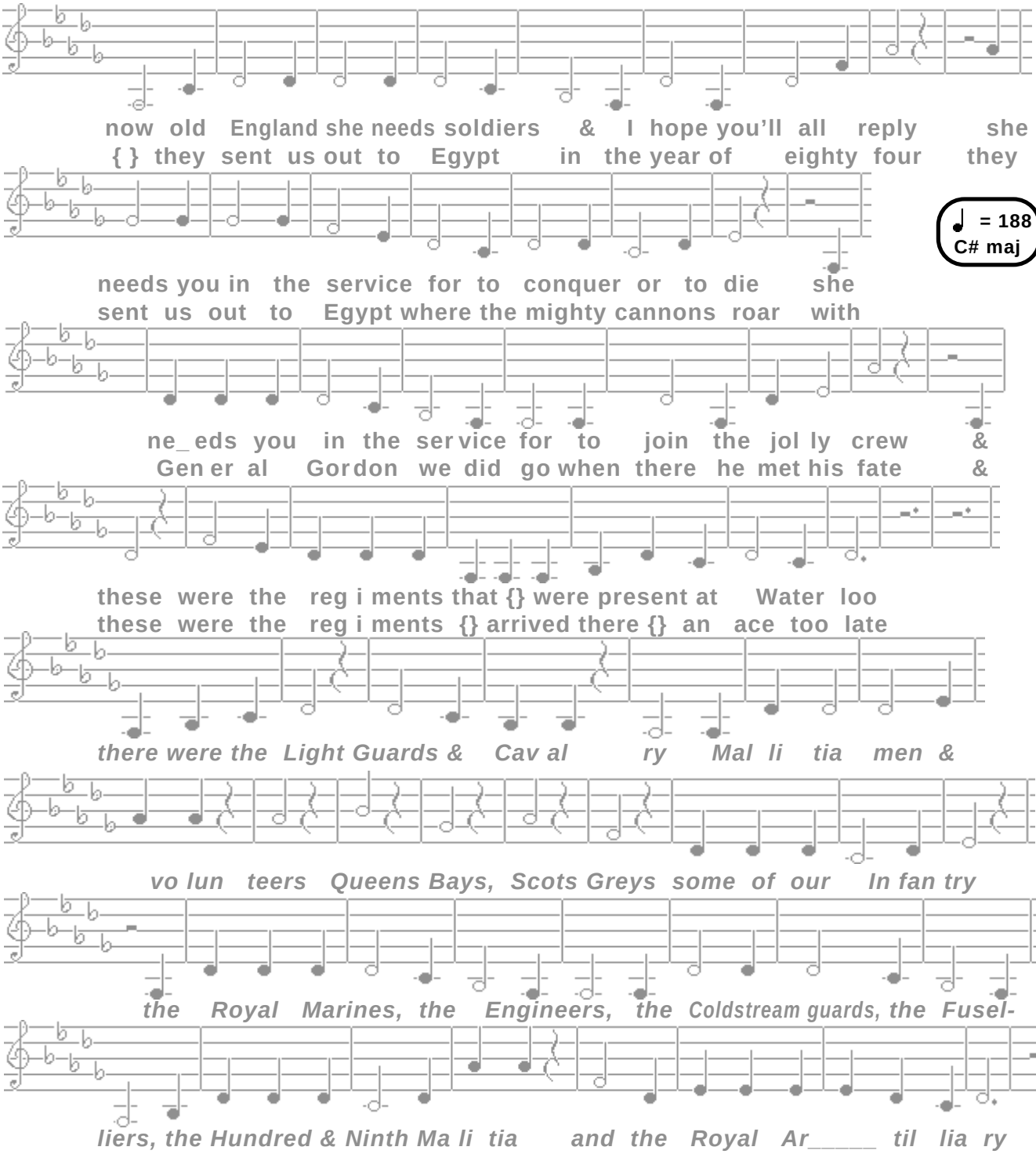
# Old England She Needs Soldiers






v1 & 2 from the singing of Joe Latter at Putley Folk Festival 1992.
Joe learned it in 1940 from Alice Marsden (then aprox age 50, born in Derbyshire) of West Chiltington, Sussex, while he was evacuated during WW2
The content and chronology lead us to believe this is a Boer War recruiting song. Or perhaps a Music Hall satire thereof.



They dressed us up in uniform of red & gold & black
They dressed us up in uniform, a knapsack on our back.
We marched right off to Africa, & we looked mighty swell
And these were the regiments from which the soldiers fell: *ch*

We won the fight, we won the war, we won the bloody lot,
We won the fight, well some of us did, those that didn't get shot.
The lucky ones left standing, they raised the Union Jack
And these were the regiments that almost made back *ch*

When we got back to Blighty, still in battledress,
When we got back to Blighty, we saw the officers mess.
Recruiting sergeant he was there and us he did inspect,
And these were the regiments that almost wrang his neck. *ch*

# The Old Barbed Wire

This version was collected from Robert Graves the war poet, via the radio. As a literary luminary (he wrote 'I Claudius') his passing commanded an extended obituary on radio news programs. In one - old interviews were broadcast and he recounted the mood of his fellow soldiers and demonstrated it with what they used to sing in the trenches. As deserters were being shot by firing squad at the time, the singing of this song was not only frowned upon, but positively sat upon. References to the song have all come from the lowly ranks and many years later, such was the fear engendered in the soldiers at the time. Other versions have been collected but of this at least there is some record - albeit held unbeknownst - at the BBC. The fragments also appeared on a BBC2 TV program in 1995 called Bookmark plotting the life of RG. No one at the BBC has ever responded to my request for a more complete transcript of the interview.

The better known version has the private 'hanging on the Old Barbed Wire', perhaps the 'Front Line Wire' that Robert Graves knew was a little more dangerous. The girlfriend more poignant.

My family folklore reports that in the first world war opposing soldiers on many fronts ceased fighting on Christmas Day and exchanged pleasantries and food, even managing a game of football on one. This is well documented despite the fact that the allies - particularly the British - suppressed all news of this. Tommy Aktins was was brought up to be a decent honest citizen who always told the truth. So although he might wait to be asked (given the threat of firing squad) then he would not lie about these things. Thus it was in the Staffordshire regiment that for three months after Boxing Day, their casualties were light. Until that is, ultimately, the officer class spotted a remarkable similarity in the dearth of deaths on both sides of the front line. Big and little guns were firing as fast and furious as ever but the aim on both sides was somehow awry. You won't find that in any army historians' accounts unless it is as a rider to a mass execution by firing squad. I know of none in the Staffs.

But proving it is a damn sight easier than disproving it. Try asking someone who was there. I know a man who didn't need to ask, he was told by his Grandfather Page.

Do you want to find the General?
I know where he is, I know where he is  Oh I know where he is!
Do you want to find the General, I know where he is!  He's pinning another medal on his chest.
I saw him, I saw him, pinning another medal on his chest,
I saw him, pinning another medal on his chest.

Do you want to find the Captain?
I know where he is. I know where he is. Oh I know where he is!
Do you want to find the Captain, I know where he is  He's home again on seven days leave
I saw him, I saw him, home again on seven days leave,
I saw him, home again on seven days leave.

Robert Graves made reference only to more verses
when I now sing this I fill the intervening verses with the more well known verses

eg

Quartermaster - Drinking all the company's rum
Sergeant - Dead drunk on the dugout floor
Corporal - Up to his neck in clod

Robert Graves then finished by stating without any hesitation the last verse

Do you want to find your Sweetheart,
I know where he is. I know where he is. Oh I know where he is!
Do you want to find your Sweetheart  I know where he is  He's hanging on the front line wire.
I saw him, I saw him, hanging on the front line wire,
I saw him, hanging on the front line wire.

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When singing this once in a rural pub SW of Hereford an old lady started dancing around to the astonishment of the folkies present. With my eyes closed I missed all this but sidled over to her later and pointed out she obviously knew the song. Her response was along the lines of “Yes but you don't know the propper words”. I obliquely suggested she whispered them to me but all she would say is “That's for me to know and you to find out”. No amount of cajolling would change her mind.
In a similar incedent at a folkies gathering in Ruardean Dec 1997 the song caught the rapt attention of an old lad who ignored all other fare. I was not present. When told this I asked for the gent to be pointed-out but we were in a different pub and no-one seemed at all interested in the possibility that we might be able to collect more FOLK. Ho hum.
The folklorist Roy Palmer had not heard of Robert Grave's version despite having just had published his book of war songs "What a Lovely War" (ISBN 0-7181-3357-9). The book contains much insite on other versions and other famous documenters of the song. The version Roy gives is far removed from the version I know from folk clubs, a version emanating from an unidentified vynal record of the 70's (ish) alledgedly.
Roy Palmer was the obvious person to consult when I collected “Old England She Needs Soldiers” and at the time he had no research of his own that could shed any light on the song, though he felt the tune was a derivative of “the Ball of Kirriemuir”. In my estimation that "ball" has bounced a long way! The Bodlean Library and especially it's music department were unable to help either. By Feb 1998 Roy Palmer had happened across a reference to what was clearly a sibling &/or descendant of “Old England...”

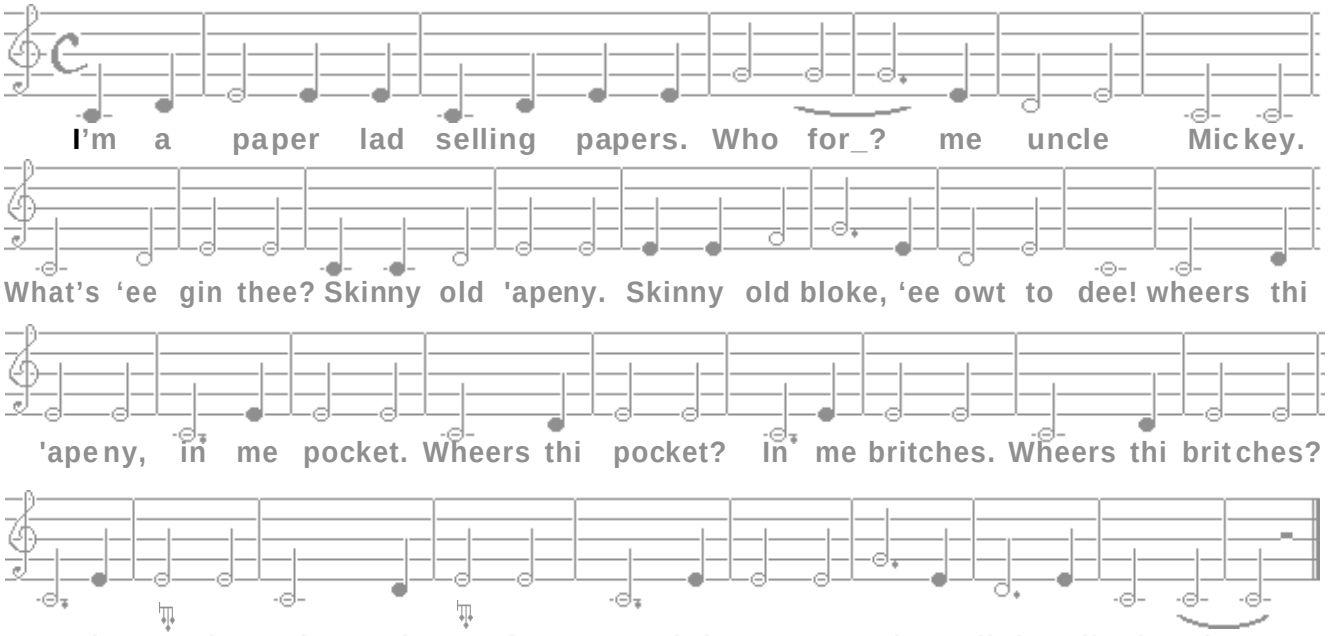
The infantry went over the top, the Fuseliers as well
As we engaged the Gerry at the battle of Neuchâtel
.....
.....
For there were the RC's, C of E's, Chinese and Japanese
Siamese and Portuguese and some of the infantry
There were the bombadiers and brigadiers and Mademoiselle from Armentièrs
Some of the Irish Rifles and the Royal Artillery.

(from a pre-WWII Territorial; learned from an old Sweat Instructor.)

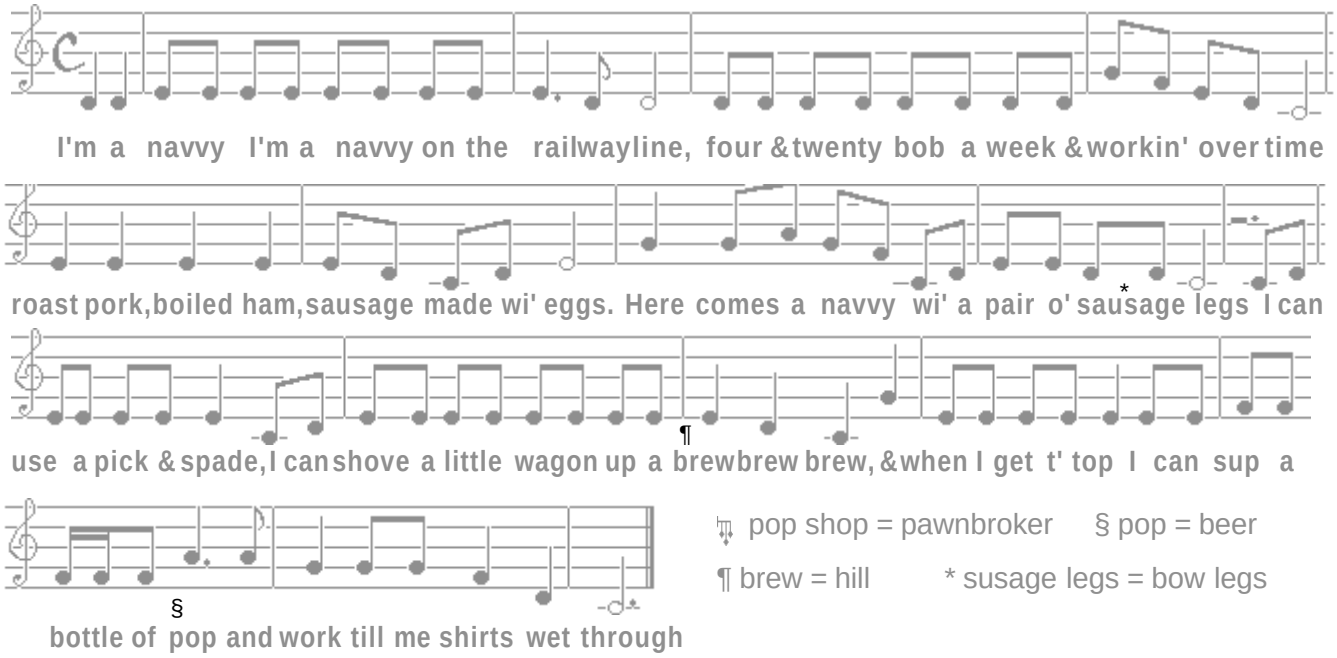
The tenor and references to various groups makes one think immediately of a later age than Joe Latter's version.

# I'm a Paper Lad

♩ = 75




# I'm a Navvy




pop shop = pawnbroker § pop = beer

¶ brew = hill * susage legs = bow legs

These two pace-egging songs were collected from Somer's Club member Joe Hurley. Joe grew up during the 30's in the area of Church & Oswoldtwistle, part of latterday Accrington, Lancs. As a young boy, with his friends, he would go from door to door, sing two songs, then knock on the door, saying "owt f' pace eggers?". They were always in traditional fancy dress consisting of items like a girls skirt, a jacket worn inside-out and blacked-up faces. Others who lived then and recognised the songs confirmed the tradition and added that it was quite young lads, not girls, that went out in the 30's. By that time the begging for eggs had devolved to a few welcome pennies, just one more season for carol singers. There were other songs but Joe can not remember them, they were short though. My rendition of the Navvy song is very true to his memory of it. Accurate presentations of Paper Lad have so far fallen short. Musical notation was provided by Joe, who steadfastly prefers not to sing them, even in the interests of posterity.

# Todd the Toad

Oh Todd the Toad, Oh Todd the Toad, Why ever did you cross the road?
You used to be so green and fat, But now you are so red and flat.
Oh Todd the Toad, Oh Todd the Toad, Why ever did you cross the road?

Oh Todd the Toad, Oh Todd the Toad, Why ever did you cross the road?
You didn't see that car ahead, Now you're stuck to a tyre tread
Oh Todd the Toad, Oh Todd the Toad, Why ever did you cross the road?

sung to the same tune as “the International”
collected from Victoria Makeman (age 16 approx) of “Clattering Clogs” at Putley FF 1997
Victoria learned this from her Guide leader Hellen Stuckey of 12th Worksop Guides
Worksop Nottinghamshire.

# Shine Your Buttocks

My father's a lavort'ry cleaner, _ he works at the lo~ocal pit _
And when he comes home in the ev'ning, _ his boots are all covered in ....

chorus Shine your buttocks with Brasso, _ it's only two ha'pennies a tin. _
You can buy it or nick it from Woolies, _ but I doubt if the'll 'ave any in. _

Some say that he died of a fever, _ some say that he died of a fit, _
But I know what my daddy died of, _ he died of the smell of the..... ch

Some say that he's buried in gravel, _ some say that he's buried in grit, _
But I know what my daddy's buried in, _ he's buried in a big pile of.... ch

Some say that he left me a fortune, _ some say that he left me a bit, _
But I know what my daddy left me, _ he left me a big pile of.... ch

sung to the same tune as “My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean”
~ repeat phoneme as a syllable for correct scansion.
_ denotes beginning of the bar, as do all blue letters.
collected from the young lassies of “Clattering Clogs” who learned it from their Guide Leader see above for details.

Victoria Greenwood (originally of Leintwardine, Herefs) remembers a version sung in approx 1970

My father's a lavatory cleaner, he works all day and all night,
and when he comes home in the evening, his boots are all covered in .....
Shine your buttons with Brasso etc etc etc.

# Riddle me that

Riddles, educative phrases I remember from my childhood

**Riddle-me Riddle-me Roat-te-toat**
**I saw a man in a red coat, a stick in his hand, a stone in his throat**
**Riddle-me Riddle-me Roat-te-toat** answer a cherry

**What goes up a chimney down, but not down a chimney up?** answer an umbrella

Though these were principally given to me by my Grandmother {Mary Ann (Polly) Ingram neé Edge} they were ever present in the family consciousness. The Edge and Ingram families lived in and around Darlaston and Wednesbury from the 1841 census through to 1954 when Polly died. It was mother who told me that**:** Grandad, Thomas William Ingram, told the story below that was told to him by his father (William Thomas). Ultimately this could be traced back to Mark Twain though he probably acquired it aurally.

**When I was twenty, my father knew nothing. When I was twenty one I was amazed how much he had learned in one year!**

The previous generation, Thomas William, drank himself into the workhouse so what he might have said was measured in pints. Polly taught Thomas William to read and write. Neither his father, nor his mother Agatha, could even sign their names on Thomas's birth certificate, X had to suffice. This was common in 1880 and before because schooling cost a penny a day. Indeed Aunt May (Thomas William's youngest sister born 1890's) took her nieces to silent movies so they could read out the story and dialogue, much to the annoyance of the rest of the audience. Some nieces were given the task of reading and writing the love letters between Aunt May and her future husband, which they enjoyed to a far greater degree than trips to the cinema!

Aunt May reported remembering, as a very young girl, a Boer War recruitment rally coming to Darlaston. She watched from an upstairs room as the military band played jingoistic music and read out enticements to potential volunteers. They left empty-handed that day according to her.

My paternal Grandmother Margaret (Martha) Brown neé Huffadine used to repeat the advice below, as given to her by her mother and presumably so on back through the generations. It was intended for my sister though I guess if I was listening..... (no I wasn't, yes I should have been), visa vis choosing a spouse**:**

**Winter them and summer them, then winter 'em again.**

And from the same textbook, in the same **beauty is only skin deep** chapter she often said:

**Handsome is as handsome does.**

Another ever present family (and community) phrase was in describing someone with less than average intelligence as**:**

not knowing **how many beans make five**

Which puzzled me through to adulthood, because it was so obvious that five beans made five! Oh the shame of my ignorance. It was a colleague that pointed-out that the correct formula was **:**

**Bean, half a bean, bean an' half, and two bean.**

Hmm, amazing. Since then many formulae have come to light but all working on the same theme. Even more amazingly all purport to be the true answer. Hmmm.

My sister, Valerie Joyce Lewis neé Brown, learned this skipping rhyme c1952, in Wednesbury. I distinctly remember the progress of learning covered more than one day and the result was longer than all I can recall. There was a possible change of form at the end involving a counting scheme or the song alluded to or a prediction that the skipping would fail as the speed increased. Or maybe it became the song mentioning in the song, if you see what I mean.

**Hezikiah the King of the Jews,** **Bought his wife a pair of shoes**
**When the shoes began to wear,** **Hezikiah began to swear**
**When the swearing failed to stop,** **Hezikiah bought a shop**
**When the shop began to sell,** **Hezikiah bought a bell**
**When the bell began to ring,** **Hezikiah began to sing.**

Folk pursuits are often well documented, these are snippets I have not seen in print or differ.

**Tin-can-alerky**.

Grandfather told me many things, few of which stuck. The name of this game did and the fact that it involved a tin can. The precise rules that he played to are not recalled but it was he and his friends that played. I assume it was a boys game but cannot confirm that. What is of significance here is that this kiddy's game existed in the towns of Wednesbury and Darlaston and they called it by this name in the early 1880's. This differs slightly from documented reports in thatWolverhampton is the nearest location credited for the same naming of the game and the dating was not this early. I doubt the spelling of the game is accurate, it is my attempt at phonetic correctness. Grandfather pronounced it in one long concatenation and certainly could not read or write with any degree profficiency (if at all) at the time he played this game.

**Turkey**

The game of Turkey was popular at my boarding school in the early fifties amonst boys aged between 7 and 11, the reason for the age range being so specific was due to the segregation into junior and senior schools with appropriate age ranges. I never knew the game by any other name. The Royal Wolverhampton School had a catchment area stretching from Newcastle on Tyne southwards, most kids were from within a 100 mile radius, all kids had lost one parent, their father almost without exception. This game was was another form of hide and seek. It involved the use of four sticks and a tennis ball. Three sticks in an ‘H’ were leant up against a wall, probably at 15 to 30 degrees off vertical. This was called the ‘den’. The fourth stick usually had a naturally forked end or fortuitous protuberance, though not always if the length and skill of the setter were conducive. Stick 4 rested the horizontal of the ‘H’ to keep it in position by balance and friction. The length did not need to be precisely right for the position of the horizontal because stick 4 could sit at a steeper angle. The sticks were invariably found pieces often fairly dry and usually branches rather than sawn timber. One inch diameter would be a bit big, half inch too fragile on dry wood.

The idea was to have a person ‘on’ who did the seeking. One hider threw the ball at the ‘H’ to scatter the sticks. There must have been an accolade for breaking a stick in certain versions of the rules because some ball throwers would hurl with considerable force from the (about) 10 yard distance allocated. The force also allowed the ball to bounce a longer distance. The seeker would hide his eyes and count to a nominal value (usually 100) as the hiders scattered. The seeker had to nuetralise the hiders by physical contact either personally or by hitting with the ball. Found persons congregated by the ‘den’ and acted as lookouts for any brave hider who could rush in and reset the ‘H’. If he managed this the game started over with the same seeker. Otherwise the first found became the seeker in a new game after all hiders were caught. Five or so participants were normal, more than ten made the game cumbersome.

**Practical jokes**

Mother told of this wheeze perpetrated by a couple of her friends who eventually married (the Murphys). They came up behind mother in Franchise St., Wednesbury which has a reasonable slope and hooked their umbrella handle in the belt of her coat. They then proceeded to push her along downhill at a fair pace. She found it impossible to run away because of the pace and she was hooked. The episode doubtless resolved within yards because a turn to the left would spoil the fun. It was deemed a good wheeze by all.