Folk Review was a British magazine dedicated to folk music, which was published monthly between 1971 to 1979. In this 1978 edition, a piece about Agincourt folk music was published by John Paddy Browne; which we have reproduced for you below. A scanned version of the original copy can be found here: DOC040416.

“Southampton is a small, squat city, lying on a flat plain, and caught in a triangle at the confluence of two rivers which finally meet at a building called the Ocean Terminal, the first piece of England upon which most American feet first alight.

As a city it is no great shakes, having had most of its character knocked out of it by Hitler’s bombers during the last War, and by an unimaginative planning department afterwards who eccentrically resorted coach-width roads, and replaced fussy but interesting red sandstone buildings with plain white concrete two-storey blocks of no interest whatsoever. That a few relics remain of pre-war Southampton and fewer still of more ancient days – is more by the grace of God than by any deliberate policy of the Council, whose chief aim in this life seems to be the extraction of as much money as possible, by whatever means from the city’s already hard-raked inhabitants.

To be fair, though, we have recently enjoyed a daredevil organisation called the Leisure Services Department, sponsoring good quality and cheap entertainment (a lot of it folk); and the long established Friends of Old Southampton have done much over the years to awaken a sense of the town’s great past in the minds of those interested enough to get off their backsides and follow the itinerant Friends on their occasional odysseys around the few remaining relics.

And what a past!

A major commercial port since the time that clever Rome divined its strategic importance, Southampton saw wealth arrive and warriors depart. It enjoyed great days of mercantile hubbub until Mediterranean pirates made the high seas a no-go area, and Southampton’s nautical merchant trade took a dive. Wine and wool were big things in the old days, and relics

of both trades still survive; indeed, the wine cellars which catacomb the city are the most numerous of their kind in the country, and give some council-house kids somewhere safe to play.

Southampton also provided the passageway for the Great Plague. The City's oldest folk club, the Fo'c'sle, is wont to stage annual concerts at an elegantly-restored merchant's warehouse – a small hall separates by a single flight of steps from the very gate through which the Black Death entered England, and through which, too, Henry V's men set out for their appointment with Charles VI of France.

Henry had arrived in Southampton to set up his armies (years later, American and British armies would also amass in Southampton for another trip to France, but that's another story.) The 'people's version' of our present yarn is that English and French kings had traditionally operated a sort of mutual protection racket as a peace preservative. So long as the two monarchs amused each other with gifts of bullion, land, ships and other goodies, peace reigned. But when Charles sent Henry a set of tennis balls, Henry was so peeved that Agincourt resulted. Well, as I say, that's the folk version of the story and there's a ballad to go with it:

As our king was lying all in his bed
A certain thought came into his head,
That he would send the king of France
And cause his tribute to be paid.

'Arise my page, my trusty page,
My trusty page arise to me,
And you will go to the king of France
And bring the tribute due to me.'

'What news my page, my trusty page,
From English king, what news to me?'
'I have come from the English king,

To bring the tribute due from thee.'

'Your king is young and of tender years,
And has not come to my degree,
So I will send him three tennis balls
That with them he might play, might he'

'Arise my page, my trusty page,
My trusty page, arise to me,
And we will send him such tennis balls
That in fair France he never did see.'

The legend has it that Henry had the tennis balls encapsulated in concrete and used some of them (there were more than three) as cannon shots. Some are still to be seen as Southampton's Tudor House Museum, a pleasantly subdued piece of restoration not a stone's throw from the merchant's hall and the West Gate already mentioned.

Whatever the truth of the matter, things went from bad to worse with the monarchs, and as time went by, there seemed little hope of reconciliation:

Recruit me Cheshire and Lancashire,
And Derby man that are so free;
But no married man and no widow's son
For no widow's curse shall fall on me…

They recruited Cheshire and Lancashire,
And Derby men that are so free,
And when their numbers were counted o'er
There were forty thousand men and three

That ballad, so far as it goes, agrees largely that with the one version given in Child (its number 164). Child declares that all known versions of the ballad are modern (about mid-18th

century in origin), and his lists fragmentary digressions in the text. The version I've known for years is only slightly as odds with Child's:

As our king lay musing on his bed
He bethought himself upon a time...

Which isn't as neat a rhyme as 'head' and which, as a result, may indicate an older vintage.

Henry was stern enough in his dealings with Charles, but was no without the grace to see a last minute treaty. At Southampton, his port of embarkation, he again adjusted his claims upon Charles in the hope of averting a war, but Charles has by now felt the flea in his ear, and either couldn't or didn't want to back down.

The sudden discovery of a conspiracy against Henry caught Henry in the worse possible mood, much to the conspirator's ill-luck. Richard, the Earl of Cambridge, the Kings cousin, Lord Scrope of Masham, and Sir Thomas Grey has waited across one of the rivers at a point later forded by an eccentrically designed 'floating bridge' – a steel platform dragged to and fro from bank to bank, and with a penchant for running aground at low tide, or breaking its moorings and drifting happily with the current. Until only a year or so ago, this floating bridge – known locally as the Itchen Ferry ('it wasn't built for comfort, it was built to last,' wrote a local songsmith in its praise) – was the only means of crossing the river to Southampton for a large number of inhabitants, your present story-teller included.

When they thought the moment was right, the conspirators crossed the river to the town side, and walked straight into the arms of all the King's men who had been alerted about the treason. A hasty trial took place at the town's minstrel room (now a Watney's house known as The Red Lion, and looking much as it must have done in those days) as which Henry himself officiated. The three traitors were found guilty and summarily executed a few yards up the street at the town's Bargate. Grey was put to death immediately: he was a commoner and was tried by the jury. Cambridge and Scrope were tried by a council of peers; Cambridge, being of royal blood, was allowed to walk to the place of execution, but Scrope was carried

there on a hurdle.

On the following morning, a last chance was offered to Charles; the minstrels assembled, only to be silenced by Henry who, although he favoured music and celebration as a rule, on this occasion felt that the coming battle was a pointless exercise, a likely waste of life and effort, and therefore little cause for song. But the ballads persisted:

O then we marched all into France,
With drums and trumpets so merrily,
And so upspoke the king of France
'O yonder comes the proud Henry

The first shot that the Frenchmen gave,
They killed our Englishmen so free;
But we killed ten thousand of the French
And the rest full cowardly ran away.

Shakespeare's play on the affair has a scene (it's the fourth in Act IV) set on the battlefield in which Pistol, in combat with a French soldier, shouts 'Yield, cur!' The soldier replies 'Je pense que vous etes gentilhomme de bonne qualite.' And Pistole retorts 'Qualities calmie custure me!' – a remark passed over by most Shakespearean scholars as a meaningless phrase, as indeed it is in Pistol's scornful mouth. But the refrain of a 15th century Irish song bears a remarkably close phonetic similarity to Pistol's exclamation: *Cailin o chois tSiuire me* would remain fairly obscure, lost in Queen Elizabeth's Virginal Book until Chapell, in his *Popular Music of the Olden Time, Volume 2, 1859*, published for the first time. William Byrd's arrangement,, in the notes of which later Irish tunes (such as 'The croppy boy' – the 'good men and true' version) may be heard whispering. Nowadays, Mary O'Hara may be heard signing the Byrd arrangement, a song called by Chappell, and presumably Byrd, 'Callino Casturame.' Incidentally, the earliest manuscripted tune in Dublin's Trinity College collection is one called 'Callino.'

Henry, meanwhile, had crossed the Somme after a long northwards sweep, the ballads tell us. It was 25th October 1415, and the conflicting reports which record Henry's feelings toward the French at this moment reflect amply the proverb that the first casualty of war is the truth. That Henry could not be appeased now or at any time except by a complete victory over the French was both a political expedient and a popular wish. Certainly the French should have been more wary of Henry: the young Englishman, while still the Prince of Wales, had established his reputation as a campaign general when he defeated the rebel Hotspur in a pitched battle, and organised a small mobile striking force to put paid to Owen Glendower's Welsh uprising and the siege of Aberystwyth in 1407.

Three months had passed since his departure from Southampton on August 11th. The march northwards to Calais, avoiding Paris, had been a strategic risk taken by a leader who, his victories and confidences piling up, experienced less and less self-doubt. Now standing at Agincourt, he found his way blockaded by a French army which outnumbered his own by three to one. He drew the French cavalry into a massive attack against the English archers in a brilliant manoeuvre which finished Charles's hopes once and for all. The archers' counter attack must really have sounded like that horrific flight of arrows ingeniously engineered for Olivier's film version of the story (achieved, I understand, by swinging a microphone at speed through the air, and playing the recorded results backwards!)

Well then we marched to Paris gates
With drums and trumpets so merrily,
We fought the king until he cried
Have mercy on my men and me

O I will send your tribute home,
Ten tons of gold is due to me,
And the fairest lily that grows in France
To the rose of England give I free.

So, apart from lands gained and enemies quenched, it *had* all been a waste of time. The

French had lost face in a quarrel they might have avoided. Henry's victories were soon to be threatened by reconciliation between the Dauphinists (formerly the Armagnacs) and the Burgundians. The murder of the Duke of Burgundy by the Dauphin in 1419 showed how much the friction between the French factions out-weighed their hatred of the English, though only three months after Burgundy's death, the new duke had given way to all of Henry's demands. The whole mish-mash of internal French politics was to continue until Henry's death (probably from dysentery) at Bois de Vincennes on August 31 1422. He was 34 years old, and had reigned for only 9 years.

Whether or not Agincourt had been a waste of time, Southampton had again proven its value as a port, satisfying an ancient desire of the English to own French estates. Little remains in Southampton now to record Henry's departures apart from the few concrete-encrusted tennis balls which have an occasional habit of disappearing from the Tudor House museum. Some ballads tell us that Charles sent Henry a *ton* of tennis balls (see Child); if that's even half the truth, then one of two specimens rarely available in an out-of-the-way museum is short shrift for history.

The West Gate, Henry's last tunnel from England, and once licked by the broad sheet of Southampton Water, now looks across a reclaimed plateau which offers foundations for a large, grubby Pirelli factory, a modern swimming baths, a tall hotel, and the sprawling maze of Southampton's new docks with its container port resembling a massive Lego set. From the West-gate too, the little Mayflower set sale, and we commemorate that significant episode with a slim panatela of a column, and a children's playground. Somewhere in the far beyond is the sea which played such a part in the city's life – which was, in fact, the reason for the city's ever coming into being. Now, like its history, it's being pushed further and further away.

Still, so what?