

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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Queen Mary's Men

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1.

This night it is guid New'r E'en's night,
We're a' here Queen Mary's men;
And we're come here to crave our right,
And that's before our lady.
The very first thing which we do crave,
We're a' here Queen Mary's men;
A bonny white candle we must have,
And that's before our lady.

Goodwife, gae to your butter ark,
And weigh us here ten mark--

Ten mark, ten pund;
Look that ye grip weel to the grund.

Goodwife, gae to your geelin vat,
And fetch us here a skeel o' that.

*Gang to your awmrie, gin ye please,
And bring frae there a yow-milk cheese;

And syne bring here a sharpening-stane,
We'll sharp our whittles ilka ane.

Ye'll cut the cheese, and eke the round,
But aye take care ye cutna your thoom.

*Gae fill the three-pint cog o' ale,
The maut maun be aboon the meal.

*We houp your ale is stark and stout,
For men to drink the auld year out.

Ye ken the weather's snaw and sleet,
Stir up the fire to warm our feet.

Oor shoon's made o' mare's skin,
Come open the door, and let's in.

2.

This is guid New Year's Even-night,

We are a' Queen Mary's men;
And we've come here to claim our right,
And that's before our Lady.

Auld man gae tae your ale-in-vat,
We are a' Queen Mary's men;
And hand us here twa pints o' that,
And that's before our Lady.

Guidwife, gae to your pork-ham,
We are a' Queen Mary's men;
And cut it large and cut it roond,
Be sure you cut no your big thoom,
And that's before our Lady.

Here's tae the ane wi' the yellow hair,
We are a' Queen Mary's men;
She's in the hoose, and we maun hae her,
And that's before our Lady.

I wish her kye may a' weel thrive,
We are a' Queen Mary's men;
And every ane a guid calf,
And that's before our Lady.

I wish yer mares weel in their boal (beul)
We are a' Queen Mary's men;
And every ane a stag foal,
And that's before our Lady.

I wish yer hens may a' weel thrive,
We are a' Queen Mary's men;
And every ane lay three times five,
And that's before our Lady.

I wish yer geese weel frae the hill,
We are a' Queen Mary's men;
And every ane twelve at her heel,
And that's before our Lady.

3.
Gude new'r even, gude new'r night
St. Mary's men are we;
We're come here to crave our right
Before our leddie.

[similarly]

King Henry he's a-huntin' gane,

And ta'en wi' him his merry young men.

I'll tell ye how our lady was dressed,
If ye'll gie tae us some o' yer best.

She had upon her well-made head
A crown of gold, an' it fu' braid.

She had upon her middle sma'
A silver belt an' it fu' bra'.

She had upon her fingers ten
Rings o' gold, fu' mony an ane.

She had upon her weel-made feet
Silver slippers, an' they fu' neat.

Gude man, gang in your gauin-geel,
An' gie's a can or two o' ale.

Gude wife, gang in your butter-kit
An' gie's a spoon or two o' it.

Likewise gang in your farrel-creel,
An' wale your farrels, an' wale them weel.

Our spoon is made o' cow's horn,
Open da door an' let us in.

We're standing here before da door,
An' we'll pass in before a score.

4.

Peace be to this buirdly biggin'!
We're a' Queen Mary's men,
From the stethe unto the riggin',
And that's before our Lady.

[similarly:]

This is gude New Year's even nicht--
An' we've come here to claim our richt.

The morrow is gude New Year's day--
An' we've come here to sport and play.

The hindmost house that we came from--
We're a' Queen Mary's men;
We gat oat-cake and sowens' scone;

The three-lugged cog was standing fou;
We hope to get the same from you,
And that's before our Lady.

Gudewife gae to your kebbock-creel--
And see thou count the kebbocks weel.

Gudewife gae to your gealding-vat--
We're a' Queen Mary's men,
An' let us drink till our lugs crack,
An' fetch us ane an' fetch us twa,
An' aye the merrier we'll gang awa',
And that's before our Lady.

Gudewife gae to your butter-ark--
We're a' Queen Mary's men;
An' fetch us here ten bismar mark;
See that ye grip weel in the dark,
And that's before our Lady.

May a' your mares be weel to foal--
And every ane be a staig foal.

May a' your kye be weel to calve--
And every ane a queyock calf.
May a' your ewes be weel to lamb--
And every ane a ewe and a ram.

May a' your hens rin in a reel--
And every ane twal at her heel.

Here we hae brocht our carrying-horse--
We're a' Queen Mary's men;
A mony a curse licht on his corse;
He'll eat mair meat than we can get;
He'll drink mair drink than we can swink,
And that's before our Lady.

(1) Chambers' version (PRS 1847, 298; 1870, 168) from Deerness, Orkney. C. calls this version not very satisfactory to the antiquary, but the best that could be managed, "namely, with a number of verses composed as much from imagination as from memory, to make out something like the whole piece." The interpolated stanzas are asterisked above. [Lauchlan MacLean Watt, *Scottish Life and Poetry* (London, Nisbet, 1912), 380-1, quotes Chambers's stanzas 1, 11, 12, commenting: "Note the curious thread of papacy here, where `Queen Mary'

and 'Our Ladie' doubtless refer to the Virgin--all the more remarkable as popery was early dead among the Orcadians."]

(2) Greig FSNE clii.1, from Orkney.

(3) John T. Reid, *Art Rambles in Shetland* (1869), 59, "as remembered by an old dame in Shetland" (per *County Folk-lore III* (1903), 256). Gauin geel = ale-kirn; farrel creel = cake basket.

(4) Daniel Gorrie, *Summers and Winters in the Orkneys* (1869), 334-7, in *County Folk-lore, III.253*. "At the conclusion of the song the minstrels were entertained with cakes and ale, and sometimes a smoked goose was set before the company. The singing-men at starting were few in number, but every house visited sent forth fresh relays, and the chorus waxed in volume as the number of voices increased. . . . The 'carrying-horse,' mentioned in the last verse, was the clown or jester of the party, who suffered himself to be beaten with knotted handkerchiefs, and received double rations as the reward of his folly."

See A.G. Gilchrist in *FSJ* no. 14 (IV.1), 1910, 69, noting it is a carol, "preserved till recent times in the Orkney and Shetland islands,--a carol demanding hospitality in the name of the Virgin somewhat after the fashion of the English 15th century carol:

Bring us in good ale, good ale,
Bring us in good ale;
For our Blessed Lady's sake
Bring us in good ale."

See her analysis, *ibid.* 71-3, connecting with "My Theerie and My Thorie", q.v. Among other things, she suggests that the mysterious formula "Metheerie and Mathorie" may be "a corruption of some such refrain as Mater redemptoris" or another of Mary's titles; perhaps the game is a memory of struggles between carollers of the Popish religion and supporters of the reform?

L.E. Broadwood adds a note (pp. 73-5) which finds a parallel to the "other" tune in that of "Der Ritter von Staufenberg und die Meerfel"; and Cecil Sharp a further note on variants, referring to an article by the Rev. C.W. Whistler in the *Saga-Book*, V.ii, p. 243, suggesting [somewhat improbably] the game's remote origin in the contest between Romans and English clergy for the Sacraments (A.D. 616; reported in Bede, *Eccl. Hist.* II.v).

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