

Six Wassailing Songs

Sugar Wassail

C

Sugar Wassail (or *Sussex Wassail*) was popularised about fifteen years ago by Vic Gammon. It's one of the many songs of this sort sung between Christmas Eve and Twelfth Night. This one appears in the small Sussex collection from the 1840s made by the pioneer collector, the Rev. John Broadwood of Horsham. The tune comes in part from *God rest you merry gentlemen*.

A wassail, a wassail, a wassail we'll begin
With sugar strands and cinnamon and many spices in
With a wassail, a wassail, a jolly wassail
And may joy come to you and to our wassail.

Good masters and good mistresses as you sit by your fire
Remember us poor wassailers who trample through the mire
With a wassail, a wassail, a jolly wassail
And may joy come to you and to our wassail.

And if you've
any maids within your house as I suppose you've none
They'd not let us stand a-wassailing so long on this cold stone
With a wassail, a wassail, a jolly wassail
And may joy come to you and to our wassail.

We'll cut a toast from off the loaf and set it by the fire
We'll wassail bees and apple trees until your heart's desire
With a wassail, a wassail, a jolly wassail
And may joy come to you and to our wassail.

Bring out your silver tankard, likewise your kissing sphere
For we'll come no more a-wassailing until another year
With a wassail, a wassail, a jolly wassail
And may joy come to you and to our wassail.

[And now no more we'll sing to you because the hour is late,
For we must go and sing our song at many another gate
With a wassail, a wassail, a jolly wassail
And may joy come to you and to our wassail]

Wassail Wassail (post Christmas)

A - D

In the 1890s Gloucestershire farm labourers used to visit large farms carrying a wassail-bowl decorated with ribbons. The bowl was one of the wooden sycamore or maple ones used to hold boiled potatoes on a farm kitchen table. The wassailers would also toast one of their number dressed as a cow, referred to as the Broad.

*Wassail Wassail all over the town
Our toast it is white and our ale it is brown
Our bowl it is made of the white maple tree
With a wassailing bowl we'll drink to thee*

Now here is to Cherry and to her right cheek
May God send our master a good piece of beef
And a good piece of beef that may we all see
With a wassailing bowl we'll drink to thee

So here's to Broad Mary and to her broad horn
May God send our master a good crop of corn
And a good crop of corn that may we all see
With a wassailing bowl, we'll drink to thee

And here is to Filpail and to her left ear
May God grant our master a Happy New Year
And a Happy New Year that may we all see
With a wassailing bowl we'll drink to thee

[Come butler, come fill us a bowl of the best
Then we hope that your soul in heaven may rest
But if you do draw us a bowl of the small
Then down shall go butler, bowl and all]

Now here's to the maid in the lily-white smock,
Who tripped to the door and slipped back the lock.
Who tripped to the door and pulled back the pin
For to let these jolly wassailers in.

The Jacobstowe Wassail

F - A#

Wassail, wassail!

Good master and mistress, sitting down by the fire
While we poor wassailers be dabbling in the mire
With our jolly wassail.

Oh, little Robin Redbreast he has a fine wing
Give us of your cider and we'll begin to sing
With our jolly wassail.

Wassail, wassail!

Good master and mistress, our wassail begin
Please open your door and let us come in,
With our jolly wassail.

Oh, little Robin Redbreast he has a fine song,
Give us of your cider, we won't keep you long
With our jolly wassail.

Wassail, wassail!

Your ale cup is white and your ale it is brown,
Your beer is the best that ever can be found,
With our jolly wassail.

Oh, little Robin Redbreast he has a fine leg,
Give us of your cider, and we'll begin to beg,
With our jolly wassail.

Wassail, wassail!

Your gin it is brew'd from the juniper tree,
Your gin is the best that ever can be,
With our jolly wassail.

Oh, little Robin Redbreast he has a fine toe,
Give us of your cider, and we'll begin to go,
With our jolly wassail.

Wassail, wassail!

With our jolly wassail.

Here We Come a-Wassailing

C

Here we come a-wassailing among the leaves so green
Here we come a-wandering so fairly to be seen,
Now is winter-time strangers travel far and near
And we wish you, send you a happy New Year.

*Bud and blossom, bud and blossom, bud and bloom and bear
So we may have plenty of cider all next year
Apples are in capfuls, are in bushel bags and all,
And there's cider a-running out of every gutter hole.*

Down here in the muddy lane there sits an old red fox,
Starving and a-shivering and licking his old chops
Bring us out your table and spread it if you please,
And give us hungry wassailers a bit of bread and cheese.

*Bud and blossom, bud and blossom, bud and bloom and bear
So we may have plenty of cider all next year
Apples are in capfuls, are in bushel bags and all,
And there's cider a-running out of every gutter hole.*

I've got a little purse and it's made of leather skin,
A little silver sixpence it would line it well within;
Now is winter-time strangers travel far and near,
And we wish you, and send you a happy New Year.

Now is winter-time strangers travel far and near,
And we wish you, and send you a happy New Year.

Apple Tree Wassailing Song

G

The old Twelfth Night was celebrated on 17 January, when it was the custom for groups of young men to go around farms and houses with orchards to wassail the apple trees in return for food and drink. In Sussex the practice was known as howling and they would shout: *Stand fast root, bear well top, Pray that God send us a howling good crop, Every twig, apples big, Every bough, apples enow. Hurrah!*

Oh lily-white lily, oh lily-white pin,
Please to come down and let us come in!
Lily-white lily, oh lily-white smock,
Please to come down and pull back the lock!

*For it's our wassail, jolly wassail! Joy come to our jolly wassail!
How well they may bloom, how well they may bear
So we may have apples and cider next year.*

Oh master and mistress, oh are you within?
Please to come down and pull back the pin
Good health to your house, may your wishes come true
Now bring us some cider and we'll drink down the moon.

*For it's our wassail, jolly wassail! Joy come to our jolly wassail!
How well they may bloom, how well they may bear
So we may have apples and cider next year.*

There was an old farmer and he had an old cow,
But how to milk her he didn't know how.
He put his old cow down in his old barn.
And a little more cider won't do us no harm.
*Harm me boys, harm, harm me boys harm,
And a little more cider won't do us no harm.*

*For it's our wassail, jolly wassail! Joy come to our jolly wassail!
How well they may bloom, how well they may bear
So we may have apples and cider next year.*

Oh the ringles and the jingles and the tenor of our song goes:
Merrily, merrily, merrily. And the tenor of our song goes: *merrily.*

(Spoken): Here's to thee old apple tree! Whence thou mayst bud, and whence thou mayst blow, and whence thou mayst bear, apples enow! Hats full, caps full, three-bushel bags full, barns full, pockets full and little heaps under the stairs. Hip hip hooray!

The Gower Wassail

C – F

The wassailers carried a large wooden bowl, wrapped in a sheepskin. This held the wassail, a special concoction of warm and highly-spiced ale, which would be replenished at each place where they called.

A-wassail, a-wassail throughout our town,
Our cup it is white and our ale it is brown.
Our wassail is made of the good ale and true,
Some nutmeg and ginger, it's the best we can brew.

*Fol-dee-dol, fol-dee-dol-dee-dol,
Fol-dee-dol-dee-dol, fol-dee-dol-dee-dee,
Fol-dee-derol, fol-dee-der-dee,
Sing too-ra-li-oh.*

Our wassail is made of the elderberry bough,
And so my good neighbours, we'll drink unto thou,
Besides all on earth, you'll have apples in store,
Pray let us come in for it's cold by the door.

There's a master and a mistress sitting down by the fire
While we poor wassailers do wait in the mire.
And you pretty maid with your silver-headed pin,
Please open the door and let us come in.

We know by the moon that we are not too soon,
And we know by the sky that we are not too high.
We know by the stars that we are not too far,
And we know by the ground that we are within sound.

We hope that your apple trees prosper and bear
So that we may have cider again all next year.
And where you have one barrel we hope you'll have ten
So that we may have cider when we call again.