

# FIVE LEICESTERSHIRE MAY-DAY SONGS



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### Introduction:

MAY DAY was the first day of the Celtic summer and was celebrated as Beltane. May-day rituals were akin to the observance of nature worship, but the festival was largely suppressed by the Puritans in the 1640s. After the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, the Festival became overshadowed by Oak Apple day (29 May), which was declared a day of Thanksgiving for the birth and safe return of Charles II. May-day celebrations, in which girls pre-dominated, were largely revived in schools in the nineteenth century, the tradition of May-day songs largely dying out with the advent of World War I. The "traditional" maypole with its plaited ribbons only came from Southern Europe in the last century, the May garland of spring flowers being more deep-rooted in this country. Until 1752, when eleven days were cut out of the calendar, May Day would have fallen later, by which time flowers would have been more plentiful.

Notes on the songs appear on the next page.

March 1984.

Jonathan Wilshere.

### Acknowledgments:

The five songs here presented were collected more than twenty years ago by the Leicestershire and Rutland Federation of Women's Institutes and appeared in a long out of print paper "May-Day Songs and Celebrations in Leicestershire and Rutland" by Elizabeth Ruddock. This appeared in Volume XL (1964-5) of the Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society. The late Dr. Ben. Burrows, a well-known local music teacher and composer, transcribed, re-constructed or part completed many of the songs collected.

The cover illustration of a Northamptonshire May Garland is taken from Margaret Baker's "The Folklore and Customs of Rural England" (David and Charles).

### Notes:

At least one of the tunes (Thurnby) is closely related to such traditional items as "Nuts in May", "I saw three ships" and its variant, "As I sat upon a sunny bank". The Saxby song betrays puritan "gloom" influence - an adult rather than a children's song. The tune, as with Market Bosworth, not really ancient. The source of the Cottesmore songs is probably a song known as "The Bailiff's daughter" or "The Maid of Islington". The words of the second version contain the "Night" and "Day" contrast.

Only the melody lines of the music are provided. Newarke Houses Museum, Leicester, hold taped versions of the songs reproduced here, as well as examples from other villages.

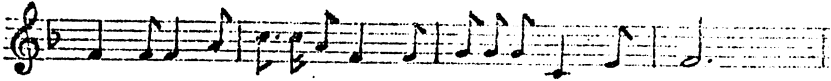
The flowers that traditionally made up May garlands locally appear to have been May blobs (Marsh Marigolds), Lady's Smock and Cowslips. Where two or three circular hoops were used a May bush or May doll formed the centrepiece, but it was possible to mount a garland on a half hoop.

May day cake in the eighteenth century contained meat, apple, onion and lemon thyme, rosemary and black sugar, in a pastry case.

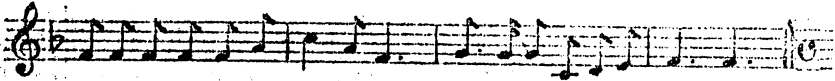
# THURNBY



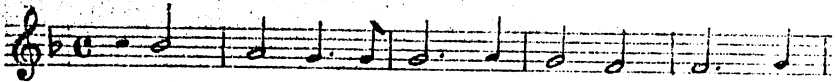
1. We've brought you a gar-land fine and gay. Please to remember the new May Day, We've



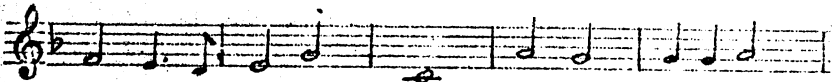
had good show'rs to water the flow'rs, For this is the First of May. \_\_\_\_\_



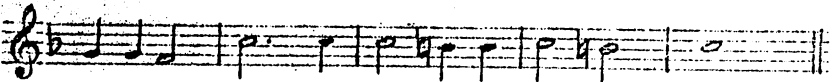
Sticking our stakes in Saint George's face, Please to re-member the May - pole.



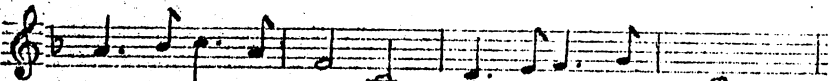
2. Come out to the green re - joic - ing sing, Come



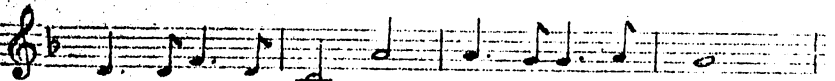
out at your neigh-bour's call, Gai - ly, mer-ri - ly



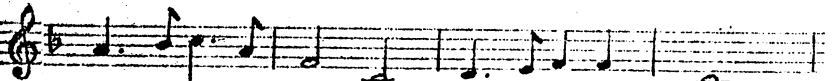
trip-ping a - long, Come out at your neigh - hour's call \_\_\_\_\_



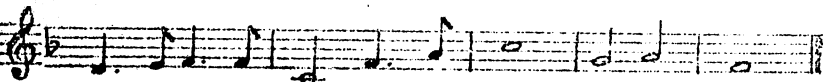
3. Round and round the May-pole mer - ri-ly we go, \_\_\_\_\_



Trip-ping, trip-ping light - ly, swing-ing to and fro, \_\_\_\_\_

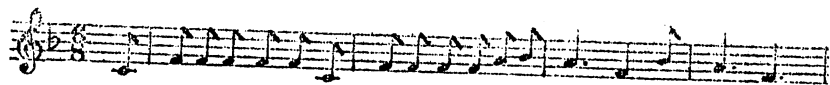


All the hap - py pas - times on the vil - lage green, \_\_\_\_\_

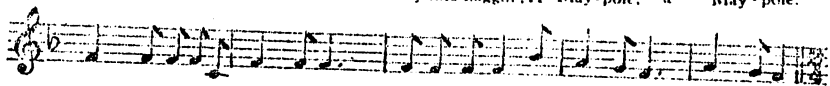


Sport - ing in the sun - shine with our \_\_\_\_\_ flow' - ry Queen.

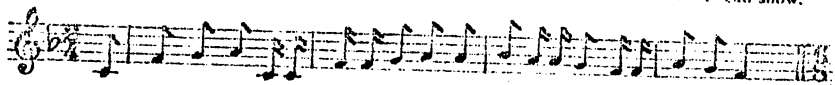
# MARKET BOSWORTH



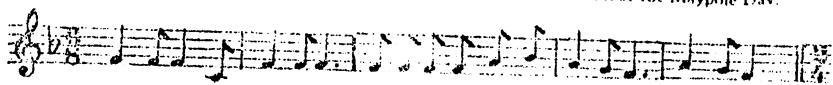
1. A dig-gin', a daggin', a dainty fine daggin', A May-pole, a May-pole.



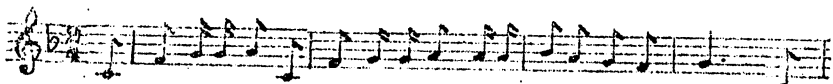
Dress'd in ribbons and tied in bows, See what a May-pole I can show, I can show.



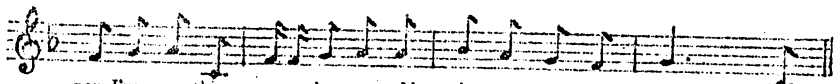
The First of May is a very fine day, So please to remember the Maypole Day.



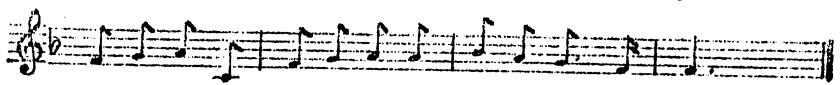
Let your gifts be great or small, I've got a purse that will hold it all, hold it all.



2. It's well set about and well spread about, For the sake of our dear Lord. And

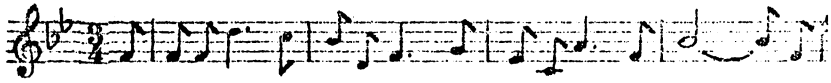


now I've sung this pretty short song, No lon-ger can we stay. — God

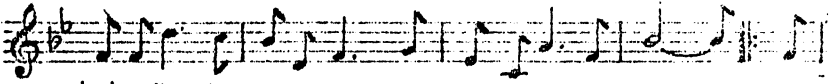


bless you all, both great and small. We wish you all Good Day. —

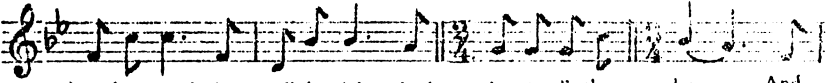
SAXBY (near Melton)



1. Re-member us for May is here, And thus we do be - gin — To



lead our lives in righteousness Un - less we die in sin. — 2. We



have been ramb - ling all the night And almost all the day. — And



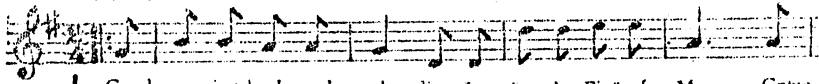
now return - ing back a - gain, We have brought you a branch of May. —

*Repeat for verses 3, 4, 5, and 6.*

3. A branch of may we have brought you,  
And at your door it stands.  
It is but a sprout but it's well budded-out  
By the work of our Lord's hands.
4. The hedges and trees they are so green,  
As green as any leaf.  
Our Heavenly Father waters them  
With His heavenly dew so sweet.
5. The life of man it is but a span,  
It flutters like a flower.  
We're here to-day and gone tomorrow,  
And we are dead in an hour.
6. The moon shines bright and the stars give light,  
For nations seem so gay.  
So God bless you all, both great and small,  
And send you a joyous May.

# COTTESMORE

## SONG 1



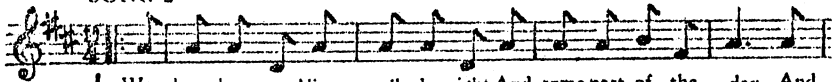
1. Good morn-ing, lords and la - dies, It is the First of May. Come



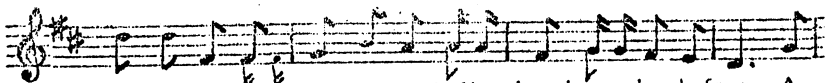
look at our fine gar - land, That looks so green and gay. —

1. Good morning lords and ladies,  
It is the First of May.  
Come look at our fine garland,  
That looks so green and gay.
2. The cuckoo sings in April,  
The cuckoo sings in May,  
The cuckoo sings in June, July,  
And then she flies away.
3. The cuckoo is a merry bird,  
She sings as she flies.  
She brings us good tidings,  
And never tells no lies.

## SONG 2



1. We have been trav'ling all the night, And some part of the day, And



now we have re - turn'd a - gain, And have brought you a bunch of may. A



bunch of may we have brought you, And at your door it stands. It's



nothing but a sprout, but it's well spread about By the work of our Lord's hands.

2. I have a bag lies on my arm,  
'Tis lined with silk and string,  
And all we want is a silver piece,  
To line it well within.  
Good morning all, both great and small,  
We wish you a joyful day.  
Good morning all, both great and small,  
We wish you all Good Day.

