

Old Kent Carollers song sheets 2025

Our public dates for singing historical old local carols this year:

- Wednesday 10th December, Marden Society, The Vestry Hall, Marden, an hour-long concert of old local carols from 2.30pm. Address: High St, Marden, Tonbridge TN12 9HN
- Wednesday 10th December, Tenterden Folk Club, Tenterden Club folk club session with spots from us, starts 7.30pm. Address: Church Rd, Tenterden TN30 6AT
- Thursday 18th December, The Chequers, Lamberhurst, carols session, starts 8pm. Address: The Chequers Inn, The Broadway, Lamberhurst, Tunbridge Wells TN3 8DB
- Sunday 28th December, The King's Head, Grafty Green, carols and tunes session, starts 2.30pm. Address: Headcorn Rd, Grafty Green, Maidstone ME17 2AN
- Monday 5th January 2026, The West End Tavern, Marden. Twelfth night last chance carol sing, starts 7.30pm. West End Tavern, Goudhurst Road, Marden TN12 9JB England. Groups singing old carols from other areas are very welcome. Please email gmatkin@gmail.com to let us know you're coming!

The volume marks explained: pp=very quiet, p=quiet, mp=less quiet, mf=louder, f= normal loudness, ff=still louder

While Shepherds Watched: Cranbrook

1. While shepherds watched their flocks by night, All seated on the ground,

The angel of the Lord came down, (x2)
And glory shone around, (x3)
2. 'Fear not,' said he, for mighty dread,
Had seized their troubled minds.
'Glad tidings of great joy I bring, (x2)
To you and all mankind.' (x3)
3. 'To you in David's town this day,
Is born of David's line,
The Saviour who is Christ the Lord (x2)
And this shall be the sign.' (x3)
4. 'The heavenly Babe you there shall find,
To human view displayed.
All meanly wrapped in swathing bands, (x2)
And in a manger laid.' (x3)
5. Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith
Appeared a shining throng,
Of angels praising God, who thus, (x2)
Addressed their joyful song.(x3)
6. All glory be to God on high,
And to the earth be peace;
Goodwill henceforth from heaven to men (x2)
Begin and never cease. (x3)
Tune composed by Canterbury shoemaker Thomas Clarke, published 1805. Lyrics by Nahum Tate (1652-1715)
Christians Awake
1. Christians awake, arise rejoice and sing,
Behold glad tidings of great joy I bring,
A child is born, his wonders will increase,
The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. (x2)
2. This Prince's child is born of David's line His
name is wonderful, his grace Divine.
Arise, rejoice, sing hymns of joy and mirth,
And worship him all nations upon the earth;
3. Sweet Jesus Christ our Saviour here we find,
From sin he hath redeemed all mankind,

And now he reigns above the starry skies,
Where Saints and Angels sing continually.(x2)

4. Let every soul in joyful accents sing Loud
praises to our great Almighty King,
p Let us with them unite to swell the sound,
p Goodwill to men and peace on earth are found;
f Let us with them unite to swell the sound,
f Goodwill to men and peace on earth are found.
Sung at Aldington and Otham

Lazerus

1. Come all you worthy Christian men that are so
very poor,
Remember how poor Lazerus lay at the rich
man's door,
A-begging for those crumbs of bread that from
his table fell;
The scripture doth inform us all that he now in
heav'n doth dwell.
2. Now Job he was a patient man, the richest in
the East;
How he was brought to poverty, his troubles soon
increased,
He bore them all most patiently, from sin he did
refrain,
He always trusted in the Lord, he soon got rich
again.
3. The time it will soon come, that parted we
must be,
The only thing that doth remain is to joy our
misery;
For soon we must account give, both great as
well as small,
Remember all good Christian friends, one God
will judge us all.
4. Though poor I am contented, no riches do I
crave,

For they are all but vanity on this side of the grave;
Where some they roll in riches, their glass will soon run out,
No riches we brought in this world, nor none can we take out.

5. Come all you worthy Christians, that dwell within this land,
Don't spend your time in rioting, remember you're but man;
Be watchful for your latter end, be ready when you're called,
There's many changes in this world, some rises and some falls.

Collected from Mrs Lurcock of Bredgar, Kent, noted by Miss Alice Travers and included in the Frances Collinson collection, Vaughan Williams Memorial Library

WSW: Eythorne

1. While shepherds watched their flocks by night
All sea ted on the ground
The angel of the Lord came down, (x2)
And glory shone around.
2. 'Fear not,' said he, for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled minds.
'Glad tidings of great joy I bring,
To you and all mankind.'
3. 'To you in David's town this day
Is born of David's line
The Saviour who is Christ the Lord
And this shall be the sign.'
4. 'The heavenly Babe you there shall find
To human view displayed.
All meanly wrapped in swathing bands
And in a manger laid.'
5. Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith

Appeared a shining throng
Of angels praising God, who thus
Addressed their joyful song.

6. All glory be to God on high
And to the earth be peace;
Goodwill henceforth from heaven to men
Begin and never cease.

Tune composed by Canterbury shoemaker Thomas Clarke, who also composed Cranbrook.

Behold the Grace Appears

[NB volume marks in v.5, don't wake the baby!]

1. f Behold, behold, the grace appears,
Thy promise is fulfilled, (x2)
Mary the wondrous virgin, bears,
p And Jesus is the child, mp and Jesus is the child,
mf And Jesus is the child, f and Jesus is the child
2. The Lord, the Lord, the highest God,
Calls Him His only Son, He bids Him rule the lands abroad,
p And gives him David's throne, mp And gives him David's throne.
And gives him David's throne. (x4)
3. O'er Jacob, Jacob, shall He reign,
With a peculiar sway, (x2)
The nations shall His grace obtain,
His kingdom ne'er decay. (x4)
4. To bring, to bring the glorious news,
A heavenly form appears, (x2)
He tells the shepherds of the news,
And banishes their fears. (x4)
5. f 'Go, humble, humble swains,' did say, 'To David's city fly, (x2)
p 'The promised Infant born today,
p 'Doth in a manger lie.' p 'Doth in a manger lie.'
p 'Doth in a manger lie.' f 'Doth in a manger lie.'

6. f 'With looks, with looks, and hearts serene,
'Go visit Christ your King,' (x2)

And straight a flaming troop was seen,
p The shepherds heard them sing, mp the shepherds heard them sing,
mf The shepherds heard them sing, f the shepherds heard them sing.

7. In worship, worship, so divine,
Let saints employ their tongues, (x2)

With the celestial hosts we join,
And loud repeat their songs. (x4)

8. f All glory, glory to God on high!
And heav'nly peace on Earth, (x2)

Goodwill to men, to angels joy,
At our Redeemer's birth. (x4)

Sung at Bethersden. Lyrics by Isaac Watts 1674-1748

Ditchling Carol

Ch. Be merry all, be merry all, with holly deck the festive hall,

Prepare the song, the feast, the hall, to welcome merry Christmas.

1. But oh remember gentles gay, for you who bask in fortune's ray,

The year is all a holiday, the poor have only Christmas.

2. When you with velvets mantled o'er, defy December's tempest roar.

O spare one garment from your store, to clothe the poor at Christmas.

3. From blazing loads of fuel awhile, your homes are within summer smile;

Oh spare one faggot from your pile, to warm the poor at Christmas.

4. When you the costly banquet deal, to guests who never famine feel;

O spare one morsel from your meal, to feed the poor at Christmas.

5. When gen'rous wine your care controls, and gives new joy to happier souls;

O spare one goblet from your bowls, to cheer the poor at Christmas.

6. So shall each note of mirth appear, More sweet to heaven than praise or prayer;

And angels in their carols there Shall bless the poor at Christmas.

The Ditchling Carol lyrics by poet William Robert Spencer, tune by shoemaker and church musician Peter Parsons (or Preston)

The Moon Shines Bright

1. The moon shines bright, the stars give light, a little before it was day,

The Lord, our God, he calls on us, and bids us to wake and pray.

2. Awake, awake! good people all, awake and you shall hear,

How our Lord our God died on the cross, for us he loved so dear.

3. In yonder garden green doth grow, as green as any leek,

Our Lord our God he waters us, with his heavenly dew so sweet.

4. So teach your children well, dear man, it's whilst that you are here,

It will be better for your soul, dear man, when you are gone from here.

5. To day you might be alive, dear man, and worth ten thousand pound,

Tomorrow might be dead, dear man, and your corpse lie underground.

6. The turf all at your head, dear man, and another at your feet,

When your good deeds and your bad deeds, before the Lord will meet.

Collected from James Beale of Warehorne by Cecil Sharp in 1908 and Mrs Alice Harden, Hamstreet, 1911

WSW: Pentonville

1. While shepherds watched their flocks by night All seated on the ground (x2)

The angel of the Lord came down, And glory shone around, (x4)

2. 'Fear not,' said he, for mighty dread Had seized their troubled minds.

'Glad tidings of great joy I bring, (x2)

To you and all mankind.' (x3)

3. 'To you in David's town this day

Is born of David's line

The Saviour who is Christ the Lord (x2)

And this shall be the sign.' (x3)

4. 'The heavenly Babe you there shall find To human view displayed.

All meanly wrapped in swathing bands (x2)

And in a manger laid.' (x3)

5. Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith Appeared a shining throng

Of angels praising God, who thus (x2)

Addressed their joyful song.(x3)

6. All glory be to God on high

And to the earth be peace;

Goodwill henceforth from heaven to men (x2)

Begin and never cease. (x3)

Canterbury bookseller William Marsh's

Pentonville tune was published in 1815.

Pentonville was then a fashionable new housing

estate in North London. The carol is still very

popular in the villages around Sheffield.

Oxford Christmas Version

1. mp Hark the glad sound! The saviour comes, The saviour promised long;

mf Let every heart prepare a throne

f Let every heart prepare a throne

ff Let every heart prepare a throne

And every voice a song.

2. mp He comes the prisoners to release, In Satan's bondage held.

mf The gates of brass before Him burst, (x2)

ff The iron fetters yield.

3. He comes the broken heart to bind, the bleeding soul to cure,

And with the treasures of His grace, To enrich the humble poor.

4. Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace, thy welcome shall proclaim.

And heaven's eternal arches ring,

With thy be loved name.

Sung at Oxford. Composed by Philip Doddridge, (1702-1751).

The Seven Joys of Mary

1. The first good joy that Mary had, it was the joy of one,

To see her own son Jesus, to ride above the sun,

Refrain: To ride above the sun, good man, and

blessed may He be;

Both Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, To all eternity.

2. The next good joy that Mary had, it was the joy of two,

To see her own son Jesus, to make the lame to go.

3. The next good joy that Mary had, it was the joy of three.

When that her own son Jesus did make the blind to see.

4. The next good joy that Mary had, it was the joy of four,

To see her own son Jesus, to read the scriptures o'er.

5. The next good joy that Mary had, it was the joy of five,

To see her own son Jesus, to raise the dead to life.

6. The next good joy that Mary had, it was the joy of six, To see her own son Jesus, To wear the Crucifix.

7. The next good joy that Mary had, it was the joy of seven,

To see her own son Jesus, to wear the crown of heaven.

Taken from 'A Kent Christmas', by Fran and Geoff Doel. The carol was contributed by local folklore researcher and collector Simon Evans. It was collected in Gravesend, in the 1880s

Hark! What Sounds

1. Hark! What sounds! Salutes our ears,
Christ, the Lord, at length appears,
Unto us a child is born, Zion is no more forlorn.

2. Come, ye saints, arise and sing, glory be to God our King.

Unto us a son is given, angels bring the news from heaven.

3. Who are these that come from afar, led by Jacob's rising star?

Lo, they gather like a cloud, or as doves their window crowd.

4. Strangers they to Zion come, there to seek a peaceful home.

Zion wonders at the sight, Zion feels a strange delight.

5. Son of Zion sing aloud, see her sky without a cloud,

God shall make her joys complete, Zion's sun shall never set.

From the music books of Robert Thomas Bottle (1761-1849) of Harrietsham

WSW:Lyngham

1. While shepherds watched their flocks by night
All seated on the ground

The angel of the Lord came down, (x2)

And glory shone around, (x3)

2. 'Fear not,' said he, for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled minds.

'Glad tidings of great joy I bring, (x2)

To you and all mankind.' (x3)

3. 'To you in David's town this day

Is born of David's line

The Saviour who is Christ the Lord (x2)

And this shall be the sign.' (x3)

4. 'The heavenly Babe you there shall find

To human view displayed.

All meanly wrapped in swathing bands (x2)

And in a manger laid.' (x3)

5. Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith

Appeared a shining throng

Of angels praising God, who thus (x2)

Addressed their joyful song.(x3)

6. All glory be to God on high

And to the earth be peace;

Goodwill henceforth from heaven to men (x2)

Begin and never cease. (x3)

Sung at Aldington, Bethersden and Smarden

Shepherds Rejoice

1. Shepherds rejoice, lift up your eyes,

And send your fears away, (x2)

News from the regions of the skies, Salvation's born to day. (x3)

2. Jesus the God, whom angels fear,
Comes down to dwell with you,

Today he makes his entrance here,
But not as monarchs do.

3. No gold nor purple swaddling bands,
No royal shining things,
A manger for his cradle stands, and holds the King of Kings.

4. Go shepherds where the infant lies,

And see his humble throne,

With tears of joy in all your eyes,

Go shepherds, kiss the Son.

Lyrics: Dr. Isaac Watts (1674-1748) Music: John Fawcett, Bolton (1789-1867), and found in a manuscript book used at Bilsington, and transcribed by Tony Singleton. Tony then set Watt's lyrics to Fawcett's tune.

WSW: Sweet Chiming Bells

1. While shepherds watched their flocks by night
All seated on the ground,

The angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around.

2. 'Fear not,' said he, for mighty dread

Had seized their troubled minds,

'Glad tidings of great joy I bring,

To you and all mankind.'

3. 'To you in David's town this day

Is born of David's line

The Saviour who is Christ the Lord,

And this shall be the sign.'

4. 'The heavenly Babe you there shall find,

To human view displayed,

All meanly wrapped in swathing bands,

And in a manger laid.'

5. Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith,
Appeared a shining throng,
Of angels praising God, who thus,
Addressed their joyful song.

6. All glory be to God on high,
And to the earth be peace,
Goodwill henceforth from heaven to men,
Begin and never cease.

*Sweet Chiming Bells was well known across
England during the 19thC, and was doubtless also
sung in Kent. Versions with different verses
unrelated to the While Shepherds biblical story
also exist.*

Good King Wenceslas

1. Good King Wenceslas looked out, on the Feast
of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about, deep and crisp
and even;
Brightly shone the moon that night, tho' the frost
was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight, gath'ring winter
fuel.

2. *[low voices]* 'Hither, page, and stand by me, if
thou know'st it, telling,
'Yonder peasant, who is he? Where and what his
dwelling?'

[high voices] 'Sire, he lives a good league hence,
underneath the mountain;
'Right against the forest fence, by Saint Agnes'
fountain.'

3. *[low]* 'Bring me flesh, and bring me wine,
bring me pine logs hither,
'Thou and I shall see him dine, when we bear
them thither.'
[all] Page and monarch, forth they went, forth
they went together;

Through the rude wind's wild lament and the
bitter weather.

4. *[high voices]* 'Sire, the night is darker now,
and the wind blows stronger;
Fails my heart, I know not how, I can go no
longer.'

[low] 'Mark my footsteps, good my page. Tread
thou in them boldly,
'Thou shalt find the winter's rage freeze thy
blood less coldly.'

5. *[all]* In his master's steps he trod, where the
snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod which the saint had
printed.

Therefore, Christian men, be sure, wealth or rank
possessing,
Ye who now will bless the poor, shall yourselves
find blessing.

*Lyrics by John Mason Neale, of East Grinstead,
working with Thomas Helmore, Master of the
Choristers at The Chapel Royal, St James's,
London. The tune is adapted from a 1582 book
published in the once-Finnish city of Turku, which
is now part of Sweden.*

God Rest ye Merry, Gentlemen

1. God rest you merry, gentlemen, let nothing you
dismay,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour was born upon this
day,
To save us all from Satan's power when we were
gone astray:

Ch. O tidings of comfort and joy,
comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy.

2. From God our heavenly Father a blessed angel
came,

And unto certain shepherds, brought tidings of
the same,
How that in Bethlehem was born the Son of God
by name:

3. The shepherds at those tidings Rejoiced much
in mind,
And left their flocks a-feeding in tempest, storm
and wind,
And went to Bethlehem straightway this blessed
Babe to find:

4. But when to Bethlehem they came, whereat
this Infant lay,
They found Him in a manger, Where oxen feed on
hay;
His mother Mary kneeling, Unto the Lord did
pray:

5. Now to the Lord sing praises, All you within
this place,
And with true love and brotherhood each other
now embrace;
This holy tide of Christmas all other doth deface
*This carol is known from printed broadside
ballads going back to the 17thC, and was made
popular by author, antiquarian and lawyer
William Sandys (1792-1874), who lived in London.*

The Holly and the Ivy

1. The holly and the ivy, when they are both full
grown,
Of all the trees that are in the wood, the holly
bears the crown.

Ch. The rising of the sun, and the running of the
deer,
The playing of the merry organ, sweet singing in
the choir.

2. The holly bears a blossom, as white as the lily
flower,

And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ to be our sweet saviour.

3. The holly bears a berry, as red as any blood,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ, for to do poor sinners good.

4. The holly bears a prickle, as sharp as any thorn,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ, On Christmas day in the morn.

5. The holly bears a bark, as bitter as any gall,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ, for to redeem us all.

Lyrics from broadside ballads published in the early 19thC. The tune was collected from a Mrs. Mary Clayton of Chipping Campden, Oxfordshire, by Cecil Sharp.

The Pilgrim's Way

1. Christmas tide is here once more, a time of joy and mirth,
Amid the feasting let's be sure to acclaim our Saviour's birth,
Let us sing and shout, let the bells ring out from tow'rs and steeples all about,
In ancient towns beside the Downs, a long the Pilgrims' Way,
A long the Pilgrims' Way.

2. *[low voices]* Men of Kent all year have raised their apples sheep and crops;
By autumn too, the Lord be praised!, a bumper yield of hops.

[all] Let us spare a thought for those with naught
And spread our bounty through the county,
And let each Went, each lane of Kent, become a Pilgrims' Way.

3. *[all]* All are welcomed in the Waits, be they nightingales or croakers;

Our carols soon will rock your gates, be ye farmers or stockbrokers.

Our choirs are trained by their magisters Who hope we'll sing like larks, not hagisters,
In churches filled, across The Weald, and by the Pilgrims' Way.

4. *[high voices]* Long ago a blazing star brought light to this dark Earth,
And Wise Men marked it from afar, as the sign of Jesus' birth.

[low voices] Came Melchior, and old Caspar, and not forgetting Balthazar,
They gladly trod to see their God, along a Pilgrims' Way.

5. *[all]* Merry Christmas to you all, and a prosperous New Year;
May happiness now bless us all and those whom we hold dear.

Wishing peace on Earth, goodwill to all, let the cheer and song echo through the hall,
The goodwill here, let's keep all year, and seek the Pilgrims' Way.

Lyrics adapted for The Old Kent Carollers with kind permission of John Brooks, who penned the lyrics. The tune is taken from the 19C folk song The Farmer's Boy.

Our thanks go to George Frampton, whose book of Kent carols *Arise and Hail the Happy Day* provided many of the carols we sing. It is published by the Faversham Society and is number 124 on the organisation's publications list, should you wish to buy a copy. Thanks also go to Kathy Wallwork and John Mooore for finding further Kent carols, and to Kathy for

curating the working versions of our carols, and for developing the harmonies we sing.