

English Navy, The: A New Temperance Song

Synopsis

A navy proclaims his adherence to temperance.

Text

I am an English navy, and I tell the tale with glee,
Tho' thousand curl their lips in scorn, and mock at chaps like me;
But round and round our kingly isle, on meadow, glen, and hill,
Ten thousand mighty monuments proclaim our strength and skill.

CHORUS: Yes, I am an English navy; but, oh, not an English sot.
I have run my pick through alcohol, in bottle, glass, or pot;
And with the spade of abstinence, and all the power I can,
I am spreading out a better road for every working man.

We have set the light-house on the rock, the harbour on the strand,
And run the tunnels through the hill, that commerce might expand;
But while Britannia holds aloft her flag of old renown,
This cruel drink, with crushing might, keeps British workmen down.

Glossary:

Source of Text: Words from "*Our Navvies: A Dozen Years Ago and Today*" by Elizabeth Garnett, published by Hodder and Stoughton (1885).

Music. Garnett gives the tune as "*The Days We Went A-Gipsying*"

The Days We Went A-Gipsying



Source of Music: Royla Military School of Music, Keller Hall, Reference Library

Philip Booth, Music Reference Librarian, RMSM Kneller Hall writes

"As far as I can ascertain," [*The Days We Went A-Gipsying*] "dates from approximately 1840, when it was written by the Ipswich based composer and singer, Nathan James Sporle. It was adopted as the Regimental March of The North Staffordshire Regiment in 1881 when this regiment came into being from the amalgamation of the 64th and 98th Foot Regiments; there appears to be no particular reason for its adoption, other than its popularity at the time".

Date: Some between 1877 and 1885

Printer:

Where Printed:

Author : Anonymous

Notes of the Song and Its Historical Background

The author describes these temperance verses as 'very good' but unfortunately chose not to record any further verses

The Christian Excavators' Union (popularly known as the Navvies' Mission) was established in November 1877 after Evans, along with the eight teachers of the Navy Sunday School, including Garnett, sent out some 400 letters of appeal to high-placed Anglicans throughout the nation. As a result Evans is recorded on his grave in Leathley parish churchyard as being the union's founder, but Garnett must be considered its co-founder, both because of her earlier work and because it was the royalties from her first publication, a 'navvy novel' entitled *Little Rainbow* (1877), that provided the financial support for this appeal. Through her missionary work, a further eight navvy novels, and her lively reports on the mission in *Our Navvies*, *Women's Mission*, and the *Quarterly Letter to the Navvies*, which she edited from 1878 until 1917, Elizabeth Garnett was the spirit of the union from Evans's premature death in 1878 until her own in 1921.

While Garnett held no official role within the union save that of a lady section head, her zeal brought much support to it. Commencing with a membership of thirty-seven, including seven navvies, in 1877, the union boasted a total of 700 supporters by 1917.

Ref; Dictionary of national biography