

65 Million BC to AD 1945

(A History of the English People)

by

John Clachan



Story, Words & Chords

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All songs written by John Clachan except those marked with an asterisk (\*) which were written by J & C Clachan.

## 65 Million BC to AD 1945 (A History of the English People)

### Introduction

The arrival of Covid 19 in early 2020, and the 'lockdowns' that followed, gave me plenty of leisure time and space for writing new songs, many of which turned out to have historical narratives, including a number that were related specifically to the theme of 'ancient man'.

When I began to consider which new songs would be suitable for my next CD, I realised I almost had enough material to create a 'concept' album that, with a stretch of the imagination, could loosely follow the course of the history of the English people. I chose a selection based on events that occurred in the 'BC' years of our history and a further selection specific to the 'AD' years, writing a few extra songs to fill in some gaps. The resulting CD follows a path that leads from our ancient forebears, through a whistle stop tour of some of England's historical landmarks, to date.

I recorded the basic songs using bouzouki/keyboard and then asked two friends, Mark Campbell and Ronnie Laing, to provide the rhythm section for the project, both of whom played on my previous CD (Postcards from England). After a long delay due to Covid restrictions, rehearsals finally began in June 2021.

So, welcome to 65 million years of our history distilled into 14 songs! Please bear in mind that many of the dates given for the songs are rough guides only, to place them in their historical time line. The factual details have been checked but, hopefully, the listener will make allowance for a few flights of poetic license that occasionally slip from the pen - I hope you enjoy the historical ride!

John Clachan - October 2021

## Chapter 1 - The BC to AD Overture

I usually like to start a CD with an up-tempo number, to set the scene, rather than a ballad. However, as I felt the songs on the current project needed to appear in chronological order, due to the historical theme behind the concept, and the earliest song being a gentle ballad, I looked to other options for the opening number.

When searching through the songs looking for ideas, I became aware of the number of 'hook lines' and 'refrains' etc. amongst them, which made me wonder whether I could link a few of them together to create a musical overture which would introduce the motifs of the songs in advance.

Fortunately, the excerpts of music all gelled together and I soon had my opening number ready to drop into place.

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### The BC to AD Overture

The short excerpts from the songs appear in this order:

- The Last of the Clippers
- The Burning Down
- Soldiers of the Dissolution
- Uncovering
- Henry Eight
- Standing Stones
- The Revenue Men
- Borderline
- The Tiniest Degree

## Chapter 2 - The Tiniest Degree

The story of the CD begins with a song called 'The Tiniest Degree', which takes us right back to the end of the Cretaceous period of Earth's history. Approximately 65 million years ago there occurred what is now called a 'mass extinction event'. This killed off all the dinosaurs, the dominant animal species at the time.

One widely held theory as to why they became extinct is the belief that there was a large meteor strike which caused weather patterns to alter so dramatically that vegetation was decimated. The result of this was that the plant eating dinosaurs saw their food supply simply disappear. Once these giant, plant eating Sauropods died out, their predators then lost their food supply. There was not enough time for dinosaurs to evolve and adapt to the new conditions.

The catastrophe did, however, enable the small mammals, that had been living in the shadow of the dinosaurs, to spread far and wide and eventually become the new dominant life form which, in the long term, led to the evolution of the human race.

The song also marvels at the slim chance of that meteor strike hitting the Earth at that point in history and how a slight change in its orbital path around the sun would have meant that it missed the Earth completely, leaving the dinosaurs unscathed. Bearing in mind that they had already been the dominant form of life for more than 150 million years, it's difficult to see how things would have changed without the 'extinction event' happening - it really was very likely that 'The Tiniest Degree' was responsible for our own existence today!

## The Tiniest Degree F

V.1

F

The shock waves spread so rapidly,

Bb

C

F Bb/C

They ripped along the ground and through the air.

F

The clouds were building angrily,

Bb

C

Dm Bb/C

They'd hide the wounds that daylight would lay bare.

Bridge

Gm

Dm

The chance was 50 million to one,

Bb

C

The aftermath would see much worse to come.

Chorus

F

And to think that such misfortune

Bb

C

Dm / Bb

Hinged upon the tiniest degree.

C

F

Bb/C/F

-----Fates were sealed.

V.2

As the Earth returned to darkness,

No light meant vegetation soon would die.

Without 'mother nature's' harvest,

Herbivores would lose their food supply.

5

Bridge

The strike would change the face of planet Earth

But tragedy would offer up rebirth.

Chorus

And to think that such misfortune

Hinged upon the tiniest degree.

-----Fates were sealed.

Middle

Dm

Am

An asteroid, the harbinger of doom,

Bb

F

So hard to comprehend inside my room,

Dm

Am

Could threaten the survival of us all.....

Bb

C

Were another one to fall.

V.3

With the Sauropods' extinction,

The carnivores were not that far behind.

For fate makes no distinction,

Evolution was too steep a hill to climb.

Bridge

In the time it took the planet to repair,

Small mammals filled the niches everywhere.

Chorus

And to think that our existence

Hinged upon the tiniest degree.

-----Fates were sealed. x2

6

### Chapter 3 - The Missing Link

The small mammals that survived the dinosaurs' extinction event quickly spread and diversified into a wide range of creatures, many of which we still see today, although they would have looked very different then to what they do now!

Fossils show that Primates, the branch of mammals to which humans belong, started to appear on Earth as tree dwelling creatures 50-55 million years ago. It was approximately another 45 million years before climate changes forced our distant ancestors out of the trees and onto the ground, where they become bi-pedal (walking upright).

Charles Darwin was the first person to suggest that human origins dated back millions of years, to apes and beyond, and his theories on animal and plant evolution must have hit the human psyche like an atomic bomb in the middle 1800's! Up to that point, it was generally believed in England that human beings owed their origins to Adam & Eve and that the human race was introduced 'fully evolved' at the biblical creation!

Darwin's ideas must have brought great hilarity and disbelief to the English, Victorian population of the time. There were many humorous cartoons published, depicting monkey-like bodies with human heads (often caricatures of Darwin's own!) as the media, and mankind in general, pondered on the possibility that there might have been a missing link between apes and humans in the past.

Although the song is set in 1859, when Darwin's book 'The Origin of the Species' was published, I have placed it early on the CD (at about 5 to 3 million years BC) to represent the period when certain branches of apes began to develop into hominids.

### The Missing Link D

V.1

D G D D A D

A new book's just been published and this is what I've heard.

D E A

'We've all evolved from Chimpanzees', but I don't believe a word.

D G

This book expounds a theory but it's all a waste of ink

D A D /A

For if apes turned into humans, tell me where's the missing link?

Refrain

D G

Well, it's 1859 and it's all a waste of ink

D A D

For if apes turned into humans, tell me where's the missing link?

V.2

Mr Darwin draws conclusions studying animals and their bones,  
Giving Conan Doyle a prototype for a future Sherlock Holmes.  
He gathered in all his evidence and the upshot made us blink.  
Now anthropologists everywhere hunt for the missing link.

Refrain

For it's 1859 and the upshot made us blink.

Now anthropologists everywhere hunt for the missing link.

V.3

What would Adam and Eve have said if they'd heard such blasphemy?  
I thought they were our ancestors, not chimps up in a tree!  
If it's true we're all part-monkey, then I'm off to see my shrink.  
There'll be no more scratching underarms if they find the missing link.

Refrain

For it's 1859 and I'm off to see my shrink.  
There'll be no more scratching underarms if they find the missing link.

V.4

I used to like bananas but they've quite lost their appeal.  
Must I stop using knives and forks when I sit down for my meal?  
There'll be no more eating peanuts, no 'PG tips' I'll drink  
If they keep unearthing ancient bones and find the missing link!

Refrain

For it's 1859 and no 'PG tips' I'll drink  
If they keep unearthing ancient bones and find the missing link!

V.5

Mr Darwin has a great white beard, which might be living proof  
That his bold, outrageous theories hold a smattering of truth.  
For if, underneath his day clothes, he's hairier than you'd think,  
Well it - 'takes one to know one', maybe he's the missing link?

Refrain

It's 1859 and if he's hairier than you'd think,  
Well it - 'takes one to know one', maybe he's the missing link?

V.6

Now let's look to the future, when it's proved his words are true  
And all his speculations then receive their proper due.  
For it's natural selection that keeps us 'in the pink'.  
We're the sum of all that's gone before, there's been no missing link.

Refrain

For it's natural selection that keeps us 'in the pink'.  
We're the sum of all that's gone before, there's been no missing link.

## Chapter 4 - Primitive Art

As further time passed, early hominids evolved into the recognisable human beings that we've become today. By the time of the last ice age, their looks would have certainly been very similar to our own and it's likely that their intelligence was little different either. There is a school of thought that says 'ancient man' was indeed no less intelligent than modern man, the only difference between us being the state of technology at the time - hence the line in this song 'Would they draw just like us given paper and pen?'. The song could easily be dated any time between 40,000 & 10,000 years BC.

The tools that early humans created, made from stone flints etc. were practical and important aids to their survival. But, when they turned their skills to painting 'wall art' using charcoal and coloured pigments, this was truly something completely different not seen in any animal on this planet before.

I find looking at cave art drawings quite emotive and it was fascinating to imagine myself in a cave environment as I wrote the song. It enabled me to create an atmosphere as I put down the words. Imagination is probably one of the most important things that differentiates us from other animals and often appears to be limitless.

## Primitive Art Dm

v.1

Dm C Am Dm  
Here in the half-light, deep in the gloom,

Dm C Dm C Dm  
It's hard to imagine an old 'living' room

Dm Am C Dm  
With maybe a fire and skins on the floor,

Dm Am Dm C/Dm  
Rock face walls, no window or door,

Dm C/Dm  
But there's proof – This was somebody's home,

Dm C Bb Am  
A people with culture, description unknown.

Dm C  
Roof and walls – filled with colourful smears,

Dm C Bb Am  
The closer you look, the more you will see

Dm Am Dm  
And the more their life story appears.

v.2

They hunted for food and pictured their prey,  
Woolly rhinos and mammoths alive in their day.  
In the flickering firelight paintings were drawn,  
A call to their gods or just to adorn?

Near the cave – coloured pigments were found,  
Watery mud stirred and mixed on the ground.  
Charcoal sticks – made black wavy lines  
And humanlike figures, so clearly defined;  
They were so far ahead of their time.

v.3

Though it's primitive art, formed in pre-history,  
The imagery pierces the soul of me.  
The colours of yellow and brown may be mud  
But the deepest of reds must surely be blood.  
Heaven knows – such intelligence then,  
Would they draw just like us given paper and pen?  
In my eyes – their achievements are vast,  
These wonderful drawings, depicting their lives;  
It's truly like watching the past.



## Chapter 5 - Standing Stones

Returning to technology..... I've often wondered how our ancient ancestors built the huge stone monuments that are still there for us to see thousands of years after their construction.

Bearing in mind that some of the stones were dragged miles from their excavation sites, to the places where they were to be erected, it's incredible to think that many of the projects were undertaken before the invention of the wheel. The man-power and organisation required to carry out those herculean projects must have been tremendous. It seems to me that modern man too easily makes the mistake of undervaluing the abilities and intelligence of our own forebears. The song 'Standing Stones' is intended to be a celebration of their amazing achievements.

This song represents the period in our history between 4,000 & 1,000 years BC when many of these monuments were erected. It also briefly touches on what our own legacy to future generations is likely to be.....if we leave them a future at all, that is!

## Standing Stones D (capo2)

V.1

D G D A D G

How did they move twenty ton pieces of rock one hundred and fifty miles?

D A D G/D/A

To set in the ground, like the face of a clock,

D G D A D G

With enough precision to make its mark as a stellar observatory,

D A D G/D/D

To align with the stars as the evenings grew dark.

A D G/D/D

Now recall it's a time when they didn't have wheels,

E A /A7

No mechanical tools for such an ordeal.

Chorus

D G D A D

Standing stones, burial mounds,

G

White horses and sacred grounds,

D A D G/D/A

Hill forts, barrows and cairns are what they would leave.

D G D A D

Standing stones, burial mounds,

G

White horses and sacred grounds,

D A D G/D/A

Earth works, tumuli, henges, circles and reaves.



V.2

In the ground they dug patterns only now seen  
From the height of an aeroplane  
And still to this day we don't know what they mean.  
It seems in the past that many had visions, and sights  
Were set on a higher plane;  
Spiritual matters were often their guiding light.  
Now recall it's a time when they didn't have wheels,  
No mechanical tools for their many ordeals.

Chorus

V.3

So they left their mark on the face of the Earth  
A very long time ago  
And still the monuments stand to honour their birth.  
Plastic bags, toxic soil and waste  
Are the things that we'll leave behind  
And they'll point a finger at us in great distaste.  
For now is a time when there's nothing but wheels  
And mechanical tools for all our ordeals.

Chorus



## Chapter 6 - Sixth Century BC

During the 'Sixth Century BC' there seemed to be an 'awakening' of humankind across the world that led us to become more aware of our own place in the universe. Humans began asking questions about their own existence and the meaning of life - they also started framing their own answers!

In fact, during this period five major thought streams sprang from five great thinkers in different parts of the world - Buddha and Mahavira in India, Zoroaster in Persia, Pythagoras in Greece and Confucius in China. The results of these thought streams formed the basis of a series of philosophies created during that amazing century.

Although none of these thinkers were English, their ideas were adopted by millions of people all over the world, eventually influencing people in England too. Many still abide by these philosophies to this day, using them to guide their daily lives. It is remarkable to think that many of the ideas were developed over 2,500 years ago!

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### Sixth Century BC G (capo3)

V.1

G

The wind of change that blew from the East

C

Fanned the sparks and turned them to a flame.

C

G

A hunger for new learning was unleashed.

D

C

What opened human minds? What challenged human kind?

D

C

G

Defining times, sixth century BC.

V.2

With an awareness of their place and of their time,  
They started framing questions never asked.  
Seeking explanations, forever to refine,  
Rationale and cause, searching without pause.  
Defining times, sixth century BC.

Chorus

C

G

Gautama Buddha, Confucius, Mahavira,

D

G

Zoroaster, Lao-Tze, Anaximander.

C

G

Through India and China, ancient Greece and Persia,

D

A rising tide that lifted high and shattered their inertia.

C

G

Tell me how..... this all came to be?

D

C

G

Defining times, sixth century BC.

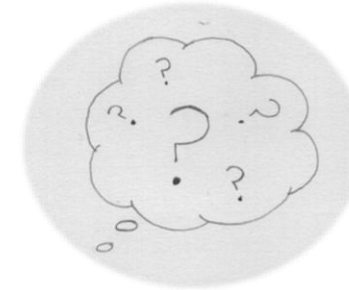
V.3

New schools of thought we call philosophy  
Found answers to the questions of the mind.  
They left their mark upon our history,  
Transforming us completely, our species and our kind.  
Defining times, sixth century BC.

Chorus

V.4

The wind of change that blew from the East  
Still guides how we perceive our mortal lives.  
Be we beggar, merchant, nobleman or priest,  
There's now a sure foundation, bequeathed to every nation.  
Defining times, sixth century BC.



## Chapter 7 - Uncovering

Looking for an appropriate song theme to close the 'BC/ancient man' element of the CD and also link it to the 'AD' element that follows, I drew on the fascination I had with archaeology as a child. I was intrigued by the idea of discovering things about our early history, through digging up relics from the past that had lain underground for thousands, if not millions, of years.

Modern archaeological 'digs' tend to start the excavations with mechanical diggers, to clear away tons of top soil first, before setting volunteers and enthusiasts loose with picks and shovels to continue the unearthing by hand. As they approach the layer where the remains are expected to be found, the experts then move in and the 'finds' are slowly extricated from the soil/bedrock with more specialised tools and an infinite amount of patience!

Once again, the song is set in modern times but the subject matter relates to an older period. In 'Uncovering', the Celtic village is imagined to have existed during the final centuries BC before our dating system turned to AD.

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### Uncovering D

V.1

D A D  
There's a Celtic village buried deep below,  
G D A  
Radar shows its outline well defined.  
D A D  
Careful excavation soon will show  
G A D  
The traces that its people left behind.

19

V.2

D A D  
To start the 'dig' machinery's deployed,  
G D A  
Then picks and spades are used by volunteers  
D A Bm  
But further down more subtlety's employed,  
G A D  
With brush and trowel to peel away the years.  
Chorus  
G D  
Uncovering ..... the secrets of the past,  
Em Bm  
They work their way through layers of the ground.  
G D  
Discovering ..... why the old ways didn't last  
A Bm  
From the relics and the artefacts they've found,  
G A D  
From the relics and the artefacts they've found.  
V.3  
Coins and ancient jewellery come to light,  
Shreds of clothing show what they once wore.  
Weapons prove their power and their might  
And tools demark the rich from the poor.

20

V.4

We unearth the past to learn about our forebears  
With an ever burning need to understand.  
Their daily lives, their loving and their warfare,  
Are stories buried deep within the land.

Chorus

V.5

Now the foreman of the dig is urging speed;  
As time runs out they work on through the night.  
For altruism soon gives way to greed  
When it's a supermarket chain that owns the site.

V.6

Ancient versus modern, oil and water,  
Is a balance that's so very hard to find  
But without an understanding of this quarter,  
We march into the future semi-blind.

Chorus



## Chapter 8 - Borderline

We now move into the 'AD' element of the CD when England was under the control of the Roman Empire. The song 'Borderline' looks at the departure of the Roman soldiers from England (circa AD 405), when they were recalled back to Rome to protect their motherland from barbarian invasions. This left our country virtually defenceless against our own barbarian incursions and, what turned out to be, the oncoming slide into the 'Dark Ages'.

Talking to Ronnie about the horrors of existence outside the borders of the Roman Empire in those times, it made me think about the growing terror in the minds of the people in many northern communities, particularly those who had grown up under the protection of 'Hadrian's Wall', as they realised there would soon be no Roman defenders to protect them against the hordes who would shortly be pouring over the unmanned wall (which was at one point the northernmost border of the Roman Empire).

I also thought about the fact that every empire in the past has eventually fallen by the wayside, often to be replaced by another which, in its turn, comes to its own unfortunate end! The more I read about human history, the more it seems to me that no generation ever really learns from the mistakes made by previous generations. Could this inability to benefit from past experience be a fatal flaw in our human psyche?

## Border Line Dm (capo1)

V.1

Dm F C Dm  
The lookouts posted on the wall were few and far between.

F Am C G  
They were told to keep their heads down to keep from being seen.

F Am C G  
Barbarians were gathering, waiting for a sign,  
Dm F Am Dm  
At the outposts of the empire that marked the border line.

V.2

The legionnaires were marching south to heed the call from Rome.  
The last few manning Hadrian's Wall would soon be heading home.  
The villages of England were running out of time,  
There was fear and trepidation all along the border line.

Chorus

F / C G D  
And we know,..... every empire has to fall.

F / C G D  
They come and go,..... there's no one reason for it all.

F / C G D  
Each ebb and flow,..... always makes the same mistakes.

F /Am F G D  
And, as one passes,..... so another one awakes.

V.3

The Picts and natives of the north grew bolder every year.  
They watched the empire crumble at its northernmost frontier.  
In time the Roman legacy would wither on the vine,  
There'd soon be no defenders to protect the border line.

Chorus

V.4

The last boats sailed from England, around AD 405,  
Leaving few remaining settlers to keep Roman ways alive.  
Their world of art and culture was destroyed or undermined  
By the waves of invaders pouring 'cross the border line.

Chorus



## Chapter 9 - Henry Eight

After the fall of the Roman Empire and throughout Saxon and Norman invasions, England remained just a small, backwater country on the western fringes of Europe, until the establishment of one of our most powerful royal dynasties - The Tudors.

King Henry VIII (1491 to 1547) has to be one of the most colourful royals in English history and, when looking for a monarch to write a song about, he was a prime candidate, particularly as I wanted a light hearted subject to balance some of the heavier, more thought provoking, historical numbers on the CD.

Simply titled 'Henry Eight', the song refers to his reputation for having a fearsome temper, especially in his later years after he injured himself in a jousting accident and grew to enormous proportions. When seen through the eyes of the twenty first century, he does seem to lend himself to a certain amount of humour and I felt it was time to lampoon the Tudor terror!

### Henry Eight C (capo2)

v.1

C G F C  
If you read your history books, one Englishman stands out.

G F C  
He grew to more than six feet tall and more than five feet stout!

D G D G  
He had a fearful temper and liked to get his way

A D A D/D7  
And when they heard his morning roar, you'd hear the servants say....

25

Chorus

G C D G  
Old Henry rose this morning from the wrong side of the bed

C D  
And if you catch his beady eye, you'll likely lose your head.

C D C D /D7  
So, if your brain and torso you've no wish to separate,

G C D G  
Then keep your head down or you'll catch the wrath of Henry Eight.

v.2

Wolsey was his right hand man and rose high in the church  
But when no dispensation came, it left him in the lurch.  
For Henry wanted his divorce but the Pope just wouldn't play.  
When Wolsey's call came from the King, he heard the courtiers say...

Chorus

Break

Chorus

v.3

Those poor old queens of England, Henry's fretful wives,  
Lived in trepidation and fearful for their lives.  
For if they burnt the morning toast, or the bills forgot to pay,  
Their maids would turn a ghastly white and then you'd hear them say...

Chorus

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## Chapter 10 - Soldiers of the Dissolution

On a more serious note, Henry VIII was also responsible for the dissolution of the monasteries, towards the middle of the sixteenth century (1536 to 1541). Whatever the rights and wrongs of his actions, it was certainly life changing for the monks and their communities as they watched their old ways of life torn apart before their eyes. The result of Henry VIII's decision to break away from the Roman Catholic faith had a lasting effect on England's own destiny too.

There are many ancient monastic ruins still scattered around the country and the peace and calm of these sites are in stark contrast to the evidence of their violent destruction, which is clearly visible all around.

When wandering through the grounds and amongst the ruins, you might be able to feel the definite, tangible 'atmosphere' that seems to hang in the air. While writing the song 'Soldiers of the Dissolution', I imagined myself back amongst the rubble walls and found that the words virtually wrote themselves!

## Soldiers of the Dissolution Dm (capo1)

v.1

Dm C Am Dm  
It's early in the morning and they hear the marching feet upon the ground.

C Am Dm  
The monks of Benedictus leave their cots and at the altar gather round.

F G A  
They bend upon their knees and, as the rap comes on the door, they start to sing

Dm Bb C Dm  
While the soldiers of the Dissolution carry out the orders of the king.

v.2

The monasteries of England are torn apart and falling one by one.  
For the newly self-appointed head of church these deeds are being done.  
While the abbot and his 'brothers of the faith' pray to a higher lord,  
The soldiers of the Dissolution break the fibres of a nation's cord.

Chorus

Dm F G Dm  
What now, for how will they survive?

Dm F G Dm /C/ Am  
What now, can keep their faith alive?

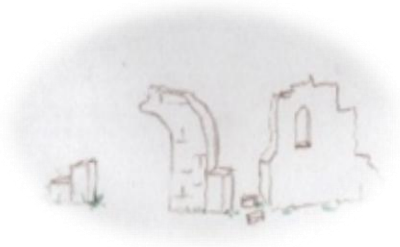
V.3

In truth the Benedictine way was flawed and needed great reform  
But it was sad to see this tiny band of men turned out on the cloister lawn.  
Their way of life destroyed, these broken souls were left with nothing but despair  
While the soldiers of the Dissolution carried out their work without a care.

Chorus

V.4

I stand among the ruins of the Abbey, in a sanctuary of calm,  
But here among the rubble walls I sense the residue of old alarm  
From the time when ancient ways were ripped apart, and an edifice pulled down,  
And the soldiers of the Dissolution carried out the orders of the crown. x2



## Chapter 11 - Penny for the Guy they Cry

After the Stuart dynasty replaced the Tudors in 1603, there was no relief from the ongoing religious problems caused by Henry VIII's conversion to Protestantism over fifty years earlier.

The first Stuart king, James I, was a Protestant and, although Catholicism was an unlawful practice when he became king, he basically turned a blind eye to Catholics practising their beliefs, provided they kept a low profile..... which, unsurprisingly, many Catholics found to be totally unacceptable.

Guido Fawkes was one of a group of Catholic sympathisers who planned to blow up the Palace of Westminster at the State Opening of Parliament in 1605. The plan was to kill the King and to create an uprising in the hope of installing his nine year old daughter, Princess Elizabeth, on the throne, as Queen, in his place.

The plot, however, was discovered and Fawkes and his fellow plotters were all eventually arrested and executed. King James subsequently set aside the 5<sup>th</sup> November each year for remembrance of the failed attempted coup.

It's fascinating to think that, over 400 years later, England still celebrates and remembers that fateful date. Although 'back garden' bonfires are now few and far between, I can vividly recall, as a child, the excitement of making a 'guy' and wheeling him around the streets for firework money before fixing him to the bonfire wood and setting light to it all. Jacket potatoes, chestnuts and toffee apples were eaten as the fireworks were set off - those were the days!



## Penny for the Guy they Cry G (capo1)

V.1

G C G  
There are people gathered round the roaring fire

C D G  
Watching the 'guy' catch light.

G C G  
There are fireworks throwing out shooting stars,

C D  
It's a cold November night.

C D  
There are chestnuts roasting in an old tin tray,

G C  
Potatoes wrapped in foil.

G C G C D Em C/D/G  
Sausages sizzle on toasting forks and hot soup's on the boil. x2

Chorus

D G  
For it's bonfire night and they celebrate,

C D  
Though few of them know just why,

D G  
A Catholic plot on a Protestant state

C D / D7  
That badly went awry.....

G C G C D Em C/D/G  
And now upon this fateful date 'Penny for the guy' they cry. x2

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V.2

At Westminster Palace, in the undercroft,  
Guy Fawkes was standing guard.  
Gunpowder barrels, under faggots and coal,  
Were disguised in a grand charade.  
But the secret leaked out and a search was made;  
Fawkes tried to take the blame.  
They were just in time to prevent the crime  
Of a Parliament put to flame. x2

Chorus

V.3

We make our 'guy' from pa's old clothes  
With newspapers stuffed inside.  
Then with gloves and scarf and a frightening mask,  
He's wheeled down the street with pride.  
With the money that's thrown in an old tin can,  
We go straight to the firework shop  
To buy bangers and crackers and mines and squibs  
That'll make the old folks hop! x2

Chorus

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## Chapter 12 - The Burning Down

I find I'm quite fascinated with how songs and their stories develop as they're being composed. Historical songs don't always need factual narratives but the songs are easier to write if the story line has a factual base.

The song 'The Burning Down' is a case in point; the title came to me one night and I set about writing a fictional song of a devastating fire and its consequences. After many hours of thought and false starts, I felt I was getting nowhere then, on the verge of giving up the song, 'The Great Fire of London' (1666) came into my mind and there was my answer! History had already 'written' an epic fire story and, when I concentrated on that, the song quickly took shape. By lunch time next day the song was finished!

One interesting thing about the politics surrounding the 'Great Fire' was that the 'City of London' at the time was virtually an autonomous state within London and generally looked after itself, jealously guarding its privileges from interference by the Crown! When the fire began within its boundaries, its leaders were slow to react and deal with it (but quick to reject offers of help from the King and his army!). It wasn't until the fire had spread beyond the City of London boundaries that the King's men were able to blow up buildings in its path in order to create fire breaks and contain it.

When the devastated area was rebuilt in the following years, surprisingly, the new buildings were erected following the old street plans, losing an opportunity to modernise the layout. This is why the City of London still has such a labyrinth of alleyways and lanes.

## The Burning Down C (capo1)

V.1

C  
From a glowing ember to a tiny spark,  
C  
From a smoke-filled room in the midnight dark  
F C  
Came a frightened call – hark, fire, hark!  
G F G Am  
And no-one knew there'd be a burning down that night.

F G C  
And no-one knew there'd be a burning down that night.

V.2

From a baker's shop in Pudding Lane,  
Through the tar-pitched roof shot a burning flame.  
They never found out just who to blame.  
There were none prepared for the burning down that night. x2

Chorus

F C  
Oh the sparks did crackle and the fire did roar,  
G Am  
No hiding place for the rich or poor.  
F C  
Not a hovel or mansion would the flames ignore  
G Am F G C  
In the burning down that night, in the burning down that night.

V.3

Now the City of London had men in power  
But they didn't act fast in the burning hour.  
As the flames took hold, such a dithering shower  
Sealed the city's fate for the burning down that night. x2

V.4

People ran to the Thames where boats were docked,  
With their nightwear flowing and no shoes or socks.  
Every home catching fire, like a tinderbox.  
No belongings saved from the burning down that night. x2

Chorus

V.5

The church bells rang out a warning peel  
But the gods couldn't save them from the fire's ordeal.  
St. Paul's caught light to the laughs of the devil  
Who fanned the flames of the burning down that night. x2

V.6

Five days and nights the fire would blaze,  
No rule of law in the smoke and haze.  
Then the King's own men did some buildings raze  
And the firebreaks stopped the burning down that night. x2

Chorus

V.7

There were 70,000 homeless made,  
So they rebuilt London through the next decade.  
For a new St. Paul's, Wren's plans were laid  
And a phoenix rose from the burning down that night. x2

## Chapter 13 - The Revenue Men

Smuggling was rife around the coasts of Britain throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and many songs have been written about it from the standpoint of the smugglers and the communities involved.

The next song 'The Revenue Men' (set around 1800) is a snapshot taken from a different perspective and is 'narrated' through the eyes of the hated revenue men themselves. These tax collectors were employed by the government to pit their wits against the locals and to curtail illegal smuggling of goods wherever and however they could.

The revenue men would hardly have been popular figures in their local area and would no doubt have had to keep their eyes wide open to avoid being, at the very least, pulled down some backstreet and 'roughed up' by the locals, should they be given half a chance!

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### The Revenue Men Dm

v.1

Dm C Dm F G  
No moon reflects on the mill pond sea - whispered voices in the air.  
Dm C Dm A Dm  
From an anchored ship, a boat pulls free - we wait to do our duty.  
Dm C Dm F G  
The row boat beaches on the strand - whispered voices in the air.  
Dm C Dm A Dm  
Smugglers' boots kick up the sand - we rise to do our duty.

Chorus

F C  
 They curse the ground we walk on,  
 Dm A  
 We're the hated revenue men.  
 F C A  
 We dare not walk alone about the town.  
 F C  
 Our lives we'd surely forfeit,  
 Dm A  
 On that we could depend,  
 F C A  
 With a price upon our heads to bring us down.  
 A Dm  
 A price to bring us down.

V.2

Rum in barrels they offload - whispered voices in the air.  
 To secrete them down an old by-road - to stop them is our duty.  
 A look-out sounds the first alarm - whispered voices in the air.  
 Panic breaks the midnight calm - we fire for it's our duty.

Chorus

V.3

The smugglers race along the beach - shouting voices in the air.  
 Hoping to get out of reach - to catch them is our duty.  
 Others swim into the sea - shouting voices in the air.  
 Some remain and give their plea - to arrest them is our duty.

Chorus / Repeat first two lines of V.1

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## Chapter 14 - The Last of the Clippers

Of all the sailing ships throughout history, it's probably the 'Tea Clippers' of the nineteenth century that stir the emotions more than any other. Iconic and attractive as they were, they were also extremely well designed ships built totally for speed, to bring 'tea' from India and China to England as fast as was possible at that time.

The ships could be at sea for over 100 days, covering the 14,000 mile trips, and one can only imagine the trials and tribulations they had to go through. When I thought about their feats and achievements, I decided to write a song in praise of these vessels and the men who sailed them. The song is called 'The Last of the Clippers' and is set in the late 1800's.

I remember a school trip, back in the 1960's, to see the 'Cutty Sark' (one of only two surviving clipper ships in the world). Even at that young age, I think I was able to sense the history the boat invoked and wonder at the skills and craftsmanship used in its build.

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The Last of the Clippers D

V.1

D A D  
 The ship sailed out from Portsmouth, then around the Isle of Wight.  
 G D A  
 In the English Channel it found the breeze in the early morning light.  
 G D A  
 Then with every sail, on every mast, set tight as they could draw,  
 D A D  
 The last of the Clippers sailed out to sea on a trip she'd make no more.

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Chorus

G                      D                                      A

If you close your eyes, you might dream of the white wings blowing free.

D                                      A                                      D

But the last of the Clippers, on the water green, no longer sails the sea.

V.2

Through Biscay Bay and around the Cape, these ships were built for speed.  
Then across the Indian Ocean, ropes tight on their fairlead.  
To bring home tea from China they fought through many trials -  
For a hundred days they'd clip the waves, that's fourteen thousand miles.

Chorus

V.3

When the Suez finally opened, in eighteen sixty nine,  
The steam ships cut the journey time and sent the Clippers in decline.  
But many a gallant captain kept sailing just the same  
Till the Clippers were scuppered one by one and they were left with just a name.

Chorus x2



## Chapter 15 - The Higher They Climb

The final song of the CD is called 'The Higher They Climb' and is set in 1945. Having read a biography of Sir Winston Churchill that covered the years of the Second World War, I found the most poignant aspect of the story was the defeat of Churchill's Conservative party at the 1945 general election, which was held shortly before the end of the war.

Churchill himself was (and is) credited with having played a huge part in Britain and its allies winning the war and he, along with many others, expected that goodwill to extend to and influence voters at the ballot box. The book itself didn't delve into the personal setback the election defeat might have given him but, to my mind, the disappointment and shock to the man's ego must have been severe and I wanted to give him a chance to 'vent' his likely feelings in song, albeit seventy five years after the event!



## The Higher They Climb G

v.1

G C G  
In a haze of cigar smoke, it's ten in the morning  
C D G  
And Winston's still lying in bed.

C G  
The debris of a full English breakfast surrounds him  
C D  
And newspapers scattered, unread.

C D  
For the election took place yesterday  
G C  
And they've sent the 'old boy' on his way.

G D G  
'There's gratitude for you, my dear Clementine,  
C D G  
That's how the voters repay!'

v.2

'I gave them my speeches, I bullied and blustered,  
I talked a fine war from the start.  
I promised them victory, never defeat;  
This I truly believed in my heart.  
But, just as the hour draws near,  
They deliver a kick up the rear.  
And, try as I might, my dear Clementine,  
I'll never forgive them I fear.'

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v.3

'Joe Stalin and Roosevelt parleyed with me,  
My persona gave Britain more clout.  
Six years I have flourished the Union Jack,  
Now the people have voted me out!  
With such wisdom I'll never agree,  
And when from the war we are free,  
I ask in all honesty, dear Clementine,  
Just what will they do without me?

v.4

'We've beaten the Axis and I tell all the people  
"Let the future take care of itself".  
But homecoming soldiers, who fought for their future,  
Now want a big say for themselves.  
With a new generation in power,  
And a 'class ridden' Britain turned sour,  
This man for his time, my dear Clementine,  
Is no longer the man of the hour.'

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So, from dinosaurs to Churchill, back to the Covid 19 world of 2021. Thank you so much for listening to and reading 'A History of the English People' according to the thoughts of John Clachan!

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## Acknowledgements & Further Information

I would like to thank Mark Campbell (bass) and Ronnie Laing (percussion) for adding their exceptional musical skills to the CD. They are both stalwarts of the local music scene and I really appreciate the time, effort and enthusiasm they've invested in the project; I've enjoyed every minute of it - thanks again guys.



I would also like to thank Chris for all her help and patience with my never ending musical projects! And, for her much appreciated participation in the writing of many of the more recent songs - it's great fun working together.

All the very best - John Clachan - October 2021

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