THE MURDERED SWEETHEART BALLADS:
A DISCURSIVE CATALOGUE AND BIBLIOGRAPHY
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This is a substantially revised version reflecting the discovery (by David Atkinson) of the earlier and longer broadside version of Mary Thomson postulated at the conclusion of the original’s Introductory Essay, and following the renewed analysis of the material this occasioned.

THE MARY THOMSON CLUSTER

RACHAEL CROSSL(E)Y
BETSY SMITH
MARY TOM(P)SON
ANN WILLIAMS

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

THE CLUSTER
This contribution concerns a cluster of ballads, all published as broadsides in England or Scotland in the nineteenth century, on the murders, by their respective lovers, of four different women (in alphabetical order): Rachael Crossley;¹ Betsy Smith; Mary Thomson;² Ann Williams, two of which have subsequently been recovered from performance tradition. But the cluster actually consists of five ballads, as Mary Thomson had the singular misfortune (or was it carelessness) of being murdered by two different lovers in two different locations. These ballads are dealt with together because despite quite concrete discrepancies with regard to the names of the murdered sweethearts and the murderous lovers, and the specified locations of the crimes, they are manifestly variants of the same song. The two longest comprise the same 24 stanzas in the same order; all the shorter songs are made up entirely of selections, also in the same order, of these same stanzas, with the exception of one ballad that has one stanza unique to itself, and another that is achieved by conglomerating lines from several of the stanzas shared by the others. The group is here designated the “Mary Thomson Cluster” essentially for purposes of recognition among students and performers of folk song, as three of the four versions recorded from singing tradition in Great Britain and North America name her as the victim (the fourth, a one-stanza fragment, is assigned this title by its editors, but derives from another member of the cluster). Meanwhile the other broadsides, if

¹ The spelling Crossley / Crossly differs between the two available printings of this ballad (and may consequently be inconsistent in my discussion).
² The spelling is uniformly “Thomson” on the broadsides, “Thompson” in three of the four known versions from performance tradition (at least as published).
they are known at all, are generally not perceived as being the same song.\(^3\) This does not in itself imply that the longer Mary Thomson ballad (distinguished in what follows as *1Mary Thomson*) is the original of all the others, although this is manifestly the case with the shorter *2Mary Thomson*, and may be the case for others. The narrative shared by the ballads within the cluster conforms closely to the Murdered Sweetheart genre, telling the tragic story of a girl seduced by a lover who promised her marriage, but when she becomes pregnant and importunes him to live up to this commitment he lures her away to a lonely spot and kills her. Following the discovery of the crime he is arrested, and now awaits his trial. This means that unlike perhaps a majority of Murdered Sweetheart Ballads, but far from uniquely, these ballads do not follow the narrative through the trial to the eve of the execution (they are not ‘last goodnights’ in the voice of the lover-murderer, and are narrated in the third person).

**THE BROADSIDES**

Before entering what may develop into a complex exploration with confusing multiple comparisons, the simple ‘factual’ differences identifying the five broadside ballads in the cluster may be noted at once and schematically:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sweetheart</th>
<th>lover</th>
<th>location</th>
<th>date (printer)</th>
<th>Roud no.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1Mary Thomson(^4)</td>
<td>David Gaston</td>
<td>“near Amsterdale .... in Derbyshire”.</td>
<td>(1810-36)</td>
<td>2458(^5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2Mary Thomson(^6)</td>
<td>David Brown</td>
<td>“near Amsterdale in ... Carlisle”.</td>
<td>(1835-6)</td>
<td>2458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betsy Smith(^7)</td>
<td>‘Thomas’</td>
<td>“Manchester in Lancashire”</td>
<td>(1820-60)</td>
<td>V6818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Williams(^8)</td>
<td>William Jones</td>
<td>“Wirksworth ... ‘1823’ in Derbyshire”</td>
<td>(1819-44)</td>
<td>V41960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachael Crossly(^9)</td>
<td>William Shaw</td>
<td>“Kirkburton” “Yorkshire”</td>
<td>(1834-88)</td>
<td>V9935</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The information here on people and places and (in the one case) the year specified for the events, is in each case derived exclusively from material on the broadside concerned (be it the ballad text itself, the extended title, or an accompanying prose account), as there are no

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\(^3\) Witness the distinct Roud Index nos. immediately following. These ballads were initially referred to in my Introduction to this Murdered Sweetheart Ballad Bibliography as the “Betsy Smith” cluster, this being the first ballad in the group I encountered.

\(^4\) Long version, quoted in what follows from version printed by Menzies of Edinburgh (see Bibliography, below).

\(^5\) This is the number assigned to versions from singing tradition; the broadsides are not registered in the Roud Index.

\(^6\) Short version, quoted in what follows from version printed by Sanderson of Edinburgh (see Bibliography, below).

\(^7\) Quoted in what follows from broadside printed by Robert McIntosh, Glasgow (see Bibliography, below).

\(^8\) Quoted in what follows from the reproduction by Charles Hindley (see Bibliography, below).

\(^9\) Quoted in what follows from the printing by G. Walker of Durham (see Bibliography below)
records outside the broadsides of any of these women being murdered by any of these men.  

This circumstance, that despite the considerable circumstantial details some of them supply, all the events are evidently invents (or as we now say, are fake news),

complicates discussion of their relationships – it might have been expected that one was based on a real case, the others opportunistic remixes.

Encountering the same ballad deployed for multiple cases is very rare compared to the opposite, multiple ballads on one case (amply illustrated by the nine songs on Maria Marten), but as it happens both situations apply here, as there was evidently a third broadside ballad on Mary Thomson, or rather a second ballad on her murder (as in *Mary Thomson*) by David Gaston. This other ballad may ultimately have indirect contextual implications for the relationships between those within the cluster (say in the matter of which came first), but by virtue of being a quite different ballad in a quite different verse-form it does not itself qualify as a member, and will not be considered further.

Something similar might also be said of Rachael Crossly, of whose murder we also have two ballads, only one of which qualifies for attention here, but under unusual, not to say weird, circumstances. As recounted in a broadside entitled *The Yorkshire Tragedy* (no connection with the Elizabethan play of that name) she was murdered by her sweetheart, William Shaw, who is duly tried and hanged, in a scenario which would have been in conformity with the Murdered Sweetheart paradigm had he not waited to kill her until she was pregnant with their second illegitimate child. Whatever its generic status this is obviously a quite different story having no connection with the present cluster. However it constitutes only “Part First” of the verses on the broadside. Narrating a given story in two parts on the same broadside is normal enough, and doing so with a Murdered Sweetheart ballad would not be unique, but here “Part Second”, unusually and perhaps uniquely, is not a continuation, since the judicial aftermath having played itself out in the first Part the protagonists are both dead before the second begins. Puzzled readers were presumably to construe it, since the names are the same, as a retelling of their story from the beginning. It is effectively a second song, therefore, but now with only the one, murder-instigating, pregnancy, fully qualifying as a Murdered Sweetheart ballad. Moreover, in comprising exclusively, in the same order, stanzas shared with two or more of the others, it qualifies as a further member of the Mary Thomson cluster. It will be referred to in what follows as *Rachael Crossly*.

In the light of these circumstances it is a relatively simple task to survey schematically which broadside ballad has which stanzas. While sometimes printed as eight-line (or four long-line) stanzas (on which see further the concluding remarks on music), for purposes of comparison all the broadside ballads belonging to this complex (and their performed derivatives) can and will be resolved into (and cited by reference to) numbered units

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11 This would mean they are all what were known as ‘cocks’, cases invented to provide commercially profitable material during a dearth of spectacular news.

12 Saving *Yorkshire Tragedy* for the broadside as a whole, and in accordance with the convention applied in the particular circumstances of this paper that broadsides will be identified by the name of the murdered sweetheart in italics, and derivative versions from performance tradition by the name of the murdered sweetheart in inverted commas. This nonetheless means that references to an italicized name sometimes refer to the printed ballad, sometimes to the broadside (and the other contents) on which it was printed.
corresponding to regular (‘common measure’) ballad quatrains, that is rhyming abcb, with verbal stresses 4.3.4.3.\textsuperscript{13} The five ballads are here presented in descending order of length; the narrative sub-sections indicated are those characteristic of the genre and will be invoked in ensuing discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mary Thomson</th>
<th>Ann Williams</th>
<th>Betsy Smith</th>
<th>Mary Thomson</th>
<th>Rachael Crossly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEAD-IN</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFFAIR</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>MURDER</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>&gt;8.3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>&gt;8.1</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>&gt;8.2,4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7 &amp; said she wouldn’t ask to be his wife.</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFTERMATH</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18.</td>
<td>12.</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>MORAL</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary:

\textit{Mary Thomson}

and \textit{Ann Williams} comprise the same 24 stanzas;

while \textit{Betsy Smith} comprises 18 stanzas

\textsuperscript{13} The verse in the alternate, third broadside on Mary Thomson is in long measure (4.4.4.4.) rhyming aabb.
all corresponding to stanzas in the 24-stanza ballads;

2Mary Thomson comprises 12 stanzas
-- 10 corresponding to stanzas in the 24-stanza ballads
+ one made up of lines from 3 stanzas in the 24-stanza ballads
+ one unique to this song

Rachael Crossly comprises 10 stanzas
-- all corresponding to stanzas in the 24-stanza ballads.

With reference to complete stanzas, ‘corresponding’ here means not merely the same information (other than names) but (allowing for occasional moderate variation) the same verbal formulations. There are no textual features in which two or more of the shorter broadside ballads share a feature which is not also shared with the 24-stanza ballads, but conversely each shorter ballad shares stanzas with the longer which it does not share with the others. The comparison therefore suggests very strongly that one of the 24-stanza ballads was the original, from which the others, directly or indirectly, are derived.

THE LONG BALLADS: ANN WILLIAMS AND 1MARY THOMSON
If we had been looking for an original ballad based on an actual case, then A mournful and affecting Copy of Verses on the death of Ann Williams, Who was barbarously and cruelly murdered by her sweetheart, W. Jones, near Wirksworth, in Derbyshire, July, 1823 is technically the best qualified, if only because the specified location, unlike 1Mary Thomson’s “Amsterdale” (also “in Derbyshire”) can actually be shown to exist. With regard to precedence the unique specification of a year, 1823, is not decisive, as the printer of 1Mary Thomson was active at the address specified on the sheet from 1810, but on the other hand the appearance of a “Copy of Verses on Ann Williams, Who was murdered” in a catalogue issued by a Brighton printer in 1820-24 indicates an intention to mimic the function of an authentic, real-crime ballad, which was to exploit the notoriety of a recent case. Its London printer, J. Pitts, was in business at this time (and one might expect a ballad trend like this to start in the capital).

Otherwise Ann Williams is a business-like piece of work, the ballad prefaced, after the title quoted, only with an 80-word summary concluding, “The following verses are written upon the occasion, giving a complete detail of this shocking affair:--“. 1Mary Thomson in contrast is a multi-media product making a bid for authenticity whose energy borders on desperation. The “Full and Particular Account of a Most Cruel and Barbarous Murder, Committed upon the Body of Mary Thomson, by her Sweet-heart, David Gaston ...” promised in its lengthy (60-word) title is delivered in the respective forms of the 24-stanza ballad, a woodcut illustration, and a lengthy (350-word) prose account, whose opening is dense with circumstantial information:

David Gaston, a young man, aged 21, has been fully committed to Derby goal, for the wilful Murder of his sweet-heart, Mary Thomson, a lovely girl, aged 19, the only daughter of Isaac Thomson of Amsterdale, and servant to a respectable farmer in that neighbourhood. ...
Given this willingness to provide detail it is odd that the events are specified as occurring in that mysterious Amsterdale,\(^{14}\) and confidence is further undermined by the glaring discrepancy between the ballad, where the murder occurs “Among the flow’ry fields” (10.2), and the illustration, which depicts it as happening in a bedroom. Discrepancy between the ballad and the prose account is meanwhile equally glaring, but of ambiguous import. The authenticity of the prose account is ostensibly enhanced by its verbatim reproduction of David Gaston’s letter asking Mary to meet him at a lonely spot to discuss their marriage, but as indicated by the summary above there is nothing of this in the ballad, where it is on the contrary Mary Thomson herself who writes a letter to Gaston imploring him to marry her. This is a not altogether unique illustration of the discrepant narrative protocols of the verbal forms sharing space on the broadside, and might not have unduly disturbed readers at the time (a few years later something similar would happen in a mixed prose narrative and ballad broadside on the well documented Maria Marten case). The prose account, in journalistic mode, is interested in the judicial process, and the man’s letter to Mary Thomson, “happily for the ends of justice, was found upon her person after she was murdered”,\(^{15}\) and regular newspapers routinely quoted in full documents related to a (real) case. Meanwhile in ballad mode the pregnant sweetheart’s desperate plea for marriage (if more often spoken than epistolary) is standard within the Murdered Sweetheart paradigm. But in the present context, paradoxically, the sense of authenticity is equally undermined by the similarity between the two accounts, that in prose, other than adding names and numbers, largely elaborating with commonplaces what is already available in the ballad (of which that lengthy title is also very much a paraphrase).

2 MARY THOMSON

Whether or not it is the origin of the cluster as a whole, 1Mary Thomson evidently stands at the head of a significant strand within it, comprising both the other broadside on this particular murdered sweetheart (published by another Edinburgh printer) and those three of the four versions known from performance tradition in which the murdered sweetheart is explicitly named Mary Thom(p)son. While manifestly derivative in terms of both prose and verse,\(^{16}\) the broadside containing 2Mary Thomson has introduced many changes, and if anything further enhanced at least the appearance authenticity. The title is now significantly extended (from 63 to 108 words) to become a fully-fledged summary of the case, but the additional information from either the ballad (the manner of disposing of the body) or the prose account (specification of their meeting-place). Least altered is the prose account itself, which among a few inconsequential words and phrases, adds the quite specific information that the lover-murderer, now David Brown, was “farm-servant to Mr James Luke of Campton”. As unknown to northern England’s topography as Amsterdale to Derbyshire’s, this may be another invention, unless


\(^{15}\) My colleague Nina Nørgaard pertinently wonders whether the letter would still be legible after several days in the water.

\(^{16}\) See Bibliography below for a link to a reproduction of the whole sheet.
the reference is to Camerton in Allerdale, some 30 miles from Carlisle, to whose neighbourhood the action has now been relocated.

The most striking enhancement of authenticity by far however is the woodcut illustration, which now comprises a depiction of the murder scene manifestly based on the verbal narrative, worthy of note in a business that frequently recycled illustrations from one ballad to another, as presumably the case with the bedroom scene accompanying 1Mary Thomson. Here on 2Mary Thomson a man is depicted attacking a woman with a knife against the backdrop precisely of the prose account’s “lake surrounded with trees” into which he will throw the body. (The free-standing farmhand and milkmaid figures on each side are in contrast probably generic, but may have provided models for those in the main illustration). There remains nonetheless an interesting discrepancy, in that while the accompanying prose account has him stab her in the side and then “repeat his murderous blows”, and in the ballad as here revised he merely “Did pierce her body threw” (8.4), the woodcut clearly shows him putting the blade to her throat. This detail derives from 1Mary Thomson, where both prose account and ballad agree with the later version on the stabbing of the body (and the 2Mary Thomson woodcut also seems to show dark blood flowing from her waist down the lighter-coloured skirt), but the longer ballad has a second phase to the attack in which “Her throat was cut from ear to ear” (17.3). Presumably the illustrator had access to this earlier version which his literary colleague was in the process of shortening.

This latter process saw the ballad halved in length to only twelve stanzas, and as these retain both the two-stanza lead-in and the two stanzas on the judicial aftermath, it is inevitably the genre’s core narrative phases, the affair and the murder, that are subject to most radical reduction -- this balance is altogether unlike what would be expected to occur in performance tradition (although the two-stanza moralizing conclusion is discarded). And the process is not without some literary adroitness. The original’s elaborate murder scene (with the sweetheart begging for mercy both after the threat of violence and after its onset) is reduced to a single stanza made up of two lines repeated verbatim from different points, sandwiching reformulations of other lines:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1MARY THOMSON</th>
<th>2MARY THOMSON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.1 When to the fatal spot they came</td>
<td>8. When to the fatal spot they came</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.3 He took the knife all from his side</td>
<td>A knife then forth he drew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.3 Aloud for mercy she did call</td>
<td>And while she loud for mercy call’d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.4 And pierced her body through</td>
<td>Did pierce her body threw. [sic]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the case of the affair, the reduction is achieved, uniquely within the cluster, by the composition of a new stanza (conforming to the technical requirements of the ballad quatrain) to achieve the same narrative work as three stanzas (9-11) in 1MaryThomson:

7. That selfsame night he did appoint
   To meet her in Lime Wood,
   Where his true love soon did him meet,
   Ne'er dreading ought but good.
It is an interesting construct. The specification of their meeting in “Lime Wood” stems from the prose account, and the same may apply to the unsuspecting mood of the sweetheart (of which *Mary Thomson* has nothing), who after receiving the reassuring letter approached the rendezvous “with a heart somewhat relieved”; but as a device to enhance the ensuing horrors it is a commonplace of the genre.

**RACHAEL CROSSLY**

Predictably in light of its odd auspices, Rachael Crossly is also in textual terms the most eccentric member of the cluster. It has all the marks of a lackadaisical exercise in filling up space, the “Part First”, which is evidently the ‘real’ story of Rachael Crossly, having left just enough column inches to merit adding something else, but of limited scope. In which case the choice was unfortunate, and whoever was responsible had both to reduce one of the long ballads in the cluster to a suitable length, and at the same time avoid major inconsistencies with Part First, of which it is ostensibly a reiteration (The concatenation of stanzas shows it cannot have derived from either of the other shorter ballads). The result is an account that moves fairly slowly through the affair, until it makes two drastic leaps to wrap up the story, so that the sweetheart begs for mercy without the lover having threatened, let alone harmed, her, and the narrator draws the moral without any crime having been committed. The first leap is probably space-saving, the second perhaps to avoid an overt discrepancy on the disposal of the corpse, which elsewhere in this cluster is thrown into a river or lake, while the Rachael Crossly of Part First was thrown down a mine-shaft. While not mentioned explicitly this latter is also responsible for a concrete environmental shift, the lover now inviting the sweetheart less romantically to take a walk “Into the coalpit field” (6.2) rather than the “flowery fields” of the long versions (10.2). Exactly which long ballad was being adapted may be signaled by a single word at one of the few places in the selected material where they have a discernible verbal discrepancy: while the last line of *Ann Williams* promises that those who heed its warnings will live “In comfort, joy and love” (24.4), *Mary Thomson* (24.4), followed by Rachael Crossley (10.4), has “comfort, peace and love”.

**BETSY SMITH**

Of all the broadside ballads in the cluster the most frequently printed, Betsy Smith, makes the least effort at achieving the look of real news. Its title is simply (The) Murder of Betsy Smith, and there is no material concerning the case on the sheet other than the ballad itself (in both the available prints it shares the sheet with another ballad). The specification that the murder occurred “On the nineteenth day of August” (7.1) says very little without any reference to a year, and of the lover-murderer we learn only (when addressed by his victim, st. 14.3) that his name was “Thomas”.

Compared to the hapless Rachael Crossly the eighteen stanzas of Betsy Smith produce an efficient and viable reduction, omitting the concluding valediction and two pairs of narrative stanzas (the girl’s letter saying she is pregnant; the disposal of the corpse) which are dispensable in providing information stated or implied in material that is retained. Other than the specifics of names and places its textual revision extends from single words (“dreadful murder” for “cruel murder”, both st. 1) to the quite radical “And with solemn vows and
promises / his love he oft declared” for “My love is such I am resolved / To wed you I declare” (both 5.3-4).

Other changes are of the kind of that might suggest the impact of performance tradition, for instance the internal contamination producing (or enhancing) verbal repetition between similar narrative moments, here the two-phase attack interrupted by her plea for mercy:

**ANN WILLIAMS / IMARY THOMSON**

15. He took the knife all from his side, And pierced her body through. …
17. Twice more then with the bloody knife He ran her body through,

**BETSY SMITH**

13. Then took the knife all from his side & pierced her body through. …
15. Twice more then with the fatal knife he pierced her body through.

Something similar occurs with the connected moments in which he first invites her to a lonely place, and on arrival informs her of his intentions, except now it is a substituted word that engages in the contamination.¹⁸

10. Saying, Nancy dear, come let us walk, Among the flowery fields, …
12. When to the fatal spot they came, These words to her did say:¹⁹ All on this very night I will Your precious life betray.

8. Says, "Betsy, dear, come let us walk down in the flowery grove, …
10. When to the fatal spot they came he thus to her did say, All on this night, within this grove, I will your life betray".

Another change characteristic of performance tradition is the substitution of one traditional formula, “milk white breast” (18.3) of the longer versions with another (16.3: “lilywhite breast”).

Within the stanzas retained by Betsy Smith there are no verbal discrepancies between the longer versions that would permit identification of its source. There is an indirect indication, however in the fact that George Walker, Junior, of Durham, was involved in printing both Betsy Smith and Rachael Crossly (that is The Yorkshire Tragedy), which (as just noted) is derived from IMary Thomson. It may not be coincidental that he printed Betsy Smith, which sets the action in Manchester, on commission from John Livsey of that city.

**PERFORMANCE TRADITION**

At the outset of further, potentially confusing, comparative analyses, it may be useful to survey the stanzas encompassed by the four versions from performance tradition as set against the broadside ballads (of which the two longer, Ann Williams and IMary Thomson, in these terms identical, can now be conglomerated).

¹⁷ At 17.1 IMary Thompson has “this horrid knife”
¹⁸ It is probably more curious than significant that in shifting the venue from “flowery fields” to “flowery grove” Betsy Smith is more in line with Scandinavian traditional balladry in which the default for such a “fatal spot” is the rose grove, roselund.
¹⁹ At 12.2 IMary Thompson has “Those words he then did say”.
This single-stanza fragment was sent to Gavin Greig in 1910 (with other “bits” of it he unfortunately does not reproduce) by the appropriately named Mrs. Sangster, who also knew that the “damsel” was murdered by her lover. As reported the stanza concerned does not name...
the murdered sweetheart, and Greig was not able to identify the ballad from which it derives. The title has been supplied by the Greig collection’s more recent editors (who invoke the published text of the Holdstock version from English performance tradition), and the fragment has accordingly been indexed under Roud no. 2458 (“Mary Thom(p)son”). But while the broadsides 1Mary Thompson and 2Mary Thompson were both printed in Edinburgh (and it seems only there), this fragment does not derive from either of them. It reproduces almost verbatim the stanza of Betsy Smith (which was also published, by two printers, in Scotland) with its distinctive introduction of the sweetheart as a “damsel” and specification of where she lived:

**Betsy Smith**

3. Near Manchester in Lancashire,  
    this damsel she did dwell,  
    In service she long time had lived,  
    till this to her befell:

**Mrs Sangster**

1. In Manchester in Lancashire  
    A damsel she did dwell  
    In service a long time she lived,  
    Till this to her befell.

Mrs. Sangster’s childhood recollection that the ballad was both sold as a broadside at a named fair and sung locally therefore supplies further information on the circulation of this particular ballad.

**ENGLAND: SAMUEL HOLDSTOCK**

At the opposite extreme, from almost exactly the same time, we find the lone English version of “Mary Thomson”, collected from Samuel Holdstock of Wittersham in Kent. Recorded in August 1909 and May 1910 he ultimately supplied a text of 22 stanzas, effectively a complete 1Mary Thomson lacking only the two first stanzas with their opening “Come all ye” gambit. But this was after a complex process whose resulting documentation not represented with optimum clarity in the VWML Index and Catalogue, and whose results, when fully identified, merit further examination in their own right.

On 21 August 1909 Holdstock was visited at his home by Percy Grainger, who recorded the tune of “Mary Thompson”, accompanied by his local contact, Edith Lyttleton, who recorded the words. The latter survive in two forms. What is presumably a transcript made in the course of performance comprises nine pages of very scrappy writing ([https://www.vwml.org/record/PG/10/50](https://www.vwml.org/record/PG/10/50)) -- the Index entry erroneously placing Wittersham in Gloucestershire and misquoting the first line). What is evidently a derivative fair copy comprises four pages more neatly written in what may be a different hand or more likely the same copying at greater leisure, and accompanied by two pages of musical notation ([https://www.vwml.org/record/PG/15/3](https://www.vwml.org/record/PG/15/3)) -- the location now correctly specified and first line correctly quoted). This version of August 1909 comprises 20 stanzas, as in addition to the first two it also lacks a pair of stanzas from the narrative. It is discussed here on the basis of the fair copy: I shall not compete with the writer of the latter in deciphering the field transcript, but have compared the two in sufficient detail to determine their relationship to the same performance session.

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20 Greig is reticent in naming his female correspondents and it is just possible that ‘Sangster’ is an alias.
While the retention of 20 stanzas out of 24 (as always, it seems, in the same order) suggests Holdstock’s version was still fairly close to the broadside, alterations do include symptoms characteristic of transmission through performance tradition. This includes the omissions. Broadside ‘packaging’ which is there for the benefit of the ballad hawker, like those two opening stanzas, is particularly vulnerable to omission, and the loss of the other two makes for a more ‘efficient’ narrative progress in the traditional ballad manner. The original broadside over-indulges somewhat in the murder scene, having the sweetheart twice beg for mercy: first after the lover announces his intention to kill her, then after his first onslaught, following which he finishes her off. The omission of the first plea for mercy avoids that first hiatus. The physical attack nonetheless still has two phases, and memory-based transmission has generated a classic instance of verbal repetition resulting from internal contamination between these similar moments:

**Mary Thomson**

15. O then this wicked young man said,  
No mercy will I show,  
He took the knife all from his side,  
And pierc’d her body through.

...  

17. Twice more then with this horrid knife,  
He ran her body through;  
Her throat was cut from ear to ear,  
Most dreadful for to view;

**Samuel Holdstock August 1909**

11. He took the knife all from his side  
& run her body through  
her throat he cut from ear to ear  
most dreadful for to view

...  

13. Twice more all with his horrid knife  
he run her body through,  
her throat he cut from ear to ear,  
most dreadful for to view

The two moments already shared a line with similar formulations, but here too contamination has brought the more into line with the other: while in the broadside the perpetrator first “pierc’d … through” and then “ran threw” the sweetheart’s body, in the performance version it is “run … through” in both instances.

Whether or not these features (which from conventional points of view are errors) were the cause, Percy Grainger was evidently dissatisfied with the words recorded on this occasion, and at his instigation Edith Lyttleton called on Samuel Holdstock again on or shortly before 10 May 1910. Both the 22-stanza version she obtained on this occasion (at [http://www.vwml.org/record/PG/15/2](http://www.vwml.org/record/PG/15/2)), and her covering letter to Grainger (at [http://www.vwml.org/record/PG/15/1](http://www.vwml.org/record/PG/15/1)), are accessible via the VWML catalogue, but the entry on the text erroneously dates it to 21 August 1909 (the first visit). The two entries, however, in combination with cross-references in the documents themselves, indicate quite clearly that ‘PG/15/2’ was the text enclosed with the letter ‘PG/15/1’ of 10 May 1910 (and unlike any of the documents from the August visit they are both on Edith Littleton’s personalized stationery). Resolving this is however not the end of the difficulties with accessing the Holdstock versions, for the seven manuscript pages to which the song entry (PG/15/2) links contain only the first 14 stanzas, breaking off immediately before the murder is fulfilled. This is evidently a mechanical error in the VWML digitalization process, for the full text of 22 stanzas had previously been published by R.S. Thomson in the *Folk Music Journal* in 1974,
although its significance is confused by his assigning them, presumably in accordance with the erroneous VWML catalogue entry (in whatever form it had in 1974), to the August 1909 session.\footnote{Textual juxtapositions show both that Thomson’s transcription of the first fourteen stanzas is accurate, and that he has not supplied the remaining stanzas from the broadside or the version that really was collected in 1909 – and it is evident from his notes elsewhere in the same article that had he done so the fact would have stated.}

Comparison of the thus identified 1910 version with its 1909 predecessor indicates that Samuel Holdstock had in the interim done some serious work on his “Mary Thomson”: symptomatically, while he had previously set the action “In Hampstead down in Dirbyshire” he now insisted (Edith Lyttleton reports) it was “In Amsterdon near Derbyshire” (1.1 in both cases), closer to the original’s “Amsterdale” (3.1). While the 1909 transcript may have registered what the listener heard as much as what the singer sang, it is symbolic of the significant adjustment back into line with the broadside original also reflected in the restoration of those two stanzas (now 11-12) omitted from the murder scene at the first recording session. Furthermore with regard to discrepancies in individual words or phrases between the two performances there are no less than 17 instances where, the 1909 version having deviated from it, the 1910 version restores the reading of the broadside (as against only 4 instances where the 1909 version represents a broadside reading which the 1910 version changes). The retention of the verbal repetition caused by internal repetition just glanced at (although the broadside’s ‘pierced’ has reappeared in one line) and the substitution of an original line with a verbal commonplace,\footnote{“the truth to you I'll tell (1.4) for the the broadside’s “Till this to her befell” (3.4.; retained by the 1909 version as 1.4).} indicate that Holdstock in making these ‘corrections’ probably did not have direct access to a copy of 1Mary Thomson, but he does seem to have been conscious of a ‘correct’ (because print-derived?) original which he strove to reproduce as accurately as possible (and tried harder the second time around).

By way of contrast there is also a distinctive thematic feature in Holdstock’s 1909 rendition of the ballad which has remained stable to 1910, and that is an orientation towards the female protagonist. The general tendency in Murdered Sweetheart ballads is for attention to shift from the plight of the sweetheart to that of the lover as the narrative moves on from the affair and the murder into the aftermath, not least if this takes the form of a trial and execution. But in those cases where we have derivative versions from performance tradition the judicial aspects tend to be whittled away, so that the girl remains rather more in focus. In Holdstock’s version of this ballad, where what little is said about the judicial aftermath is mostly retained, the same shift is achieved in a more subtle way. In 1Mary Thomson the crime is uncovered by the blood-stained water, but Samuel Holdstock reformulates the lines so that it is the victim’s blood which\footnote{Retained without significant alteration in 1910.} actively achieves the revelation:

\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textit{1Mary Thomson} & \textbf{Samuel Holdstock, 1909}\footnote{Retained without significant alteration in 1910.} \\
20. O then into the watery lake & 18. \& then into a watery lake
He plunged her straightway, & he plunged her straight away,
But with her precious blood & but where her precious blood
was stained, & \textit{did stain},
\end{tabular}
Which soon did him betray.

The sustained awareness of the girl is also reflected in what would technically count as a mistake in the concluding valediction. Quite often the focus on the lover towards the end of Murdered Sweetheart broadsides is so strong that it is “young men” who are urged to take warning from the events rather than “young women”. *Mary Thomson* divides attention equally, with one statement for each, but Holdstock addresses both of these to females:

1*Mary Thomson*  

23. Now all you thoughtless young men,  
   A timely warning take;  
   Likewise ye fair young maidens,  
   For this poor damsel’s sake.

19. So all you thoughtless young girls  
   a timely warning take  
   likewise ye fair young maidens,  
   for this poor damsel’s sake.

But there remains a sting, almost literally in the tail, of Samuel Holdstock’s “Mary Thomson”, for the valediction ends, in both his performances (20.4; 22.4), promising a future of “joy & love” for those who heed its warning. But this, as already noted in another connection, reproduces the last line, not of *Mary Thomson* (which promises “peace and love”) but of *Ann Williams* (24.4 in both instances). This may be the place to observe that the broadside of *Mary Thomson* whose availability solved so many problems concerning this ballad cluster, states not that it was “printed” but that it was “Re-printed” by Menzies of Edinburgh, raising the spectre of a yet earlier Ur-*Mary Thomson* with perhaps some verbal features more in line with *Ann Williams* ....

*NORTH AMERICA*  
Performance tradition in North America similarly provides one fragmentary text and one much fuller, both of them the fruits of the indefatigable collection efforts of Helen Hartness Flanders and her associate Marguerite Olney (the latter the collector in both cases here), the singers hailing from two communities only seven miles apart in Maine and indeed recorded on the same day in 1942.

The 20 stanza version of Murchie Harvey resembles that of Samuel Holdstock in effectively representing a complete *Mary Thomson* minus a pair of stanzas from the non-narrative packaging, only this time it is the concluding valediction that is dropped, although the collector notes that the singer knew there was a “last verse” (that is, an 8 line stanza corresponding to the two missing quatrains) that he “could not recall”. It may be echoed in

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24 Reproduced verbatim in 1910 as st. 21.  
25 The following discussion ignores the suggestion that *Betsy Smith* (or another of the broadsides in this cluster) may have supplied stanzas for the American ballad “Fair Florella” which belongs to the distinct category of the Jealous Lover Ballad. The connection is discussed by Phillips Barry, "Fair Florella", *American Speech*, 3 (1928), 441-47.  
26 These unpublished texts are curated by the Helen Hartness Flanders Ballad Collection, Middlebury College, Vermont. I am happy to acknowledge the generosity of the Davis Library at Middlebury in supplying copies of both transcripts and the kind assistance of Joseph F. Watson, Preservation Manager, Special Collections & Archives Associate, Davis Library Facilities Coordinator, Middlebury College in this connection, and not least for drawing to my attention the Harvey version, which does not figure in the online catalogue, (nor, therefore, in the Roud Index).
this singer’s variant opening, “Come all young men and maiden’s fair” (1.1). There is also a
two-quatrain reduction in the narrative section, not for the first time here in processing the
original’s repetitive murder-scene. In Harvey’s case this involves omitting the girl’s second
plea for mercy which had divided the knife attack into two phases, achieved by aggregating
two half-stanzas:

**Mary Thomson**

14. With clasped hands, and uplift eyes,
    She cried, Oh spare my life,
    I never more will ask at you
    To make me your lawful wife.

15. O then this wicked young man said,
    No mercy will I show;
    He took the knife all from his side,
    And pierc’d her body through.

16. But still, she smiling said to him
    While trembling with fear,
    Ah! David, David, spare my life;
    Think on your baby dear.

17. Twice more then with this horrid knife
    He ran her body through,
    Her throat was cut from ear to ear,
    Most dreadful for to view;

**Murchie Harvey, 1942**

14. With clasped hands and uplifted eyes
    she cried, O spare my life,
    And never more will I ask you
    to make me your lawful wife.

15. He pulled the knife out from his side
    -- he runs her body through

15. He pulled the knife out from his side
    -- he runs her body through

As can be seen, apart from these omissions, there is considerable textual stability, change
restricted to substitution like “lawful wife” for “wedded wife”. Symptomatically, unique
among the oral versions of the Mary Thomson story, Harvey reproduces exactly the
Amsterdale (3.1) of the original broadside.

The same cannot be said of the version recorded from Arthur Walker, which takes the
location to the Zielform, “In Amsterdam” (1.1) manifestly awaiting it. Otherwise this four-
stanza fragment looks set fair to produce a derivative of *Mary Thomson* closely related to
Muchie Harvey’s, some of whose deviations it shares, had it not broken off at an early point in
the narrative. It also took Harvey’s reduction of the packaging a stage further by omitting the
first two, “Come all ye ...”, stanzas.

**A NOTE ON THE MUSIC**

None of the broadside printings of any of the ballads in the cluster specify a melody to which
it is to be sung. Of the Scottish singer who supplied him with one quatrain of what transpired
to be a version of *Betsy Smith*, Gavin Greig notes that he had just previously collected from
her a “big instalment of tunes”, but (perhaps precisely because this one came by post) he provides no tune for this ballad. At least, as we saw, the informant confirmed that it was indeed “sung” in her neighbourhood. Both of the American versions were recorded mechanically, and the discussion above is based on the collector’s transcripts of these, but frustratingly for one reason or another neither are currently accessible on the Middlebury College Library’s extensive internet sound archive; nor do they seem to be available elsewhere.

Despite his notorious enthusiasm for the phonograph as a research tool, Percy Grainger does not seem to have recorded the singing of Samuel Holdstock during his visit in 1909, but his detailed musical notation is accessible in the VWML (https://www.vwml.org/record/PG/15/3). It records variations in the melody between individual stanzas, and has annotations of both a technical (like repeating a bar of music), and a more general, nature (“sung rhythmically, gracefully ...”). This (although recorded in 1909) is evidently the source for the somewhat simplified notation provided with the text (from 1910) in R.S. Thomson’s article in the *Folk Music Journal*.

Significant more generally is the way the latter’s presentation indicates that the melody was clearly designed to accommodate a stanza of eight (four-beat) lines, in which format two of the ballads in the cluster (Betsy Smith; *Mary Thomson*) were indeed printed (the others do not register stanza divisions). The same stanza form appears in the collector’s transcripts of the two versions of “Mary Thomson” from American performance tradition, and of course in Thomson’s own text of Holdstock’s version. With the sole exception of the Scottish fragment, therefore, my resolution of the songs of this cluster into ballad quatrains, while reflecting the verbal aspect of the songs (syntax; punctuation; sense; rhyme) does not adequately capture the musical structure of performance. And this in turn (for those of us incorrigibly interested in words) has repercussions for the understanding of verbal change and transmission.

Inevitably, whatever their differences, all five ballads as originally printed comprise an even number of my quatrains, but it is also noticeable that the shorter renditions, in print and performance, have a distinct tendency to omit what my discussion has called “pairs” of stanzas (the first invariably an odd umber), each of which will however have been experienced as a (musical) unit by singers and audiences. And in the instance where a new stanza has been constructed by conglomerating lines from two or more others, is perhaps better understood in terms of eight- rather than four-line units.

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CATALOGUE OF SONGS AND VERSIONS

THE BROADSIDES

RACHAEL CROSSLEY
Roud Index No. V9935

THE YORKSHIRE TRAGEDY. A correct Account of the MURDER on the 9th of March, of RACHAEL CROSSLEY, of KIRKBURTON, near HUDDERSFIELD, by WILLIAM SHAW, her Sweetheart.
G. Walker, Jun., Printer, Sadler-Street, Durham. No. 309

National Library of Scotland
http://deriv.nls.uk/dcn9/7489/74898003.9.htm (transcript)
http://deriv.nls.uk/dcn30/7489/74898003.30.jpg (facs.)
N.B. “Part Second” is adapted from “Mary Thomson” ; this is the printer who produced “Betty Smith” for Livsey

-- Kirkburton is a village on the outskirts of Huddersfield

The Yorkshire Tragedy, Giving an Account of The Murder of Rachael Crossly, of Kirkburton, near Hussersfield, by William Shaw, her sweetheart.
William Walker, Otley
Two sizeable woodcuts:
between title and text: in a rural setting, a man drags a supine female figure towards a dug grave
at bottom, beneath song text and between columns of prose:
hooded man with noose around neck on balcony facing onlookers in street below.
the prose material adds nothing to the information available in the ballad, and largely comprises commonplaces about the trial, the execution, and the perpetrator’s remorse.

Oxford Bodleian Library. Firth C.17 (189)
http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/view/sheet/12677

ooo

BETSY SMITH:
-- Roud Index No. V6818
-- case unknown to list of executions at http://uk.geocities.com/becky62655@btinternet.com/
-- unknown to Times Digital Archive

Murder of Betsy Smith
together with “My Ain Fireside”
at top of column small woodcut of church and dilapidated graveyard
Durham: Printed by George Walker, Jun. – Sold by John Livsey, Shudehill, Manchester [early 19th century]
Roud says Livsey is 1833-cs1851
Walker 1834ff.

-- in connection with his thesis that it is the origin of the American ballad “Fair Florella” (which is actually a jealous lover ballad)

Murder of Betsy Smith
Robert McIntosh, Glasgow ca 1820-60
white letter
woodcut (indistinct) of people in a garden

facs. & pr. "The Word on the Street".
https://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/broadside.cfm/id/14749/criteria/%22Betsy%20Smith%22
NLS says ca 1849

Bodleian 2806 c.13(222)
-- reproduction illegible, but evidently identical with above.
Bodley says 1849-59

Murder of Betsy Smith together with "Betsy of Drumore"
white letter
woodcut of couple (regency dress?) sitting close together on a bank in a rural setting, a large Cupid hovering over them carrying a bow and a heart pierced by several arrows.
James Lindsay, Glasgow
n.d. (Bodelian says of Lindsay 1851-1910)

facs. pr.
http://www.gla.ac.uk/t4/~dumfries/files/layer2/glasgow_broadside_ballads/mu23y1091.htm

The Murder of Betsy Smith
n.d.
white letter
woodcut of man and woman in front of an avenue of trees leading to a small building

Oxford. Bodleian Library. Firth c.17(113)
facs. pr. http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/20000/18798.gif

ooo

MARY THOMSON
Roud 2548 (under Mary Thompson)
case unknown to list of executions at
http://uk.geocities.com/becky62655@btinternet.com/
Mary Thomson

A Full and Particular Account of a Most Cruel and Barbarous Murder, Committed upon the Body of Mary Thomson, by her Sweet-heart, David Gaston, who Seduced her, under promise of Marriage, and she became pregnant; also shewing how the Villain Murdered her and threw her body into a Pond, where it was discovered on Monday last, and he apprehended and committed for Trial.

Re-printed by R. Menzies, Lawnmarket, Edinburgh

-- Atkinson says printer was operating at this address 1810-36.

[prose text in three columns above verse ballad in three columns]

-- sets events in Amsterdale, and has lover committed to Derby gaol.

ballad has 24 quatrains

London. British Library. HS.74/1250.(351.) formerly 11621.k.(304)
<<transcr. David Atkinson

DIFFERENT BALLAD(?) ON SAME COUPLE

"A full and particular account of a most barbarous and cruel murder committed upon the body of Mary Thomson, by her sweetheart David Gaston, who seduced her under pretence of marriage, and how she became pregnant -- showing how the Villain murdered her, and threw her body into a pond"

London: British Library: Broadside Ballad Collection BL. 1880.C.10

-- this is a collection of prose crime ballads, some with verses; precise catalogue reference uncertain (see note below).


So all pretty maidens, wherever you be,
Beware of enticements and false perjury;
For fear, like young Mary, you’re mind full soon, [sic]
Like a rose in the summer you’re plucked in your bloom.

N.B. original not yet checked and Wiener does not explicitly say it is a ballad: this may be a prose account with a few verses (or even perhaps just this one).

Mary Thomson

"Horrid and Barbarous Murder Committed upon the Body of Mary Thomson, By her sweet-heart David Brown, a farm-servant near Carlisle".

Who Seduced her under promise of Marriage, -- and when, on account of her pregnancy, she became urgent on their marriage, he appointed to meet her at Lime Wood, where, in a lonely spot, he stabbed her with a knife, and then threw her into a pond, with a quantity of stones tied into her shawl. With an account of the wonderful discovery of the body, on which was found the letter of appointment, -- and which led to the apprehension of the perpetrator of the dreadful crime.

Sanderson, Edinburgh

n.d. [NLS says 1835-36]
white-letter: modern-looking format with large title.
at top picture of man attacking girl by a lake (as in narrative), flanked by separate depictions of man (left) and girl.
-- substantial and circumstantial prose account (including claimed citation of a letter), followed by song (12 quatrains)

fac. & pr. "The Word on the Street".
http://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/broadside.cfm/id/14629/criteria/Mary%20AND%20Thomson

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ANN WILLIAMS
Roud Index No. V41960

case is unknown to list of executions at http://uk.geocities.com/becky62655@btinternet.com/
nothing in Times Digital Archive

Copy of Verses on Ann Williams, Who was murdered
Roud has an entry (Roud No. B5019) for a “Copy of Verses on Ann Williams, Who was murdered”: in the Catalogue of songs, penny sheets of broadside printer R. Hook (1820-24) who is not responsible for any of the surviving printings.

A mournful and affecting Copy of Verses on the death of Ann Williams, Who was barbarously and cruelly murdered by her sweetheart, W. Jones, near Wirksworth, in Derbyshire, July, 1823.
Printed at J. Pitts, Wholesale Toy and Marble Warehouse, 6, Great St. Andrew Street, Seven Dials. 1819-1844
-- no copy seems to survive independently of Hindley’s reproductions (just like The Murder of Maria Marten – should we be worried?)

<<internet access at :
https://archive.org/details/curiositiesofstr00hinduoft
http://www.gutenberg.org/files/49128/49128-h/49128-h.htm

-- also in :
Hindley, Charles. The Life and Times of James Catnach (Late of Seven Dials), Ballad Monger. London: Reeves and Turner, 1878; repr. Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1968, p. 141 (facs.)
<<internet access at:
https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo1.ark:/13960/t1jh44q75;view=1up;seq=163
-- evident from Hindley’s Introduction that the facsimiles in this publication derive from the original Catnach blocks, which he had purchased, but this can apply only to the illustrations: the texts must have been reset.

Oxford. Bodleian Library. Harding B 34(f. 31)
-- an ambiguous note in the Allegro catalogue says this is a reproduction, [probably a page cut out] from C. Hindley, *The History of the Catnach Press* (1886), p. 67.
-- there is no illustration

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PERFORMANCE TRADITION

ENGLAND
Roud 2548

Mary Thompson /Mary Thomson
Samuel Holdstock
(Mill House, Wittersham, Kent)
-- the following put together from entries in VWML Full English database, http://www.vwml.org/# (checked under both spellings).

VERSION OF AUGUST 1909
Roud Index calls this “version a”:
Permanent URL: http://www.vwml.org/record/RoudFS/S338210
Collected by Percy Grainger (music) & Edith Lyttleton (words), 21 August, 1909.
-- Lyttleton Grainger’s local contact (see her letter, below).

-- this version survives in two texts:

FIELD NOTEBOOK
# Mary Thompson
“In Amsterdon near Derbyshire, Mary Thompson she did dwell”
-- incorrect: see below
-- this entry also incorrect in placing Wittersham in Gloucestershire
Percy Grainger Manuscript Collection, PG/10/50
Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne (copy at VWML)
alt ref. MG/13/1/14
Permanent URL: http://www.vwml.org/record/PG/10/50
-- link to images of 9 pages of hand-written text (scrawl) of song
-- looks like immediate transcript in field notebook
-- first line actually reads “In Hampstead down …”

FAIR COPY
# Mary Thomson
“In Hampstead down Derbyshire, Mary Thomson she did dwell”
Percy Grainger Manuscript Collection PG/15/3
Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne (Copy at VWML)
al t ref. MG/13/1/7 Grainger 395
= Percy Grainger Collection: MG/13/1/7 Kentish Folksongs No.395
Permanent URL: http://www.vwml.org/record/PG/15/3
-- link to images of 4 pages of text (looks like a fair copy of above)
  + 2 with music
+ a VWML transcription
-- lacks two stanzas (sweetheart begs for mercy on knees) in version of May 1910

VERSION OF MAY 1910
Roud Index calls this “version b”
Permanent URL: http://www.vwml.org/record/RoudFS/S338211

as explained in accompanying letter (see below) recorded by Lyttleton on an extra visit “to get
the words”, evidently at Grainger’s behest and probably to check details.

# Mary Thompson
“In Amsterdon near Derbyshire, Mary Thompson she did dwell”
Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne (Copy at VWML)
Percy Grainger Manuscript Collection PG/15/2
21 Aug 1909 (sic: an error)
England: Kent: Wittersham
alt ref. MG/13/1/7 Grainger 395
Percy Grainger Collection: MG/13/1/7 Kentish Folksongs No.395; included in letter
PG/15/1
Permanent URL: http://www.vwml.org/record/PG/15/2

-- link to 7 pages of text + a VWML transcription checked and corrected tp
N.B. not the full text (error in copying at VWML???)
What is evidently the full text (not what there is here supplemented by remainder
from version a) is supplied in:
Thomson, R.S. "Songs from the Grainger Collection". FMJ. 2.5 (1974), 335-51,
at pp. 349-50.
-- states it was recorded 21 August 1909, but discernibly different from above.

# Letter from Mrs. Edith Lyttleton, from Wittersham, Kent, to Percy Grainger (10 May
1910) re singer Samuel Holdstock and including text to song ‘Mary Thompson’
Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne (Copy at VWML)
Percy Grainger Manuscript Collection PG/15/1
10 May 1910
England: Kent: Wittersham
Permanent URL: http://www.vwml.org/record/PG/15/1

-- link to 4 pages of text
+ a VWML transcription (extract copied below)
-- the first three pages are the letter itself (with Wittersham House letterhead)
-- the fourth page is a transcript of it
-- the enclosed text of the song is at PG/15/2 (immediately above, here)

WITTERSHAM HOUSE, WITTERSHAM
May 10th 10
Dear Mr Grainger
I was only too glad to go & get the words for you & am
ashamed I have not done it before
You will see there are a few variations from the original copy as I
enclose. I took great care to get the name of the place he was quite
clear that Amsterdon was the place & you will observe near
Derbyshire.
But I expect he is easily muddled. There is another line w. he insisted
upon the instead of she in spite of his daughter who
corrected him. The old Gentleman will be 87 next Monday Oct 16th "if he lives so long" his daughter said before him. he is not very well & the day after your visit was quite ill with the excitement!

... 

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SCOTLAND

Mary Thompson [sic]

Mrs. Sangster
(Aikey, Scotland)

Sent to Gavin Greig in 1910 (see S-S and Lyle, below)

ONE STANZA ONLY

pr. Greig, Gavin. *Folk-Song of the North-East. Articles Contributed to the "Buchan Observer" from December 1907 to June 1911*. 2 vols. Peterhead, 1909 & 1914; repr. as one vol. (together with *Folk-Song in Buchan*). Hatboro, Pennsylvania: Folklore Associates, 1963, No. CXLVIII (the individual items are each paginated separately – there is no overall pagination) The following is on p. 2 of CXLVIII:

As the result of a second very pleasant visit to “An Old Correspondent” I have got another big installment of tunes … Since then my friend has sent me some bits of a ballad which she says used to be sung and sold at Aikey Fair when she was a girl. It begins –

In Manchester in Lancashire
  A damsel she did dwell,
  In service a long time she lived,
  Till this to her befell.

Her sweetheart murdered her. Can any reader supply a copy of the ballad?

-- this suggests it was both "sold" as a broadside and sung from memory.
-- no sign any one offered more information
-- evident that neither the singer nor Greig knew the name of the murdered girl: the title “Mary Thompson” was supplied by Shuldam-Shaw and Lyle (see below). It is also they who identify the source as “Mrs. Sangster” (but perhaps that was his alias for her?)


+ Notes to 205 (= p. 523):

  (Buchan) Ob(server) 148
  Acknowledged in this article, 11 October 1910, where Greig says: "[Mrs. Sangster] has sent me some bits of a ballad which she says used to be sung and sold at Aikey Fair when she was a girl. It begins [text]. Her sweetheart murdered her.". The title is editorial.

N.B. The identification of this fragment with *Mary Thomson* is an error: it quite clearly derives from the broadside *Betsy Smith*.

ooo
NORTH AMERICA

Mary Thompson

Arthur Walker, of Littleton, Maine, USA
recorded by Marguerite Olney, 31 August 1942.
FOUR STANZAS ONLY
Sound recording

https://archive.org/details/IndexToTheFieldRecordingsInTheFlandersBalladCollectionAtMiddleburyCollegeMiddleburyVermontOCR
Helen Hartness Flanders Ballad Collection, Middlebury College, Vermont, D-67
A 16
= Disc 67, side A, item 16
https://archive.org/details/HHFBC_tapes_D67A, track 16 (but recording ends with item 15)
Collector’s transcript (typescript)
Helen Hartness Flanders Ballad Collection. Papers Series VI. Song Texts
<<pdf supplied by Middlebury College Library
acknowledge Joseph F. Watson, Preservation Manager, Special Collections & Archives Associate, Davis Library Facilities Coordinator, Middlebury College.
-- see Textual Appendix below.

Mary Thomson

Murchie Harvey of Houlton, Maine, USA
recorded by Marguerite Olney, 31 August 1942.
-- sic; same date as Walker at Littleton; only 7½ miles between them
Sound recording

does not figure in Quinn, Jennifer Post. An Index to the Field Recordings in the Flanders Ballad Collection at Middlebury College. Middlebury, Vermont: Middlebury College, 1983.
https://archive.org/details/IndexToTheFieldRecordingsInTheFlandersBalladCollectionAtMiddleburyCollegeMiddleburyVermontOCR
Helen Hartness Flanders Ballad Collection, Middlebury College, Vermont, D-563
= Disc 567 (Library reports not available)
Collector’s transcript (typescript)
Helen Hartness Flanders Ballad Collection. Papers Series VI. Song Texts
<<pdf supplied by Middlebury College Library
acknowledge Joseph F. Watson, Preservation Manager, Special Collections & Archives Associate, Davis Library Facilities Coordinator, Middlebury College.
-- see Textual Appendix below.

ooo
**TEXTUAL APPENDIX**

As the above should indicate, most of the ballads within this cluster, and their derivatives from performance culture, are readily accessible via internet resources. This is not true, however, of the two versions of “Mary Thomson” from American performance tradition, collected by Marguerite Olney in 1942, which are accordingly appended here. The texts have been kindly supplied from the Helen Hartness Flanders Ballad Collection by its curators at Middlebury College, Vermont (see acknowledgements immediately above). It is understood that copyright resided with the singers and collectors, all now presumed deceased. Middlebury College does not claim copyright.

**“MARY THOM(P)SON”**
**IN AMERICAN PERFORMANCE TRADITION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Murchie Harvey</th>
<th>Arthur Walker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>of Houlton, Maine, USA</td>
<td>of Littleton, Maine, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both recorded by Marguerite Olney, 31 August 1942.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen Hartness Flanders Ballad Collection, Middlebury College, Vermont.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is believed that the words of the songs are not in copyright.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FOUR STANZAS ONLY

1. Come all young men and maidens fair  
   come listen to my song  
   It's of a cruel murder  
   that lately has been done

2. On the body of a maiden fair,  
   the truth I will unfold,  
   The very secrets of this crime  
   would make your blood run cold

3. In Amsterdale near Derbyshire,  
   Mary Thomson, there did dwell  
   Long time and service she had been,  
   'till this to her befell;  
   1.1 In Amsterdam ...  
   1.2 Mary Thompson ...  
   1.3 ... in service ...

4. Her cheeks were like the blooming rose,  
   all in the month of May  
   Which made her wicked young man,  
   this unto her to say  
   2.3 ... this wicked ...

5. Mary, my charming creature  
   I am ensnared by thee  
   My love is such, I am resolved  
   to wed you I declare.  
   3.3 My heart ...
6. Thus by his false and flattering tongue
   poor Mary was beguiled
   And to her sad misfortune
   by him she proved with child

4.1 It's by ...

4.4 ... she grew ...

7. Sometime ago this damsel fair
   did write to him with speed
   Such tenderness, she did resolve
   would make a heart to bleed.

8. She said, "My dearest David,
   I am with child, by thee,
   Therefore, my dear, pray let me know
   when you will marry me.

9. The following day at evening,
   this young man did prepare
   Up to the town of Amsterdale
   to meet his Mary there;

10. He said, My dear, let’s take a walk
    amidst the flowering field
    And then the secret of my heart
    to you I will reveal.

11. O then this wicked young man
    a knife he did prepare
    And all unknown to his true love,
    concealed it by his side;

12. When they reached the fatal spot,
    these words to her did say:
    All on this very night I will
    your precious life betray.

13. On bended knees she then did fall,
    in sorrow and despair,
    Aloud for mercy she did call
    her cries did rend the air.

14. With clasped hands and uplifted eyes
    she cried O spare my life
    And never more will I ask you
    to make me your lawful wife.

15. He pulled the knife out from his side
    -- he runs her body through,
    Her throat was cut from ear to ear
    -- most dreadful for to view

16. Her hands and arms and beauteous face,
he cut and mangled sore,
While down upon her milk-white breast
the crimson blood did pour.

17. He took the shawl from round her neck
and around her body tied,
With pebble stones he did it fill
thinking the crime to hide.

18. Then into a watery lake
he plunged-her straightway
But where her precious blood was shed
it soon did him betray.

19. O then this young man taken was
and unto prison sent,
In rattling chains he was confined,
his crime for to lament

20. Soon the jury did come on
where trembling he must stand
Reflecting on the deed he’d done
-- waiting the dread command.

(the last verse Mr. Harvey could not recall)
-- i.e. two quatrains, evidently the moralizing valediction, making 22 in all

ooo