

# Tristan da Cunha and the Original ‘Powder Monkey Jim’

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## Abstract

The remote South Atlantic island of Tristan da Cunha has a singing and dancing tradition similar to that of Britain and North America. All its songs and tunes came from off the island, which raises the questions of whence exactly they came, and how they arrived there. After a brief overview of the Tristan repertoire, this article examines one particular song – ‘Powder Monkey Jim’ – collected from Fred Swain in 1938. Having identified the Victorian origins of this song, it explores the mediums by which it and the other Tristan material may have reached the island.<sup>1</sup>

The small volcanic island of Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic is mostly famous for two things. First, it is the world’s remotest community, being over 1,450 miles (2,335 km) from anywhere.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, when a new sub-cone of the volcano erupted next to the settlement in 1961 the whole population was evacuated to England, where they stayed for two years before returning home. Tristan’s special nature means that the island and its population have been the subject of numerous articles and books by researchers, travellers, expatriate professionals, the occasional journalist, and latterly by islanders themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Excluding transient expatriates, the local population consists of 260–270 people. They are proudly British, although their forebears were of very mixed origins. The first permanent settlers were Scotsman William Glass and his family in 1816.<sup>4</sup> Subsequent male settlers were sailors from England, Denmark, the USA, Holland, and Italy. Some arrived on visiting ships, notably American whalers, but some were shipwrecked and decided to stay. Most of their wives, on the other hand, were of mixed race, from St Helena, the Cape of Good Hope, and Bombay, although two Irish sisters also joined the community in 1908. There are just seven indigenous family names on the island today – Glass, Green, Hagan, Lavarello, Repetto, Rogers, and Swain.

The islanders are largely self-sufficient. Their main income is from commercial fishing for crawfish, which is processed in the island’s factory and exported as Tristan Rock Lobster. These and other fish are also caught for local consumption. Every family owns livestock – cattle, sheep, and poultry – with numbers strictly limited to prevent overgrazing. The staple potato crop and some other vegetables are grown at the Patches, which are stone-walled enclosures situated at the opposite end of the settlement plain from the village. Rockhopper penguin eggs are collected for the table, as are petrels, which are harvested sustainably from the neighbouring uninhabited Nightingale Island. They formerly also ate albatrosses (‘gonies’) but nowadays the islanders are very mindful of nature conservation. Tourism and visits by cruise ships are of growing importance,

and sales of postage stamps, coins, and handicrafts provide an additional small but steady income.

### Tristan's Song and Music Tradition

The earliest account of music on Tristan da Cunha accompanies an engraving published in 1875 showing a man playing a fiddle and a woman playing a harmonium from a music book (Figure 1).<sup>5</sup> A second fiddle hangs on the wall. The accompanying account was supplied a lady who visited the island about 1862.<sup>6</sup> She was not impressed:

Those of the party who went on shore found the cottages like English ones, with large old-fashioned fire-places. The ladies were black, but rather comely. They had a nice harmonium, on which one of the fair ones (?) was urged to play. The sounds produced, and which she called 'Home, Sweet Home', were excruciating, especially as Captain C-pounded on an old two-stringed fiddle, and accompanied the damsel, who banged and lacerated the instrument with hands about half a yard long.

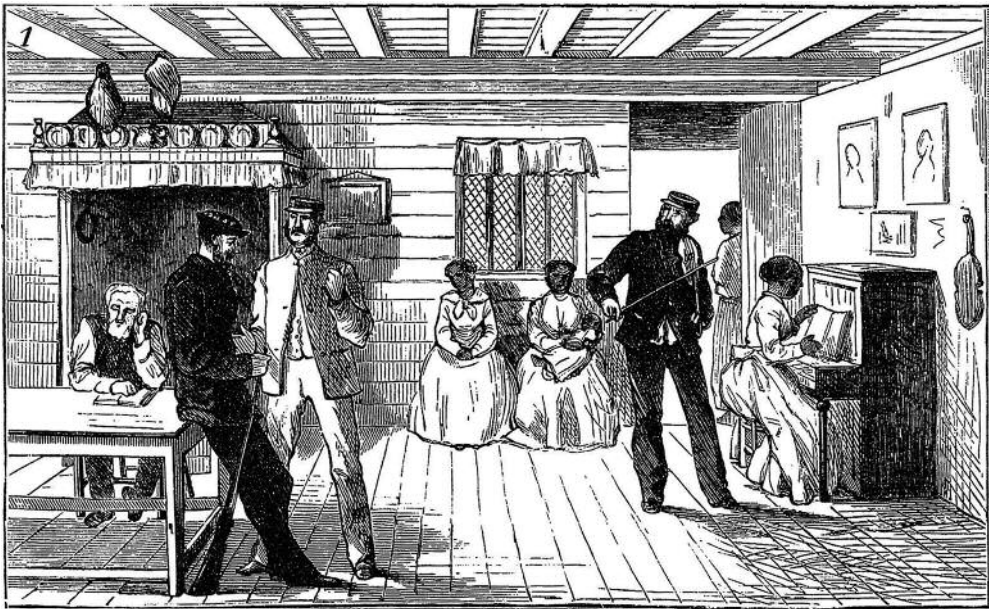


Figure 1 'Concert in the Cottage', *The Graphic* (1875)

Later visitors and missionaries make only passing mention of singing on Tristan, except for hymns. They were more forthcoming regarding dancing. An account by a missionary priest's wife, Rose Annie Rogers, of Tristan dances during their term of duty in 1922–25 is typical:

A number of the men are able to play on the accordion, but Tom Rogers is the best player, while Andrew Swain plays the violin and Bill Rogers the banjo [. . .]

The method of conducting the evening is quite amusing. The ball opens by each married man dancing the first dance with his wife. After that there is a change of

partners. The men advance to where the girls are seated and each stands in silence with arm crooked before the lady of his choice, who at first shyly averts her head, but at length rises majestically and takes the proffered arm and is led to her place in the dance ready to begin. Waltzes are the favourite dance, and next a sort of barn dance, a step-dance, also what is called a schottische. The step-dance goes on noisily till everyone is tired, each stepping as fast as she or he can move the feet. A few fancy dances with local names are danced, such as 'Tapioca's Big Toe', the 'Heel and Toe', the 'Donkey Dance' and the 'Handkerchief Dance', or some Scottish dances.<sup>7</sup>

This dance hall etiquette continued after the exiled islanders' return from England, even though the traditional dances were being replaced by the jive, the twist, and other modern dances.

Peter Munch was the first person systematically to research the traditional songs and music of Tristan da Cunha. He was the sociologist for the Norwegian scientific expedition to the island in 1938/9 led by Erling Christophersen.<sup>8</sup> Munch's original brief seems not to have included recording the folk music of the island, although it did include some ethnography. However, halfway through his sociological research he recognized how central singing and dancing were to the culture of the island, so he started collecting. In all, he collected some forty-five songs and twenty-five dance tunes from the islanders. With no sound recording equipment available, he had to transcribe tunes and words by hand on to paper, although some islanders wrote out material for him, most notably young Alice Swain (later Glass) whose musical literacy impressed him.

Another member of the Norwegian expedition was later also to be instrumental in recording the traditions of the island. The English engineer Allan Crawford was sailing to Cape Town to find work when he fell in with the outward-bound expedition and was taken on to fill the vacant post of surveyor. Crawford then went back to the island during the Second World War to set up a South Atlantic radio and weather base for the Royal Navy. He returned again later in the 1940s, taking with him a colour cine camera with which he shot valuable, if frustratingly silent, footage of island life, including dancing and musicians playing. Crawford established the Tristan da Cunha Association and maintained links with the island until his death in 2007. His films only became generally available in 2001 when a VHS video and DVD were released, to which he had added a running commentary.<sup>9</sup>

The hiatus of the Second World War and other research priorities meant that Munch's musical material languished until 1961, when he published an account, including several songs, entitled 'Traditional Songs of Tristan da Cunha' in the *Journal of American Folklore*.<sup>10</sup> This effectively coincided with the eruption of the infamous volcano on 9 October 1961, which led to the entire population being evacuated. They went first to Cape Town and thence to England, where they were eventually settled in the former RAF seaplane and flying-boat station at Calshot, near Southampton.

Many researchers and journalists found the resettlement of the Tristanians in such a convenient location an opportunity too good to be missed. They descended on the exiled community and made rather a nuisance of themselves. This was one of the factors behind the islanders deciding to return en masse to Tristan in 1963, once it had been

determined that the volcano was safe and that the village had barely been damaged.

Among the visitors were Maud Karpeles and Peter Kennedy of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, who recorded a number of the islanders' songs and tunes, and took notes on some of the social dances. These were the subject of a brief report in the EFDSS journal,<sup>11</sup> and the recordings were later released on the Folktrax label.<sup>12</sup> Of the forty tracks recorded, thirteen are songs, such as 'Light in the Window' (Roud 4987), 'Old Miser in London' (Roud 3913), and 'Darling Nellie Gray' (Roud 4883); three are songs that go with dance tunes, 'Step Dance (St Helena Girls)' (Roud 738), 'Pillow Dance', and 'Heel and Toe Polka' (Roud 7932); and two are modern popular songs adapted locally around 1960.<sup>13</sup> There are, additionally, twenty-one dance tunes, including the 'Donkey Dance', 'Tapioca's Big Toe (Varsoviana)', and 'Frisco's Fandango'; a couple of tunes are unnamed, and others are named after the style of dance and/or their country of origin – 'Italian Waltz', for example. Seven live commentaries by Kennedy on the dances he witnessed are also included. The remaining tracks are interviews about the dances, life on Tristan, and Christmas and New Year customs.

Old island friends, including Crawford and Munch, were brought in to help cushion the experience of exile, and to assist with the islanders' eventual return to Tristan. Munch collected some of the songs again and gathered further material at this time. Not all of the new visitors were unwelcome. The Swedish artist Roland Svensson, for example, had a particular interest in islands and island life. He visited the islanders at Calshot and established a long-lasting bond with them, to the extent that he was one of the few people allowed to accompany them back to the South Atlantic. He also tape-recorded some of the islanders' songs and tunes, several of which were incorporated into a series of lectures broadcast on Swedish radio.<sup>14</sup> Svensson made his private recordings available to Munch, who now wrote up his work on Tristan music in the form of a book, *The Song Tradition of Tristan da Cunha*.<sup>15</sup>

Munch's use of the word 'tradition' is significant. Some of the songs and tunes were classic folk songs, such as the Child ballads 'Lowlands Low' (Child 286) and 'Barv'ry Allen' (Child 84), and the shanties 'Ranso' (Roud 3282) and 'Whiskey Johnny' (Roud 651). These are of unknown authorship, sometimes of great age, and widely established in worldwide oral tradition. Others were popular songs with known composers and in some cases of decidedly commercial origin, such as 'Pretty Polly Perkins from Paddington Green' (Roud 430),<sup>16</sup> 'Happy Darkey; or, Josiphus Orange Blossom' (Roud 17484),<sup>17</sup> and 'Dying Californian' (Roud 2283).<sup>18</sup> Some fell in a grey area in between. Munch deliberately, and very wisely, sidestepped the debate over which songs were 'folk' and which 'popular'. Together they formed the musical tradition of Tristan da Cunha.

It may have been an advantage that Munch was Norwegian and not overly familiar with British music. British folk song collectors of the 1930s would probably have filtered out the commercial songs, consciously or otherwise. Munch, being a good sociologist, may have been deliberately unselective. On the other hand, his knowledge of Anglo-American music may have been insufficient for him to make the distinction, except in the case of some new South African popular music that had lately made its way on to the island's gramophones.

### 'Little Powder Monkey Jim'

Many of Tristan da Cunha's songs have nautical themes, and Munch was particularly interested in one song; 'Little Powder Monkey Jim' (Roud 1770). This tells a poignant tale about a young sailor who sang cheerfully as he carried gunpowder from the magazine to the gun crews on board Nelson's *Victory* during the Battle of the Nile, but who was felled by a bullet at the moment of victory. This was sung by Fred Swain, who regarded it as *his* song (Figure 2). Versions of 'The Powder Monkey' have also been collected from traditional singers in England,<sup>19</sup> and in Nova Scotia.<sup>20</sup> So Fred was in good company.

Munch reproduced this song both in his article and in his book, and also made it the subject of another article for the *Journal of American Folklore* under the title 'Whatever Became of "Little Powder Monkey Jim"?', which looked at how the song had fared over time.<sup>21</sup> According to Munch, the evacuation of the population during the volcano years and exposure to modern life effectively killed off traditional music on Tristan da Cunha. The old songs and dances were sometimes brought out for visitors, especially the 'Pillow Dance', but otherwise they remained largely un-sung and un-danced. This was particularly true of 'Little Powder Monkey Jim'. Munch says that Fred Swain was the target of much teasing for his rendition of the song. The reason for this is unclear, but the result was that Fred dropped it from his repertoire. It was not picked up by anyone else. Through a combination of lack of use and lapses of memory, the song had changed significantly when Roland Svensson collected it again in 1970 – more so than any of Fred's other songs.

Munch's article was quite groundbreaking, in that it was one of the first 'before and after' studies to examine material collected from the same contributor over an interval of decades. His declared purpose was to demonstrate the shortness of memory and to show the effects of lack of performance on an oral tradition over one generation. This provides a useful insight into the accuracy of material gathered from elderly informants. Fred Swain was seventy-five in 1970 when he was recorded by Roland Svensson.

The song had changed in two ways. First, the tune had become jumbled. The music for the original stanzas could be considered as having two sections, A and B, with the chorus in a slightly different tempo. In the 1970 recording, Fred inserted the chorus after each half-stanza, and dropped the second halves of stanzas 1 and 2. However, he also substituted part of the B tune at the beginning of the choruses. Secondly, some of



**Figure 2** Fred Swain in 1962/3, photograph by Peter Munch  
*Courtesy of Saint Louis University Libraries Special Collections, Archives & Manuscripts*

the words had changed, usually to something meaningful that sounded similar, but sometimes becoming nonsense. This could simply have been due to poor memory, but in a few cases the descent into nonsense may have been because particular words and phrases were unfamiliar to the singer, who therefore had to rely on 'phonetic memory'. Thus, 'the foeman's flagship *Orient*' became 'the foreman flaychip hardi-ent' – although there may also be an element of Tristanian dialect pronunciation involved here. Tristanians commonly add an 'h' before initial accented vowels – for example, 'apple' pronounced 'happle'.

### The Origin of 'Little Powder Monkey Jim'

Munch was unable to trace the history and origin of the song, although he said it was 'evidently a British Navy song' and a sea shanty in form. I can reveal here that in fact the words and music were written by the English ballad composer W. Michael Watson,<sup>22</sup> under the original title of 'The Powder-Monkey (An Old Salt's Story)'.<sup>23</sup> While this might seem to invalidate Munch's assessment, a footnote to the sheet music states, 'The Refrain is founded on an old Sea Song.' Stan Hugill, who knew of 'The Powder Monkey', noted similarities between the chorus and the shanty 'Donkey Riding', and suggested it was based on the shanty.<sup>24</sup> The footnote suggests Hugill had hit the nail on the head.

It was a very successful song. The day after Watson died in 1889, Mr. Willis of his publishers, Patey & Willis, said: 'His first great success was scored in 1881 with "The Powder Monkey", and since that time we have sold nearly 60,000 of the ballad.'<sup>25</sup> When Patey & Willis sold their copyrights at auction in 1896, 'The Powder Monkey' went for the considerable sum of £380.<sup>26</sup> The report of the sale indicates that Watson's royalty was 1d (one penny) per copy, the same as for most of his pieces.<sup>27</sup> The song was bought by Edwin Ashdown Ltd, who went on to print further editions.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the words were printed on song sheets and broadsides,<sup>29</sup> and they appeared in popular song books at least until the First World War.<sup>30</sup>

If further proof were needed of the song's popularity, the British Library has a copy of the 50th edition of the sheet music, the cover of which lists numerous professional artists who had performed the song (Figure 3).<sup>31</sup> There are also many nineteenth-century newspaper reports of performances of the song at concerts in Britain, Australia, and New Zealand.<sup>32</sup> The popularity of 'The Powder Monkey' in the Antipodes may have been influenced by a concert tour of Australia and New Zealand by Mr and Mrs Patey in 1890 and 1891. The song received mixed reviews. The *Brisbane Courier* reported: 'Mr. Patey contributed an old English favourite, the patriotic "Hearts of Oak", and his rendering of "The Powder Monkey" was a treat and contrast to the massacring of Watson's little ballad so often endured by a victimised audience.'<sup>33</sup> Conversely, the *Sydney Morning Herald* observed: 'Watson's "Powder Monkey" is a song that hardly merits an artist's attention, and we should have much preferred to hear Mr Patey in something better.'<sup>34</sup> Several gramophone records by various artists were produced during the first three decades of the twentieth century.<sup>35</sup> In 1899, Riley Brothers of Bradford even published a set of nine lantern slides to illustrate the song, which was still being listed in dealers' catalogues in 1912.<sup>36</sup>

The words and music of 'The Powder Monkey' as printed and as collected from Fred

50<sup>TH</sup> EDITION. H. 1601. p.  
14.

*Sung with the greatest success by*

MESS<sup>RS</sup> THURLEY BEALE, WINN, CHAPLIN HENRY, H. HORSBROFT, T. DISTIN, BEVAN, H. PRENTON,  
 EGBERT ROBERTS, FRANKLIN CLIVE ALFRED MOORE, JAMES BUDD, T. LAWLER, J. BELL,  
 R. DE LACY, etc., etc., etc.

N<sup>o</sup> 1 in F. N<sup>o</sup> 2 in G.

# THE POWDER-MONKEY

(AN OLD SALT'S STORY)

Written and Composed

BY

## MICHAEL WATSON.

*By the same Composer.*  
 A WINTER STORY (in E, F, A, G) 4/-  
 THE LOVE CHASE 4/-

*Print. Stee. Hall.* *Price 4/-*

London:  
 PATEY & WILLIS, 44, G<sup>T</sup> MARLBOROUGH STREET, W.

\*\* THIS SONG MAY BE SUNG IN PUBLIC FREE OF CHARGE.

Figure 3 Sheet music for Michael Watson's 'The Powder-Monkey'  
© British Library Board, H.1601.p.(14).

Swain are given in Appendix 1. It is unfortunate that the word 'niggers' should have been used in the second stanza, where it appears to be a compliment to the martial prowess and courage of the negro race. Although widely used at the time, it is unlikely that the song would be sung in public nowadays without alteration, perhaps substituting 'lions', 'tigers', or some other paragon of ferocity.

### Further Comparisons

Now we know the origin of the song, we can repeat Munch's comparison backwards, so to speak. Watson's and Swain's tunes are recognizably similar. Both happen to be in the key of G, but the Tristan da Cunha version from 1938 is written in lilting dotted quaver/semiquaver pairs throughout, whereas Watson's original has even quavers, except in the chorus. The original melody was arranged for piano accompaniment with interesting chord sequences that do not transfer well to unaccompanied singing.<sup>37</sup> The Tristan version has been simplified, effectively ironing out musical phrases that require accidentals and the more sophisticated chord changes of the original. To a folk singer's ears, the result is arguably better.

In contrast, the words have pretty much remained intact. The most noticeable differences are that the original words are written in an affected style with lots of apostrophized words – 'He was brimmin' full o' courage, an' was just the sort o' lad', and so on – whereas the Tristan song uses more normal English – 'He was brimmed full of courage, he was just the sort of lad'. The use of 'brimmed' in the Tristan version is interesting because it suggests that Swain and/or Munch's transcriber may not have recognized the word as 'brimming' (overflowing) and therefore reproduced it purely phonetically.

In another change, 'Bourky Bay' (Aboukir Bay, in Egypt) has become 'Bony Bay' on Tristan. 'Bony' (or 'Boney') was, of course, a common nickname for Napoleon Bonaparte, Nelson's ultimate opponent at the Battle of the Nile, and if the song was transmitted to the island orally it is possible that this change may have occurred before it reached Tristan.

The only other significant difference is in the chorus, where the refrain 'Sing, my lads, yo, ho!' becomes 'Sing ma laddie, oh!' on Tristan in 1938, and 'Sing malatchie oh' when Fred Swain sang it in 1970. This change may have been influenced by other folk songs.

### Transmission

Munch noted that the transmission of songs and tunes between the islanders was always by ear. All the songs, tunes, and dances originally came from off the island, apart from the locally adapted popular songs (mentioned above).

It is safe to assume that the original settlers arrived with their own repertoires. Additional material arrived with visiting ships, although probably not those ships that just touched at Tristan for water and fresh produce, or to drop off supplies and mail. They rarely stayed for more than a day, and more often stopped for just a few daylight hours, especially during the days of sail when a sudden change in the treacherous weather could mean shipwreck. Few people ventured ashore. Rather, the islanders



rowed their trade goods out to the ships. Such stops were far too short to permit the transmission of songs and music by aural means. More influential were whalers and sealers, mostly American, which stayed for weeks or months at a time to slaughter the local wildlife. They often took on local men who shipped for extended periods, maybe returning, maybe not. Those who did return brought back fresh musical material. Two such were the brothers Samuel and Thomas Hill Swain, who went to sea in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup> Judging from their family repertoires, Munch thought that Sam was responsible for introducing many of the island's tunes, while Tom brought many of the songs. Indeed, Old Sam Swain, who gave Munch 'Come All Ye Bold Seamen',<sup>39</sup> said that it came 'from the shipping time of Thomas H. Swain'.

Shipwrecked mariners and passengers, of whom there were many, may have had even more of an impact on the Tristan repertoire. Castaways were welcomed into the islander's homes, often at some inconvenience, until they could secure a passage off the island. Then, as now, ships were infrequent, so they could be cooped up with their hosts for several months, giving ample opportunity for islanders to learn new material from their guests. All the songs are in English, but some were contributed by foreign-language speakers, such as Dutchman Pieter Groen.<sup>40</sup> Munch's contributors attributed some of the songs to specific shipwrecks. For example, 'Annie Rooney' (Roud 4822) was introduced by a sailor nicknamed 'Shorty' from the *Allen Shaw*, shipwrecked in 1893;<sup>41</sup> and the minstrel song 'Josiphus Orange Blossom' reportedly came to Tristan with the *Mabel Clark*, wrecked in 1878.

We have already seen from Figure 1 that harmoniums and sheet music made it to the island. These were brought by missionaries sent by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel from 1851 onwards. Their use is attested in later memoirs written by two ministers' wives.<sup>42</sup> It is quite likely that additional sheet music was brought to the island by visiting ships.

Gramophones were another factor in the transmission of songs and tunes to Tristan. Munch mentions only one song as having been learned from a record. His musical helper, Alice Swain, had picked up 'Danny Boy' from a record in her father's possession.<sup>43</sup> Her father happens to have been our own Fred Swain. Munch complained about gramophone music supplanting the island tradition. This process was accelerated when the Royal Navy set up its weather and radio station on the island during the Second World War, and continued after the war when the establishment of commercial fishing led to closer interaction with South Africa.

The earliest mention of a gramophone is of one owned by the South African businessman P. Casper Keytel, who lived on the island in 1908 and 1909.<sup>44</sup> This was used to give at least one 'concert'.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, a gramophone and fifty records presented to Tristan in March 1935 by Queen Mary were used for weekly concerts.<sup>46</sup> Two hundred more records, and a supply of needles, were sent by the HMV company in December 1935, presumably drawn from their own catalogue.<sup>47</sup> Access to these records was controlled by the notoriously autocratic padre, Harold Wilde, which very likely hindered the ability of islanders to learn songs and tunes from them.

Interestingly, when the liner *Empress of Australia* delivered Queen Mary's gift, three doctors went ashore to examine the health of the islanders. They visited most, if not

all, of the houses, and their report noted: 'All the cottages I visited were exceptionally clean and tidy. Gramophones were in several, and dance music appeared to be the favourite form of music.'<sup>48</sup> These gramophones had arrived with earlier visiting ships. Both the liner *Empress of France* in 1928,<sup>49</sup> and the RMSP *Asturias* in 1931,<sup>50</sup> reported having left gramophones, and more may have been left by other ships. Unrestricted access to gramophones may well have influenced the local musical repertoire in more than the single instance cited by Munch. Thus records could have had at least as much impact on Tristan as sheet music, and may have been instrumental in disseminating material between households. Other possible media for transmission – films and radio broadcasts – did not reach the island until after Munch's expedition, and television, courtesy of the British Forces Broadcasting Service, only arrived in 2001.

Unfortunately, almost nothing specific is known about the songs and tunes included in Tristan's stock of printed music and gramophone records. The only known record title is 'Danny Boy', and apart from hymns the only sheet music title I have found is 'Home, Sweet Home'. The aid that Alice Swain gave to Munch in transcribing music is evidence that at least a few Tristanians were musically literate.

## Conclusion

While oral transmission of 'The Powder-Monkey' to the island remains possible, my first thought on discovering Watson's song was that the sheet music may have been carried to Tristan along with a harmonium taken by one of the early clergymen. In particular, Mrs K. M. Barrow, the wife of the Rev. J. G. Barrow, taught songs to her schoolchildren from sheet music between 1906 and 1909.<sup>51</sup> Fred Swain was about twelve years old at the time, so perhaps she taught him 'The Powder Monkey' as a party-piece. If so, that might have had something to do with his reportedly being teased about the song in later life. Now that we know that 'The Powder Monkey' was also issued on gramophone records, and that Fred owned a gramophone, another possibility is that he learned it from a record, most likely as an adult. It seems that neither Munch nor Svensson thought to ask him where he had learned it, which is a pity. Be that as it may, the differences between Watson's original and Swain's version are consistent either with transmission by word of mouth, or with lapses of memory over a thirty-year period after learning the song as a child, or a shorter period after having learned it from a record. In any case, Fred Swain's song became part of the Tristan da Cunha song tradition.

## Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Ruairidh Greig for his helpful comments on my draft article. I thank St. Louis University Libraries, Special Collections, Archives & Manuscripts for permission to reproduce Peter Munch's photograph of Fred Swain.<sup>52</sup> The American Folklore Society kindly granted permission to reproduce Swain's version of the song from the *Journal of American Folklore*. Vic Gammon graciously helped determine the chords for Watson's original composition from the piano score, and provided useful notes on the harmonization of the piece. I also thank Keith Chandler for helping fill gaps in the list of gramophone recordings of 'The Powder Monkey'.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This paper is a fleshed out version of the following brief article: Peter Millington, 'Little Powder Monkey Jim Revisited: An Insight into a Traditional Tristan da Cunha Folk Song', *Tristan da Cunha Newsletter*, 47 (2010), 21–23.
- <sup>2</sup> The nearest permanent settlement to Tristan's only village, Edinburgh of the Seven Seas, is Jamestown, St Helena, 1,450 miles (2,335 km) away to the north; with Cape Town, South Africa, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1,750 miles (2,815km) east and 2,080 miles (3,345 km) west, respectively. There is no airstrip and less than a dozen ships a year sail there, the voyage taking at least five days. Even then, the notorious sea conditions often mean that passengers and/or cargo cannot be landed.
- <sup>3</sup> See Patrick Helyer and Michael Swales, *Bibliography of Tristan da Cunha* (Oswestry: Anthony Nelson, 1998), for an extensive bibliography of publications on Tristan da Cunha. Accessible accounts can be found in Daniel Schreier and Karen Lavarello-Schreier, *Tristan da Cunha: History, People, Language* (London: Battlebridge Publications, [2003]); Daniel Schreier and Karen Lavarello-Schreier *Tristan da Cunha and the Tristanians* (London: Battlebridge Publications, 2011); and the booklet *Commemorative Publication to Celebrate the 500th Anniversary of Tristan da Cunha* ([Keinton Mandeville]: Tristan da Cunha Association, 2006). Up-to-date information is published in the biannual *Tristan da Cunha Newsletter* and on the island's website <<http://www.tristandc.com>> published jointly by the Government of Tristan da Cunha and the Tristan da Cunha Association.
- <sup>4</sup> Glass was an army corporal who remained on the island after the withdrawal of the British and Hottentot garrison that had been sent to prevent the French from using Tristan as a base for rescuing Napoleon Bonaparte from imprisonment on St Helena.
- <sup>5</sup> 'Views of the Island of Tristan D'Acunha', *The Graphic*, 9 January 1875, 29–30.
- <sup>6</sup> The article states that the visit to Tristan had been made some years previously, when there were thirty-five inhabitants. This tallies with the year 1862 in Arnaldo Faustini, *The Annals of Tristan da Cunha* <[http://www.tristan.it/TRISTAN/tristanlibri/tristan\\_annals.pdf](http://www.tristan.it/TRISTAN/tristanlibri/tristan_annals.pdf)> ([2004]) p. 33 [accessed 18 October 2013].
- <sup>7</sup> Rose Annie Rogers, *The Lonely Island* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1926), pp. 117–18; online at <<http://www.bweaver.nom.sh/rogers/intro.htm>>.
- <sup>8</sup> Erling Christophersen, *Tristan da Cunha, the Lonely Isle* (London: Cassell, 1940).
- <sup>9</sup> Charles Frater, *Allan Crauford's Tristan da Cunha*, VHS video/DVD (London: Parliamentary Films, 2001).
- <sup>10</sup> Peter A. Munch, 'Traditional Songs of Tristan da Cunha', *Journal of American Folklore*, 74 (1961), 216–29.
- <sup>11</sup> Maud Karpeles, 'A Report on Visits to the Tristan da Cunha Islanders', *JEFDSS*, 9 (1962), 162–67.
- <sup>12</sup> *Tapioca's Big Toe: Traditions & Customs of Tristan de Cunha*, recorded by Peter Kennedy and Maud Karpeles (Folktrax FTX-609, 1977).
- <sup>13</sup> 'There's a Little Bit of Everything in Tristan' was lightly adapted from the country and western song 'There's a Little Bit of Everything in Texas' by Ernest Tubbs (1960), and 'Fifteen Hundred Miles from Table Bay' was set to the tune of 'Galway Bay' by Arthur Colahan (1947). Both are sung by Basil Lavarello on Kennedy's recordings.
- <sup>14</sup> I have been unable to find full details of these broadcasts, although I was fortunate enough to hear a recording of them during my voyage to Tristan in December 2011. The ship's captain was Torbjörn Svensson, Roland Svensson's son.
- <sup>15</sup> Peter A. Munch, *The Song Tradition of Tristan da Cunha* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970).
- <sup>16</sup> Harry Clifton, *Polly Perkins of Paddington Green* (London: Hopwood & Crew, 1864).
- <sup>17</sup> Ned Straight, *Josiphus Orange Blossom* (Cincinnati: John Church Jr., 1868).
- <sup>18</sup> Kate Harris, 'The Dying Californian', *New England Diadem and Rhode Island Temperance Pledge*, 5 (9 February 1850), no. 6.
- <sup>19</sup> Jack Cheeseman, *South Downs & the Weald: Songs Recorded in Sussex and Kent*, recorded by Peter Kennedy (Folktrax FTX-428, 1975), track 1; Arthur Howard, *Merry Mountain Child*, recorded by Ian Russell (Hill & Dale HD 006, 1981), side 1, track 5 [Hazlehead, Yorkshire]; Washington, DC, Library of Congress, Archive of Folk Culture, AFC1972/001, James Madison Carpenter Collection, Cylinder 070 00:00; Disc side 143 00:00; MS pp. 03389, 08987–08988 [W. Rennie, South Shields].
- <sup>20</sup> Helen Creighton, *Songs and Ballads from Nova Scotia* (Toronto: J. M. Dent, 1933), pp. 115–16 [Richard Hartlan, South-East Passage, Nova Scotia].

- <sup>21</sup> Peter A. Munch 'What Became of "Little Powder-Monkey Jim": Additional Song Material from Tristan da Cunha', *Journal of American Folklore*, 84 (1971), 311–19.
- <sup>22</sup> William Michael Watson, known as Michael Watson, also published pianoforte pieces under the pseudonym 'Jules Favre'. He was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1840, the son of a music professor. He died on 3 October 1889 in East Dulwich. He originally trained as an artist before turning to music. He published his first musical piece in 1857, but 'The Powder-Monkey' (1881) was his first success. He is not to be confused with another popular song composer, J. Michael Watson, who published pieces in the 1890s and 1900s (after W. Michael Watson's death).
- <sup>23</sup> Michael Watson, *The Powder-Monkey (An Old Salt's Story)* (London: Patey & Willis, [1881]).
- <sup>24</sup> Stan Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 148: 'A "shore sea-song" which I believe came out about the forties of the last century (I do not know the composer) seems to have been based on the shanty ['Donkey Riding'], the chorus of which runs: [he then gives the words and music of the 'Powder Monkey' chorus, in the key of F]. This passage is omitted from later abridged editions of Hugill's book.
- <sup>25</sup> 'Death of the Composer of "The Powder Monkey": An Interview with his Publishers', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 October 1889 (no.7659), p. 5a.
- <sup>26</sup> 'Important Sale of Copyrights', *Musical Standard*, 6 (14 November 1896), 304. This report of the sale lists song titles, royalties, composers, buyers, and prices realized. Among the entries for a dozen different songs by Watson is: "'Powder Monkey". Ditto, Polka, Illustrated. Ditto, Band Parts. 1d. Royalty. Michael Watson. (Ashdown). £380.' Watson's portfolio included a number of other pseudo-nautical songs, such as: 'Afloat', 'An Anchor-Watch Yarn', 'Anchored', 'Little Sue: A Sailor's Love Ditty', 'The Mariner's Song', and 'The Press-Gang'.
- <sup>27</sup> To give these figures some context, Watson would have received an average of £35 5s per year, over a period of eight years. Alone, this would not have been enough to live on. Alan M. Stanier, 'Relative Value of Sums of Money' <<http://web.archive.org/web/20121101032143/http://private.www.essex.ac.uk/~alan/family/N-Money.html>> ([archived 1 November 2012; accessed 1 October 2013] gives the average annual wage of an agricultural labourer in the 1880s as £41 to £42. Fortunately for the composer, the British Library catalogue credits Watson with the words and/or music of dozens of ballads and tunes, several of which were hits. One syndicated obituary states that he was earning about £1,000 a year when he died ('Musical Notes', *Auckland Star*, 27 November 1889, p. 5). This made him very well off. According to Stanier, solicitors and barristers earned £1,300 per annum. By way of contrast to Watson's 1d royalty, the cover price of the 50th edition of 'The Powder Monkey' was 4s. This was Patey & Willis's usual cover price, although their advertisements stated that their products could be obtained at half-price from music sellers. If earlier editions were similarly priced, total sales of 'The Powder-Monkey' would have netted between £750 and £1,500 per annum.
- <sup>28</sup> Michael Watson, *The Powder-Monkey (An Old Salt's Story)* (London: Edwin Ashdown, [n.d.]). There is a copy at Mystic Seaport, Collections Research Center, ID no. 2002.73.13 <<http://mobius.mysticseaport.org/>> [accessed 3 October 2013].
- <sup>29</sup> There are broadside copies of 'The Powder Monkey' in the Library of Congress's Nineteenth-Century Song Sheets collection, the National Library of Scotland's English Ballads collection (these first two broadsides are identical, pairing the song with 'Little Tiny Tim'), the Baring-Gould Broadside Collection at the British Library, the Frank Kidson Broadside Collection, and the Norfolk Heritage Centre archives. None of these bears an imprint, nor are they dated.
- <sup>30</sup> James Edmund Jones, *Camp-Fire Choruses: The Soldiers' Song Book* (London: Oxford University Press, 1916), pp. 89–90; *British War Songs: Old English Ballads and Other Miscellaneous Selections* (Pittsburgh: John Mellor & Sons, 1916), p. 14.
- <sup>31</sup> Michael Watson, *The Powder-Monkey (An Old Salt's Story)*, 50th edn (London: Patey & Willis, [n.d.]) [London, British Library, H.1601.p.(14.)].
- <sup>32</sup> A non-exhaustive list of concert notices mentioning 'The Powder Monkey' drawn from readily accessible online newspaper archives includes: 'Concert', *Herts Advertiser & St Albans Times*, 17 December 1881, p. 5a; 'Saturday Popular Concerts', *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 15 December 1882, p. 7d; 'Public Notices: Conversazione, Tonight', *Dundee Courier & Argus*, 20 December 1882, [p. 1c]; 'William Lea's Coming Concerts', *Liverpool Mercury*, 22 December 1882, p. 1b; 'Newport: Concert at Carisbrooke', *Isle of Wight Observer*, 3 February 1883, p. 6a; 'St. Asaph: Concert', *North Wales Chronicle*, 10 February 1883, p. 5d; 'Waterloo House Entertainment', *Ipswich Journal*, 24 March 1883, p. 9b; 'Leicester Football Club', *Leicester Chronicle & Leicestershire Mercury*, 26 April 1884, p. 5d; 'Amateur Concert', *Belfast News-Letter*, 14 April 1885, p. 5c; 'St. Julian's Hall', *The Star*

- [Saint Peter Port, Guernsey], 25 April 1889, p. 2e; 'Entertainment at Fulwood Barracks', *Preston Guardian*, 24 January 1891, p. 4g; 'Concert at Stirling', *Clutha Leader* [New Zealand], 11 September 1891, p. 5; 'Music, Song, and Story', *Southland Times* [New Zealand], 30 March 1892, p. 2; 'Local & General', *Star* [Christchurch, New Zealand], 19 April 1893, p. 3; 'Beaudesert', *Queenslander*, 20 May 1893, p. 919c; 'Brisbane Musical Union', *Brisbane Courier*, 18 February 1898, p. 4e; 'Karangahake Literary Society', *Obinemuri Gazette*, 17 September 1898, p. 3; 'Entertainments: Centennial Hall. Tonight', *Brisbane Courier*, 2 June 1899, p. 2 a.
- <sup>33</sup> 'Madame Patey's Concert', *Brisbane Courier*, 24 April 1891, p. 5.
- <sup>34</sup> 'The Patey Concerts', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 October 1890, p. 8e.
- <sup>35</sup> Foster Richardson, *The Powder Monkey* (Zonophone 5207, 1928); Norman Allin, *Powder Monkey* (Columbia WAX 5610, 1930); Norman Allin, *Powder Monkey* (Columbia DX106, 1930); Norman Allin, *Powder Monkey* (Columbia DOX86, [1931?]); Thorpe Bates, *Powder Monkey* (Columbia 2592, [n.d.]); Thorpe Bates, *Powder Monkey* (Columbia 29800, 1915); Robert Howe, *The Powder monkey* (Edison Bell 507, [n.d.]); Peter Dawson, *The Powder Monkey* (Zonophone X-518, 1911); Peter Dawson, *The Powder Monkey* (International Zonophone Company X-42719, [n.d.]); Harry Dearth, *The Powder-Monkey (An Old Salt's Story)* (Odeon X44502, 1906/7); Harry Dearth, *The Powder Monkey* (Pathé 8024, [n.d.]).
- <sup>36</sup> *The Powder Monkey* (Bradford: Riley Brothers, 1899) – set of nine slides, listed in 'LUCERNA – The Magic Lantern Web Resource' <<http://www.slides.uni-trier.de/set/index.php?id=3001420>> [accessed 30 September 2013].
- <sup>37</sup> Vic Gammon, who helped me determine the chord symbols from Watson's piano score, has kindly provided the following harmonic description: 'The song is strongly centred in the key of G major with a transitory modulation to the dominant key of D in bar 4; it plays with the use of the sub-median key of E minor in bars 9–11, including a subdominant to median major chord change in bar 10, a common feature in a number of popular tunes of the period. The melody makes a strong modulation into the median major key of B major in bar 12; from this it returns by a cycle of fifths progression to the home key, finishing the verse with a transitory modulation to the dominant key (D). The double-time chorus (quoting 'Donkey Riding') is firmly rooted in the home key of G major.'
- <sup>38</sup> Thomas Hill and Samuel Swain were sons of one of the original settlers, Thomas Hill Swain senior. Both perished in a major lifeboat tragedy in 1885.
- <sup>39</sup> This is a version of 'The Coast of Peru' (Roud 1997).
- <sup>40</sup> Pieter Groen from Katwijk, Holland, arrived with the wreck of the *Emily*. He decided to settle permanently on Tristan, changed his name to Peter Green, founded a dynasty and eventually became head man. He knew many English songs.
- <sup>41</sup> Michael Nolan, *Little Annie Rooney* (London: Francis Bros. & Day, [1889]).
- <sup>42</sup> Katherine Mary Barrow, *Three Years in Tristan da Cunha* (London: Skeffington and Son, 1910); Rogers, *The Lonely Island*.
- <sup>43</sup> Munch, *Song Tradition of Tristan da Cunha*, p. 156.
- <sup>44</sup> Faustini, *Annals of Tristan da Cunha*, pp. 54–57.
- <sup>45</sup> Barrow, *Three Years in Tristan da Cunha*, entry for 6 March 1907.
- <sup>46</sup> Douglas M. Gane, 'Tristan da Cunha' [letter to the editor], *The Times*, 22 February 1935, p. 15f.
- <sup>47</sup> Irving B. Gane, 'Tristan Da Cunha: Departure of the SS. *Collegian*', *The Times*, 5 December 1935, p. 12d.
- <sup>48</sup> E. F. D. Owen, 'Tristan da Cunha: A Visit to the Lonely Island', *British Medical Journal*, 25 January 1936, pp. 173–74.
- <sup>49</sup> 'Empire's Smallest Island Asks for Help', *Coaticook Observer*, 20 September 1928, p. 3.
- <sup>50</sup> R. P. Anderson, 'The Lonely Island', *Straits Times*, 5 January 1932, p. 18.
- <sup>51</sup> Barrow, *Three Years in Tristan da Cunha*, entry for 13 September 1906.
- <sup>52</sup> Saint Louis University Libraries Special Collections, Archives & Manuscripts, PHO 25, Peter A. Munch Photograph Collection, Tristan Slide 2D7a, Fred Swain, photo by Peter A. Munch; available online at <<http://cdm.slu.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/photos/id/7595/rec/4>>.

## Fred Swain, 'Little Powder-Monkey Jim', collected by Peter A. Munch

*Journal of American Folklore*, 74 (1961), 224-25

A yarn I've got to spin, it's how I heard my old Dad tell of a  
gal - lant lit - tle he - ro who on board the Vic - t'ry fell. He was  
brim - men full of cour - age, he was just the sort of lad to  
make the sort of sai - lor that our Na - vy al - ways had. Now  
Lit - tle Pow - der - Mon - key Jim was the pet of all the crew, with his  
flax - en hair so cur - ly and his pret - ty eyes so blue. The  
boat - swain al - ways said that's how, that what got o - ver him, the  
chor - us of a sai - lor's song was sung by Lit - tle Jim:

Michael Watson, *The Powder-Monkey (An Old Salt's Story)*

50th edn (London: Patey &amp; Willis, [n.d.])

A yarn I've got to spin as how I've heard my old dad tell, Of a  
 gal-lant lit-tle he-ro who a-board the Vict'-ry fell, He was  
 brim-min' full o' cour-age, an' was just the sort o' lad To  
 make the sort o' sai-lor that our Na-vy's al-ways had. As  
 pow-der-mon-key, lit-tle Jim was pet o' all the crew, with his  
 flax-en hair so cur-ly an' his pret-ty eyes o' blue; An' the  
 bo'-s'un al-ways said as how that what got o-ver him, Was the  
 chor-us of a sai-lor's song as sung by lit-tle Jim.

A yarn I've got to spin – it's how I heard my old Dad tell –  
 Of a gallant little hero who on board the Vict'ry fell.  
 He was brimmen full of courage, he was just the sort of lad  
 To make the sort of sailor that our Navy always had.  
 Now Little Powder-Monkey Jim was the pet of all the crew,  
 With his flaxen hair so curly and his pretty eyes so blue.  
 The boatswain always said that's how, that what got over him,  
 The chorus of a sailor's song was sung by Little Jim:

*Chorus:*

Soon we'll be in London town.  
 Sing, ma laddie, oh!  
 To see the King in his golden crown.  
 Sing, ma laddie, oh!  
 Hea' ho, on we go!  
 Sing ma laddie, oh!  
 Who's a-feared to me to foe!  
 Sing, ma laddie, oh! oh!

In ninety-eight we chased the foe right into Bony Bay,  
 And we fought away like Niggers all the night till break of day.  
 Our foreman's flagship *Orient* was blown away sky-high,  
 The Admiral and all his crew, and serve them right, said I.  
 Now Little Jim was in the thick of all the fire and smoke  
 And seemed to think that fighting hard was nothing but a joke,  
 For he handed up the powder from the magazine below  
 And all the while was singing as if his pluck to show:

*Chorus*

Now Little Jim was book' for us – the fight was just on won,  
 And the musket bullet picked him off before the song was sung.  
 They carried him to a cockpit, and a-smiling he did lie,  
 The sailors, well, there went a man, somehow they pipe his eye.  
 'Ma lad,' says Jim, 'don't fret for me, but if the shore she see,  
 Give a kiss to dear old Mother, and say it come from me.'  
 For it never was a braver heart could serve our gracious King  
 Than Little Powder-Monkey who so gaily used to sing:

*Chorus*



A yarn I've got to spin as how I've heard my old dad tell,  
 Of a gallant little hero who aboard the Vict'ry fell,  
 He was brimmin' full o' courage an' was just the sort o' lad  
 To make the sort o' sailor that our Navy's al-ways had.  
 As powder-monkey, little Jim was pet o' all the crew,  
 With his flaxen hair so curly, an' his pretty eyes o' blue;  
 An' the bo's'un al-ways said as how that what got o-ver him,  
 Was the chorus of a sailors' song, as sung by little Jim.

*Chorus:*

Soon we'll be in London Town,  
 Sing, my lads, yo, ho! . . .  
 An' see the King in a golden crown:  
 Sing, my lads, yo, ho!  
 Heave ho! on we go,  
 Sing, my lads, yo, ho! . . .  
 Who's a-feard to meet the foe?  
 Sing, my lads, yo, ho!

In ninety-eight we chas'd the foe right in to 'Bourky Bay',  
 And we fought away like niggers all the night till break o' day  
 The foeman's flagship 'Orient' was blow'd away sky-high,  
 With the Admiral an' all his crew an' sarve 'em right, says I.  
 Now little Jim was in the thick o' all the fire an' smoke,  
 An' he seemed to think that fightin' hard was nothin' but a joke,  
 For he handed up the powder from the magazine below,  
 An all the while a singing like as if his pluck to show

*Chorus*

But little Jim was book'd for as the fight was just on won,  
 A musket bullet pick'd him off, afore his song was done.  
 They took him to a cock-pit, where a smilin' he did lie,  
 And the sailors – well, there warn't a man but somehow pip'd his eye.  
 Says Jim 'My lads, don't fret for me, but if the shore ye see,  
 Give a kiss to dear old mother, an' say it come from me.'  
 An' there never was a braver heart that serv'd our gracious King,  
 Than the little powder-monkey, who so gaily used to sing: –

*Chorus*