



# An Acre of Land

## Cross Curricular Teaching Ideas for Key Stage 1

Sue Nicholls, Gavin Davenport & Wendy Knight

16  
218

Sung By Frank Bailey  
Aug 31<sup>st</sup> 1964

(1) An acre of land  
Multi meters

my father left me an acre of land  
Savoury my father left me an acre of land  
and a bunch of green holly and ivy

These quire to (?)



*Unlocking hidden treasures of  
England's cultural heritage*  
**Explore | Discover | Take Part**

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## ***The Full English***

The Full English was a unique nationwide project unlocking hidden treasures of England's cultural heritage by making over 58,000 original source documents from 12 major folk collectors available to the world via a ground-breaking nationwide digital archive and learning project. The project was led by the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and in partnership with other cultural partners across England.

The Full English digital archive ([www.vwml.org](http://www.vwml.org)) continues to provide access to thousands of records detailing traditional folk songs, music, dances, customs and traditions that were collected from across the country. Some of these are known widely, others have lain dormant in notebooks and files within archives for decades.

The Full English learning programme worked across the country in 19 different schools including primary, secondary and special educational needs settings. It also worked with a range of cultural partners across England, organising community, family and adult learning events.

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## Additional Resources

- A set of **flash cards** to accompany the song, devised by Camden Music Service, is available for free download from [www.efdss.org/resourcebank](http://www.efdss.org/resourcebank)
- Camden Music Service have created **instrumental arrangements** for *An Acre of Land* suitable for Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils. These are freely available for download at [www.efdss.org/resourcebank](http://www.efdss.org/resourcebank).

## Contributors

- **Gavin Davenport:** Gavin was the Learning Officer for The Full English project and assisted in adapting the dance activities.
- **Wendy Knight:** Wendy wrote and edited the publication *English Traditional Dancing* (EFDSS 2012. ISBN: 978-0-85418-186-5). Circassian Circle is adapted from her publication.
- **Sue Nicholls:** Sue is a national primary music specialist, leading singing trainer and music consultant. Sue was commissioned to contribute the musical activities and cross-curricular ideas in this pack.

## Introduction

This pack shows some ways in which a traditional English folk song can be used in a variety of ways across the primary curriculum. While these notes are focused on Key Stage one, some elements may be adaptable across other age ranges and settings.

Folk songs have a number of characteristics that make them great vehicles for studying a number of different subjects. A collected folk song is primary evidence from a point in history; it tells us something about the tastes of an individual, and of that community as a whole.

## Song Background

*An Acre of Land* is a song found across England, from Yorkshire to Hampshire. The version below was collected in Coombe Bisset in Wiltshire in 1904

On a literal level this song tells of the small amount of land that a father has left his son, so small that all the farming activities from sowing to harvesting can be achieved with smallest implements imaginable. At another level this song features an impossible task in each verse, doing a farming job with the wrong kind of tools!

These types of impossible tasks are a common motif in English folk songs and like traditional riddles force the listener to think a bit more deeply about what is being said or sung.

Some folk song enthusiasts believe that the song is related to the famous folk song *Scarborough Fair* in which a girl must accomplish impossible tasks, before she can be accepted as the young man's 'true love'. There are other folk songs that feature impossible tasks such as *Who's the fool now?*

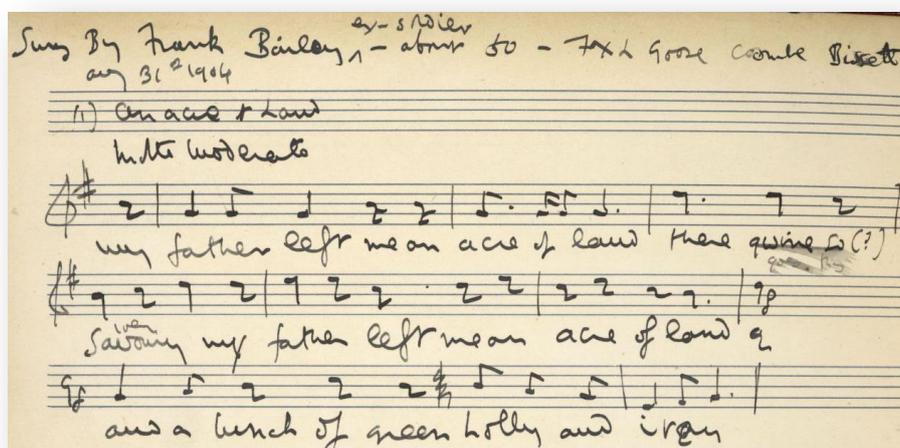


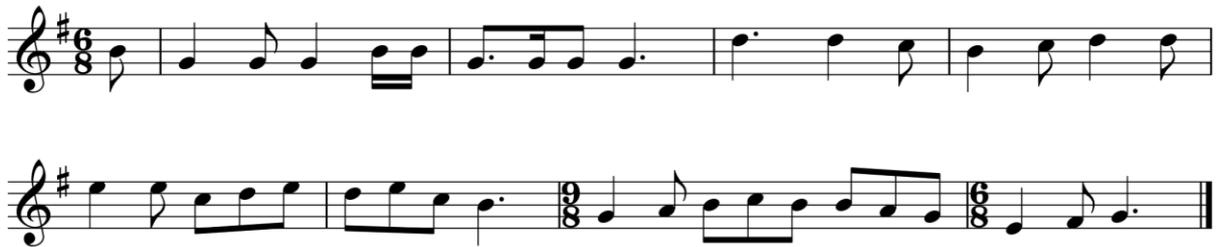
Photo: original manuscript of *An Acre of Land* from *The Full English* digital archive.

## Score and Lyrics

### An Acre of Land

Collected from Frank Bailey by Ralph Vaughan Williams  
31 August 1904, Coombe Bisset  
[www.vwml.org/record/RVW2/2/131](http://www.vwml.org/record/RVW2/2/131)

Roud Number: 21093  
Traditional



The Full English: [www.vwml.org](http://www.vwml.org)  
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My father left me an acre of land

***There goes this ivery,***  
My father left me an acre of land,  
***And a bunch of green holly and ivery.***

I ploughed it with my ram's horn,  
I sowed it with my thimble,

I harrowed it with my bramble bush,  
I reaped it with my little penknife,

I sent it home in a walnut shell,  
I threshed it with my needle and thread,

I winnowed it with my handkerchief,  
I sent it to mill with a team of great rats,

### Additional Resources

A set of flash cards to accompany the song, devised by Camden Music Service, is available for free download from [www.efdss.org/resourcebank](http://www.efdss.org/resourcebank)

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## ***Musical Activities***

1. Teach the song.
2. Once the song is familiar, perform as a 'call and response' piece. Divide into two groups, the first to sing the changing first and third lines; the second to provide the chorus lines about holly and ivy.
3. Develop this still further by inviting soloists or small solo groups to take on the 'call part.
4. Encourage the children to invent untuned percussion parts using contrasting instruments for 'call and response' lines. Be aware of maintaining a musical balance between the singing and the accompaniment and never allow the percussion to drown the performance.
5. Invite a solo player to create a part for the introduction and interludes between verses.
6. Practice clapping the pulse or playing the pulse on percussion instruments – this can help build a useful accompaniment for a dance activity.

## ***Additional Resources***

Camden Music Service have created instrumental arrangements for *An Acre of Land* suitable for Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils. These are freely available for download at [www.efdss.org/resourcebank](http://www.efdss.org/resourcebank).

## Dance Activities

You can use the melody of a song as a tune for dancing – using songs in this way is a complementary way of reinforcing rhythmic elements, syllabic structures and phrasing. You may want to record the children singing the song, or divide a class into groups so one group of children sings while another dances.



### *Circassian Circle*

Circassian circle is a simple traditional dance widespread in Britain. It is simple and enjoyable and can be used in a number of ways and made as simple or complicated as you require.

*Photo: Children dance the first part of Circassian Circle*

### *Basic dance instructions*

Children start in pairs – these could be ‘boy-girl’ or ‘As and Bs’, ‘apples and pears’ etc). Boys on left of each pair with partner to their right. All face in to the middle of a circle around the room. The following instructions assume boy-girl pairs – if you have substituted ‘ones’ and ‘twos’ or ‘As and Bs’ then you need to remember which part of each pair is leading each movement.

Words in **bold** show emphasized beats. It may be easiest once you know the song to get the children to recite the words as they walk the steps of the dance.

- A new verse means the start of a new block of movement.
- The end of the verse shows the end of a block of movement.

**Extension work.** Once children are familiar with a different set of movements for each four bars of music then they can make up their own and teach them to other children, or develop a set of patterns independently.

## ***Circassian Circle: Basic dance instructions***

A1 = One verse of the song

A1: All dance forward and back (1,2,3,4 forward 5,6,7,8 back, twice)

1 2 3 4  
My **F**ather he **l**eft me an **a**cre of **l**and

5 6 7 8  
**T**here **g**oes this **i**very

*Repeat. (all forwards and back)*

1 2 3 4  
My **F**ather **l**eft me an **a**cre of **l**and

5 6 7 8  
And a **b**unch of green **h**olly and **i**very

A2 = Second Verse

A2: as above pattern - just the Girls to the middle 1, 2, 3, 4 and clap (on 4).

I **p**loughed it **w**ith my **r**am's **h**orn

*Fall back to the circle 5, 6, 7, 8*

**T**here **g**oes this **i**very

*Boys to the middle 1,2,3,4 and clap (on 4).*

*Fall back.*

5 6 7 8  
And a **b**unch of green **h**olly and **i**very

A3: **Swing** partners.

A4: **Promenade**.

## Swing

Two dancers give crossed hands (i.e. right to right and left to left), give enough tension by pulling inwards mainly with the fingers to balance each other's weight and skip round clockwise as many times as fits the music.

(Adults mainly use ballroom hold and a pivot step.)

Posture will be the feeling of being suspended from above, so feet as little in contact with the ground as possible, looking at partner, arms slightly bent. It will be obvious which pairs are successfully giving weight by the rotation.

Control will be effected by partner's sensitivity to the speed of the movement.

Timing and phrasing will mean going straight into the movement with some vigour (not pausing to take hold or to move forward to meet), and will 'tail off' to end in position for the next movement, whatever that is.

Blending requires positioning from previous figure and at the end of the swing, including taking hands, leaving go.

## Promenade

A promenade is a moving forward figure (usually round a circle or square) danced with a partner. Cross hand hold (as in the swing) is taken and held at about chest height, but the dancers stand side by side facing the direction they are going, usually anticlockwise ('ballroom' direction), so that the boy is on the inside.

*Photo: promenade hold*



## Look For

- **Control:** the hold allows the inside partner to lead.
- **Timing and phrasing, blending:** the forward movement needs to be terminated in time to reform the set with the boy back in place and his partner by his right side.
- **Teamwork:** spacing between couples should remain equal, so each pair will need to control their travel to avoid closing up or allowing the gap to grow.
- Aim for **neat economic movement** and **light footwork** to reflect and enhance the rhythm of the music.

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# Cross Curricular Ideas

## Literacy

1. Invent new lyrics for the song to a completely different theme, but still following a logical sequence of actions:

*You find a bowl and wooden spoon  
We're going to make a cake  
You find a bowl and wooden spoon  
'Cos we're going to make a big chocolate cake.*

*You cream the sugar and butter well...*

2. Write short stories based on 'The Borrowers', using the objects listed in the song and describing what the little people would do with each one.
3. Make up new ridiculous tasks – playing football with an acorn, etc. where the same disproportionality can be considered.
4. Can you make up riddles based on English folk song riddles. When does a chicken have no bones? When does a cherry have no stone?

## Drama

1. Having sung the song and established the absurdity of doing tasks with miniature tools, read excerpts from *The Borrowers* or watch some film footage of the tiny folk who live under our floorboards and 'borrow' everyday items for furniture and household implements.
2. Use some of the original illustrations from Mary Norton's book to stimulate improvised conversations about Pod bringing home a new batch of goodies and what his family plan to do with them.

*Pod: I've found a lady's brooch  
Homily: That'll make a lovely picture for our wall*

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## **Mathematics**

Use the song vocabulary to set some number problems, including estimations.

1. How many cress seeds would fit into a thimble?
2. If a ram has two horns, how many will 10 rams have?
3. Are handkerchiefs square or rectangular?
4. If a holly twig carries 5 leaves, how many would 8 twigs have?
5. A holly bush is 3 metres tall. Is that taller or shorter than the classroom door?
6. Encourage the children to invent their own sum stories too.
7. Count how many syllables in a song.

There are links to explore from the dancing exercise too:

1. The dance groups things in patterns of 4, and can link to learning and practicing 4 times table.
2. If people clap four times, how many times in the whole dance, how many individual claps? etc.

## **History**

1. Invite a local farmer to come into school to talk about farming in general, and talk about some of the old words used in the songs.
2. Look at the information about when the song was collected. What has changed since then/over the last hundred years?
3. The folk song collector (probably Ralph Vaughan Williams) wrote this song down when he collected it. How would you collect a song from someone now? How would you share it with people?

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## ***Geography***

1. Some of these processes described in the song are still done manually in less mechanised communities across the world. Can you find out what these words mean?
2. Winnowing, threshing, ploughing, why do they have to be done?
3. There are different versions of this song collected in different places in England.
4. One version comes from Yorkshire, another comes from a village called Coombe Bisset in Wiltshire.
5. How far is the city of York or village of Coombe Bisset from your school in miles?
6. Which roads or railway stations would you use to get to York/Coombe Bisset?
7. What similarities are there between Yorkshire and Wiltshire: forests, coastline, rivers, lakes etc?

## ***Science***

1. Find out about the most common crops grown in this country and what they are used for. Try growing some cereal seeds in the school garden or in pots, encouraging the children to make fair tests to establish essential growing conditions.
2. Explore the differences between evergreen [coniferous] and deciduous trees. Organise a walk to the local park to find out what trees are growing there. Take photographs and do drawings for a 'tree' diary. Use reference materials to discover the names of common trees – is there a holly tree in your park?

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## Art and Design

1. Examine holly and ivy leaves and become familiar with their distinct shapes. Make a collage of leaf shapes cut or torn from different types of paper: magazine pages, art paper, wallpaper, newspaper etc.
2. Use thimbles for printing and pattern-making, stamping different colour paint on to a variety of backgrounds. Thimbles would also produce interesting impressions in clay or Playdough.



*Photo: craft workshop based on folk themes using leaf shapes (Roswitha Chesher)*

## Design Technology

1. Design and make a thimble rack for a collector who wants to display his prize collection of 20 thimbles. Make sure the rack is stable and attractive without detracting from the charms of the thimbles.
2. Explore how other everyday items could be used as tools and why would they be suitable: shape, materials, material properties etc.



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