)

The English Folk Dance and Song Society has recently published the Kipper Family Song Book, 'Since Time Immoral', which contains 29 of their bet's loved songs, and one dance. To mark the occasion we sent Norfolk folklorists Disk Nudds and Chris Sugden, with their trusty tape recorder, to interview Sid and Henry at their home near Trunch.

Dick: We've come to Sid and Henry Kipper's tiny cottage in the village of St. Just-outside-Trunch in Norfolk.

Mrs Dace: No you haven't. You've come to the wrong house. If it's them Kippers you want, you turn right out of here, past the Post Office, turn left at the church, straight through the duckpond, and then ask again.

Dick: Oh, sorry, Mrs. Dace. Sorry to bother you.

Mrs. Dace: Oh, that's all right. I thought you'd come about the telly.

Chris: We must remember to wipe this off the tape before we send it to English Dance and Song.

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Chris: Now we've come to Sid and Henry Kipper's tiny cottage in the village of St. Just-outside-Trunch in Norfolk.

Sid: And about bloody time too.

Dick: Yes, I'm sorry we're late. We got rather lost.

Chris: But now we're here we'd like to ask you about the publication of your old songs in a book.

Dick: Yes. Henry, most of your songs were written in the old book by your father, weren't they?

Henry: Tha's right. And tha's very important, that is. We've got the correct versions, you see, whereas a lot of these poor old men round here - you never had to go very many a mile 'til you hear these words altered out of proportion, because they had

'em just by word-of-mouth, you see. So what you get in this book is the proper songs – not mucked about by a load of ignorant farm workers and the like.

Chris: Sid, how does it feel after all these years to have this new book of songs published?

Sid: New book of songs? Cor, that sound a bit of all right, I mean, I get blooming fed up just singing the same old songs all the time. That'll be very nice to have a book of new songs.

Chris: No, I think you misunderstand. I'm talking about the book of your old songs which the EFDSS has published. How did that come about?

Sid: Oh that. Well this here bloke writ to us from the English Song and Dance Association, and he say he want to come round and take a few pictures. We told him we din't have a lot of pictures – only one of Haywain's Constable and one of a boy crying what mother got from Boots' last time she went into North Walsham. Oh, and there's one called a Renoir or something, what my Uncle George managed to – er – acquire from the Great Hall a few years ago, but we don't keep that one on display. Mind you, if you'd like to make us an offer for it...

Dick: I'm afraid I'm lost.

Henry: Well, where do you want to get to, boy? If tha's Mrs. Dace's you want, you go out of here, through the duckpond, right at the church...

Dick: No, we've already tried Mrs. Dace. Can we get back to what you were saying about the man from EFDSS who wrote to you.

Henry: Oh, him! Well, that turned out he din't want no pictures at all. What he wanted was to come round and take a few photos. So we both got dressed up in our best things, just like what we wear when we go out a-singing. I had a bath special, and that was most inconvenient, 'cause I'd just been sewn into my winter underwear.

Sid: Tha's right. We had to bath him in his woolly combinations, and he's never been the same since. Mind you, he was never the same before, so that din't really matter all that much. Anyhow come the day we dressed up in our Sunday best, and this bloke come round, and we say 'Here we all are! You can take the photos now'. And he just laugh. He say 'No – I in't come to take no photographs of you two. I've

come to photograph you old book'.

Henry: Tha's it. My old father's book what he writ down all his old songs in. 'Well,' I say, 'what the hell do you want to take a photo of a load of old songs for?' And he say 'cause he was going to put them all in a book. 'Well,' I say, 'are you bloody soft or something? They're already in a book, aren't they?'

Sid: Yes, so he say he was going to put then in loads of new books and sell 'em to people who want to learn all our old songs. That seem a blooming long rigmarole if you arst me. If people want to learn out old songs, they've only got to come round and arst.

Henry: But anyhow, he took the photographs, and we went out. That seemed a shame to get all dressed up for nothing, se we went to church. Luckily there weren't no service on or nothing.

Chris: Sid, this book is another reflection of the way you've rocketed to fame. Don't you find it amazing that two unknowns from the back of beyond have made such an impact?

Sid: Unknown? Who are you calling unknown? I mean, who ever's heard of you two, tha's not right to call Trunch the back of beyond, either. Tha's more the middle of beyond, as a matter of fact. Now Knapton, that is the back of beyond.

Henry: Yes, and that make Southrepps the front of beyond, you see. But going back to you two being unknowns - if you'll take my tip you ought to start by getting yourselves seen at some of these big folk dos...

Sid: Yes, like some of our concerts. How come you've never been to see us perform, anyhow?

Chris: Well, I mean, we're kept pretty busy looking after you bookings, and, er...

Dick: And your mother...

Sid: And our blooming money!

Dick: Well, to change the subject, you've got a new record coming out, haven't you?

Henry: Tha's right. The first two records were for them people who like out sort of

singing, so this is one for them people who don't. We don't sing on it!

Sid: No. Mind you, we do quite a lot of jawing. But now we're megostars we're got some other people in to do the singing. Martin McCartney, John and Kurt Patrick, Peter Baloney, Cathy the Scarf, people like that...

Henry: And Ashley Hatchet, he do a recination. And Fairport Detention, they do a tune, that sort of thing...

Dick: And it's not a single record?

Henry: Oh no, I dare say there'll be thousands on 'em.

Sid: No, Father. What he's trying to say is tha's what they call a double album.

Henry: Oh, so they can get twice as many photographs in, I suppose.

Sid: Tha's the whole of the old ballad opera, 'The Crab Wars', and all them characters what we now mentioned play the parts of all them other characters in the opera, you see. Tha's proper, old-fashioned, family entertainment - you know, full of violence and sex and all that sort of thing.

Henry: I expect that Dis Dizley will want to make a carton film of it, like he done with 'Snow White and the Seven Deadly Dwarfs'.

Chris: And are any of the songs from the opera in the new book?

Henry: A couple on 'em are. 'Course, a lot on 'em don't make a lot of sense unless you're following the story. Some on 'em don't make a lot of sense even then. But all the songs in the book can stand up on their own two feet.

Sid: Which is more than you can say for Father.

Chris: Ah, yes - how is your health, Henry?

Henry: If you mean how soon can you collect the money on that insurance policy you made me sign, you're got another thing coming. I'm quite hale and hearty, thank you very much. Well, I'm quite hearty, and fairly hale for the time of year. I've still got all my facilities. My old father lived right up till he died, and I mean to do the same.

Dick: Well, I'm sure we could chat for hours but we must be going, because you've just given us out hats and coats, and Sid seems to be holding the front door open.

Chris: Anyway, Mrs. Dace has asked us back for tea, so if you could just tell us where to go...?

Sid: I'd be delighted. You can...

(At this point the tape ran out.)

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(supplied to us by Chris Sugden)