

TRANSCRIPTION

Duncan Williamson sings a medley of drinking songs: first a bit of “The Tinker’s Wedding,” then a pair of songs of his own composition: “The Drinkin o the Doddle-um” and his own version of “The Day We Went to Rothesay–O”

ScottishVoicesProj.0471

[This recording was made in October 1987 in the sitting room of a rented house outside Ithaca, New York. Present were Duncan Williamson and John Niles. Niles’ wife Carole Newlands and their young son Alan were also present from time to time during this session.]

JN: So what is this one, Duncan, again?

DW: It goes to the tune o “The Tinker’s Weddin.”¹

JN: I see. You’re not going to sing me “The Tinker’s Wedding”?

DW: I’m going to do both. There’s na much to “The Tinker’s Wedding.” There’s just a short thing o “The Tinker’s Wedding.” [*Sings:*]

Oh, dummera — [*stops short, starts again at the beginning:*]

1 Oh, it’s {been upon the border bent}
{To serve} the tinkers pit their tent,
It’s old and young they did consent
To hae a tinker’s weddin-O.

Chorus: Dummera-doo, a-dummera-day
Dammera-doo an a-dadden-oh
Dummera-doo an a-dooena-day,
Hurrah for the tinker’s waddin-O!

2 For old Belle was there hersel
Of all this she was canty-O
She went tae tell her dochter Belle
Tae bing the beenship gadgie-O.

[bing the beenship gadgie:
go get the good man (cant)]

Dummera-doo, a-dummera-day
Dammera-doo an a-dadden-oh
Dummera-doo an a-dooena-day,

¹ “The Tinkers’ Wedding” (Roud no. 5408) is a traditional comic song, recorded in British broadsides, that has been revived and recorded by singers associated with the Folk Song Revival. The Irish playwright J.M.Synge wrote a play of the same name that features some colorful low-life comedy.

Hurrah for the tinker's waddin-O!

- 3 There was salmon truit an boiled eel
 A wee bottle of Syrop o Steel²
 A wee bottle o Syrop o Steel
 Tae carry on the waddin-O.

Dummera-doo, a-dummera-day
Dammera-doo an a-dadden-oh
Dummera-doo an a-dooena-day,
Hurrah for the tinker's waddin-O!

DW: There's a lot to "The Tinker's Waddin," ye know. Many many verses of it. How they robbed a still and they stole a bottle of — Ah dinnae remember much. My father used tae sing it all the time.

But the one I liked the best was "The Drinkin o the Doddle-um," tae the same tune. About the meth-drinkers. Eh, how does it go again? That one is really good. [*Thinks about it for a while, then sings:*]

- 1 Oh Sandy McCallum, he had one ee,
 He used to tak it in his tea.
 He swam frae Tayport tae Dundee³
 For half a gill of doddle-um.

chorus: Dummera-doo, a-dooera-day
 Dammera-doo an a-daddie-oh
 Dummera-doo an a-dooena-day,
 The drinkin o the doddle-um!

- 2 They drink it up in Aberdeen,
 They drink it doon in Glesca Green,
 They drink it every place I've been —
 The blue stuff called the doddle-um.

Dammera-dooera-dooera-day
Dammera-dooera-daden-oh.

² Later in the recording Williamson explains what is meant by the term transcribed here as "Syrup o Steel": it is non-alcoholic cough medicine of the kind prescribed by doctors for sore throats. "They didn't have any money to buy something to drink, so they brought Syrop o Steel to drink" [*laughs*].

³ "Frae Tayport to Dundee": there is an annual swimming competition between the town of Tayport and the city of Dundee, located on opposite shores of the river Tay as it empties into the North Sea. Crossing this wide channel, with its strong currents, would test the abilities of any long-distance swimmer.

Dammera-dooena-dooena-day —
The drinkin o the doddle-um!

- 3 Big Maggie came doon frae Montrose,
But she had warts upon her nose.
She used to tak it in her brose
The blue stuff called the doddle-um!

Dummera-doo, dummera-day
Dummera-dooena daden-oh.
Dummera-dooena dooena-day —
The blue stuff called the doddle-um!

- 4 Oh, “Twenty days,” the judge he said,
For “You’ll spend it in a wooden bed.
And I’m sure to God you’ll be gotten dead
With the drinkin o the doddle-um!”

Dummera-dooena-dooena-day
Dummera-dooena-daden-oh.
Dummera-dooena-dooena-day —
The drinkin o the doddle-um!

- 5 Some drink whisky, some drink wine
And some drink drinks of every kind.
But some they cannae pay their fine,
When they’re jailed for drinkin doddle-um!

Dummera-dooena-dooena-day
Dummera-dooena-daden-oh.
Dummera-dooena-dooena-day —
The drinkin o the doddle-um!

- 6 Oh “Twenty days,” the judge he said,
“For you’ll spend it in a wooden bed,
And I swear tae God you’ll be gotten dead
For the drinkin o the doddle-um!”

Dummera-dooena-dooena-day
Dummena-dooena-daden-oh.
Dummena-dooena-dooena-day —
The blue stuff called the doddle-um!

DW: [*Laughs, along with JN.*] It’s real funny, eh?

JN: Is that yours?

DW: Yeah — that's right, yeah.

JN: That's good! That's good, Duncan.

DW: That was the old travelling folk makin methylated spirits, yeah.

JN: When did you write that?

DW: Oh, I wrote that back a bit — oh, way back in the sixties. That was in my book, yeah.

JN: In your book of songs?⁴

DW: My book of songs, yeah. —Did you ever hear my version of “The Day We Went to Rothesay”?

JN: Well, I heard you do a bit, but maybe I haven't heard the whole song.

DW: “The Day We Went to Rothesay.” My version of “The Day We Went to Rothesay.”

JN Did you write this?

DW: Aye.

JN: Then I didn't hear this.

DW: There's many versions of “The Day We Went to Rothesay,” but this is a version you'll not find anywhere but from me. [*Laughs.*] Eh — [*Sings:*]

- 1 Oh, the sun was shinin in the west
And I was shinin in my best
And Maggie like a queen was dressed
The day we went to Rothesay-O!
- 2 Alang the quai we made oor way
Like codgers on a rainy day
And bonnie lassies their feet display
Alang the shores o Rothesay-O.
- 3 Oh, a fiddler there tae make his brass
He played tae entice both lad and lass
But for dancing steps nane could surpass

⁴ The reference is to a notebook in which Duncan once kept the texts of songs that he had written. He gave the notebook to a friend, and if it still exists, its whereabouts is unknown.

Oh me an Meg in Rothesay-O.

- 4 When the dance was done Meg says to me,
“There's lassies bathin in the sea;
Oh watch ma claites,” she says to me,
“And I'll hae a dip in Rothesay-O.”

Chorus: Dummera-dooena-dooena-day
Dummena-dooena-daden-oh,
Dummena-dooena-dooena-day,
The day we went to Rothesay-O!

- 5 I says, “Noo Maggie, dinnae gang!”
Says she, “What fun I gae noo a man!” [gae: gave
Then in between twa rocks she ran
Tae change hersel in Rothesay-O.

Dummera-dooena-dooena-day
Dummena-dooena-daddy-oh,
Dummena-dooena-dooena-day,
The day we went to Rothesay-O!

- 6 And she, good gracious, she run doon
I thought that I would nearly swoon
When up she popped in a long blue goon
Among the waves in Rothesay-O.

Dummera-dooena-dooena-day
Dummena-dooena-daddy-oh,
Dummena-dooena-dooena-day,
The day we went to Rothesay-O!

- 7 And when the bathin it was done
Meg fu o life and fu o fun
She lit on a cuddy's back to run [cuddy: donkey
Along the shores of Rothesay-O.

Dummera-dooena-dooena-day
Dummena-dooena-daden-oh,
Dummena-dooena-dooena-day,
The day we went to Rothesay-O!

- 8 But along wi fun there's surely pain
And syne we thought o the folk at hame
When Maggie's new huiks both made of cane

Were broke that day in Rothesay-O.

Dumina dooena dooena day
Dumina dooena daddy-O
Dumina dooena dooena day
The day we went to Rothesay-O!

- 9 She looked demure and sad an meek,
As she laid her head upon my cheek
When I kissed and cuddled she'd made her speak [?]
On our way comin back tae Rothesay-O.

Oh, dumina doo an dooena day
Dumina doo and a dadden-O
Dumina doo-ana doo-ana day
The day we went tae Rothesay-O!

DW: [*Laughs, along with JN.*]

[The excerpt continues with more talk, not transcribed here, about “The Tinker’s Wedding,” its story and its cant vocabulary or other special terms.

Note 1

“Doddle-um” is Duncan’s term for methylated spirits, also known as denatured alcohol. This was ethanol laced with additives that made it potentially nauseating or poisonous. Sandy Stewart remarks that some Travellers drank it for its alcoholic content despite its potentially lethal nature: “Thir wes a man they caad The Rowt . . . Noo he drunk this blue coloured stuff like spirits. Ye mix it wae a drap water an drink it. But its awfie strong! Thirs folk gotten deid wi hit. . . . It wes a dangerous drink. It wed pit ye away awfie quick.” Roger Leitch, ed., *The Book of Sandy Stewart* (Scottish Academic Press, 1988), p. 60).

Note 2

“The Drinking of the Doddle-um” appears to be Williamson’s own composition; there is no Roud number for this song. When Duncan states that this is “the one I liked the best,” what he means more precisely is “This is my favorite songs among the ones that are sung to the tune of ‘The Tinker’s Wedding.’”

Bits of two versions of “The Tinker’s Wedding” as sung by Scottish Travellers can be heard on *Songs and Ballads from Perthshire: Field Recordings of the 1950s*, edited by Maurice Fleming, Scottish Tradition Series, vol. 24 (Greentrax CDTRAX 9024, 2011, tracks 21a-b. Scottish Traveller Davie Stewart’s version of “Rothesay-O,” sung to that same tune, is published by Peter Kennedy, ed., *Folksongs of Britain and Ireland* (Oak Publications, 1975), no. 282, pp. 614–15, with notes at p. 630.

When up she popped in a long blue goon
Among the waves in Rothesay-O.

7 Oh, when the bathin it was done
Bessie fu o life and fu o fun
She lit on a cuddy's back to run
Along the shores of Rothesay-O.

[cuddy: donkey

8 But alang wi fun there's always pain
And syne we thought o the folks at hame
When Bessie's new hooks both made o cane
Were broke that day in Rothesay-O.

Oh, dumina doo an dumina day
Dumina doo-ana daddy-O
Dumina doo-ana doo-ana day
The day we went to Rothesay-O!

9 She looked so sad, demure and meek
I laid my head upon her cheek
An I kissed and cuddled she'd made her speak [?]
On our way comin back frae Rothesay-O.

Oh, dumina doo an dumina day
Dumina doo and a daddy-O
Dumina doo-ana doo-ana day
The day we went to Rothesay-O!