



## FLEETING MOMENTS

Scenes, comic and serious, from Camden's past.

### Background

This CD, the second by Sounds Like, is the recorded version of an entertainment created in response to an invitation by Tudor Allen of the Camden Local History Archive to put on a performance with a historical dimension.

It is very different from the first CD.

First, we are fortunate enough to have the participation of James Gordon as reader, singer and songwriter. James and Ed Lee first worked together in CMU and then in Trident (see website for examples of their work). Recently they have collaborated to put on work by the St Pancras Poets, and especially Roger Robinson. James brings not only his gifts as writer and performer but a stimulating, challenging and at times very offbeat vision of performance.

The other two performers are Jan North and Frances Lee. On this CD Jan takes on new dramatic challenges, while Frances at times takes on the leading singing role.

*Fleeting Moments* is also different from *Love Is...* in its content. The script is partly a presentation of authentic texts (for instance *Witches*), and partly original scripting of historical material (eg Mary's story in the *Workhouse* section). Similarly there are songs from earlier periods (*The Forsaken Mother*), and original songs by both James and Ed (listed below). There is also original music by Ed, notably the Fleet episodes, which form a framework for a poem by Edwin Webb, specially written for this show. Edwin could not be available for the performances, but his return to a creative collaboration is a welcome and valuable addition.

### PERFORMERS

Jan North      singer, reader

James Gordon singer, reader  
Frances Lee singer, reader  
Ed Lee composer, reader, piano

## CONTENT

### Prelude

Fleet Ballad: a specially written song by James, sung by him and arranged by Ed, which is used to set the scene and create a transition for the public from socialising to becoming an audience

Invocation: A parody of the opening of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, performed by Ed after a *Fanfare* written by him. To welcome and prepare the audience.

Fleet Music: *First...* Edwin's words, read by Jan North, framed by Ed's music. Creating the early landscape.

### Manors

Set in Medieval times, and read by all the group, we hear of manor courts and then of a famous banquet, given by William Bruges in 1416. The group then presents the impressive menu – in song. Its form is that of the “cumulative song” (think of *The Twelve Days of Christmas*). We end on the modern site of the banquet.

### May Day

Fleet Music: *Spring...* Edwin leads us to the theme of “new life”. The words are read by Frances.

Milkmaids: Until the reign of Queen Victoria, May Day was celebrated by the milkmaids who brought milk into London in the manner described here. Online you will easily find some of the attractive and informative prints of the celebrations

The Adam and Eve Tavern: We hear of the delights of this popular resort from the landlord, who reads us his publicity leaflet.

In the Long Room (1): As the script puts it “First a duet from Mr James Gordon and Mrs Frances Lee. Outside an old woman returning from the fields stops to listen”. The two traditional songs are the beautiful *Searching for Lambs* and the *Bedfordshire May Day Carol*. Edwin suggests that the latter relates to a very ancient tradition of songs by visitors returning briefly from beyond the grave.

Elizabeth Bocock: Extracts from the records of the Battle Bridge magistrates court. Some things never change...

In the Long Room (2): A rare treat – a rend(er)ing of *Cherry Ripe* by Signora Lotta Cannelloni (Jan)

Street Cries: The street cries of old London have had some impressive settings by noted composers, in particular Orlando Gibbons and Luciano Berio. In this version we try

to create an impression of the aural chaos which must have been the daily experience of Londoners.

### **Witches**

Fleet Music (3): "*the serpents of our crimes*" –James reads the third stanza of Edwin's poem, contrasting with the celebration of life found in the previous section.

Pancras Fields: From an account written during the Civil War, read by James.

Witches Song: Conceived and written by James, this is a grotesque presentation of beliefs about witches. James' presence brought out hitherto unseen talents of Jan and Frances.

Kentish Town: William Woodhouse wrote this sympathetic but horrifying account of a witch hunt in 1703.

### **Pratts**

Sir Charles Pratt was the man who created Camden Town in 1791. In this item you hear in words and music about him, his family and some of the streets he built.

### **Canal boats**

An interesting insight into the lives of those who lived and worked on the first canals is gained from the reports and records of missions set up to encourage the canal people to follow a devout life.

Miss Carpenter a chapel worker, (Frances) narrates

A boatman's wife (Jan) describes her encounter with the missionaries in her own words

The Pickford's Crew is a song written by James in response to the text.

The boatman We eavesdrop an interview between Miss Carpenter and a rather uncooperative boatman from Nottingham (Ed).

Lament: A song with words and music by Ed which presents a more sombre view of the canal life than the often rather romanticised picture which is often encountered

### **The Hardy Tree**

As a young man in 1864, Thomas Hardy was given the task of overseeing the removal of human remains from a part of the churchyard of St Pancras Old Church, during the building of St Pancras railway station. This experience is believed by many authorities to have inspired two poems.

We give the historical facts below, but have chosen to treat the two poems as the response of a young man shocked by what he sees, and that of an older man using images recollected in order to express disillusion.

The Levelled Churchyard: Read by James, this poem is very different from our normal image of the poet's work. Though its gallows humour and lightness might suggest a contemporary response, it was in fact written in 1882.

Neutral Tones: By contrast, one might expect this poem, in which the ash tree is such a strong image, to have drawn on memories long after the experience. In fact it was written in 1867, though not published until 1898.

## St Pancras Workhouse

Most people have some idea of the workhouse system from *Oliver Twist*. Records and satirical ballads and poems show that in the case of St Pancras Workhouse Dickens was not far from the truth.

Poem: James reads this indictment of the workhouse Guardians from the magazine *Punch* in 1867

Song: This *Song of Gratitude* was sung by children in the Wrexham Union Workhouse in 1867. As the tune used is not extant we have used the hymn *The Church's One Foundation*.

Fleet Song (4): This final section contrasts with freshness, mystery and hope of the opening stanza. We have in mind the destruction which industrialised society has inflicted both on the human race and the environment.

Mary: Our character (read by Jan) is fictional but it is a plausible history, as all the details are from contemporary records

The Forsaken Mother: This ballad, sung by Jan and Frances, could well have been known to Mary, as it was popular, and had appeared some forty or fifty years before.

## The Bedford

We create two imaginary scenes from nights at the most famous Camden Town Music Hall.

Song: Albert Day (Ed), a local artiste gives us a version of *Henry the Eighth* which is more enthusiastic than skilled. He accompanies himself on the spoons.

Song: Jan presents the ageing Marie Lloyd, singing *The Boy in the Gallery*, her first success, which she had at the age of 15.

## Finale

Dancing in the graveyard: After our stroll through history, we move into a very modern idiom, which in performances is meant to send the audience out smiling. The title recalls one of the ways (frequently condemned by the Church) in which ordinary people in Medieval times celebrated feast days.

The phrase is meant to sum up the underlying theme of the show, which is transience - the interaction of life and death, and the need to embrace fully the fleeting moments of life and joy. It also reflects the underlying philosophy of our performance, that serious themes can be expressed through entertainment and fun.

Acknowledgements:

Some materials are original and copyright of the writers:

Edward Lee: Script. Songs (words and music) *Fanfare, Fleet Music, William Bruges' Banquet, Pratts, Street Cries, Lament, Dancing in the graveyard*

James Gordon: songs (words and music): *Fleet Ballad, Witches Song, The Pickford's Crew*

Edwin Webb: *Fleet Poem*

Other material is traditional or historical and strictly speaking not subject to copyright

<i>Searching for Lambs_</i>	traditional
<i>Bedfordshire May Day Carol</i>	traditional
<i>Cherry Ripe</i>	words: Robert Herrick; music: Charles Edward Horn
<i>The Levelled Churchyard</i>	Thomas Hardy
<i>Neutral Tones</i>	Thomas Hardy
<i>Song of Gratitude</i>	anon
<i>The Church's One Foundation,</i>	music: Samuel Wesley
<i>The Forsaken Mother</i>	traditional
<i>Won't You Buy My Pretty Flowers</i>	words: Arthur W. French; music: George W. Persley
<i>I'm Henery the Eighth</i>	Fred Murray and R. P. Weston
<i>Knees Up Mother Brown</i>	traditional
<i>The Boy in the Gallery</i>	George Ware

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We also wish to thank Tudor Allen for giving us the opportunity to create and present this work and to Judy Powell, Chaplain of St Paul's Church, Camden Square for the chance to repeat it.

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