

A BALLAD ENIGMA

by Roy Palmer

‘The Bold Informer’ is a rare piece of which I obtained a copy from a source who wishes to remain anonymous. It has no imprint, and possibly the only datable reference is the mention in verse 6 of William Calcraft, who was the public hangman in London from 1829 until 1874. At least the action is firmly located in North Nibley, where the White Hart public house (v.3) closed only recently, and the Dryleaze (v.7), a field just outside the village on the road to Wotton-under-Edge, still exists.

It is clear that resentment of the eponymous informer’s actions was so strong that community resentment caused him to be twice hanged in effigy. Then an attempt to burn a mock coffin with his name was made on Bonfire Night,

and finally a third effigy was committed to the flames on Nibley Hill.

The person betrayed as ‘poor Cat’ (v.13), and the recipient of the information, presumably Farmer Povy (v.1). Yet who were they? What was the intelligence? And above all, who was the informer? When did this happen, and how did the Plough at Charfield Green (v.13) fit in?

I would be most grateful for any suggestions on solving the mystery. If only these events could be pinpointed, or roughly determined, a search of the Bristol or Gloucester press might bring the full story to light.

THE BOLD INFORMER.

Tune to ‘Nutting we will go—’

Come all ye jovial fellows that delight
to hear a song,
Now listen to my ditty I’ll not detain
you long,
T’is of a bold Informer that in Nibley
do dwell,
I’ve no need to tell his name Farmer
Povy knows him well,

CHORUS.

We have hanged the man ha? ho?

To describe this bold Informer I think
I’ve got it pat,
He’s knock-kneed and wears a steel,
sometimes a low crowned hat,
With his knock-knees, and crooked
legs he tries to cut n swell,
But I’ve been told he’ve got a knack
of choking sheep with wool,

Most nights at the Vite hart he’s seen
but never very civil,
The folks all know him very well, to
be no better than the d—l,
The image of this Informer, you all
very well remember,
Was hung up in a tree the twelfth day
of September,

On the twenty-fifth of last September,
n little past twelve o’clock,
His wife unto a Bishops went, and at
the door did knock,
She said another dudman’s up if you’ll
take it down,
Be fore that you leave your house, I’ll
give to you a crown.

The Bishop said it will not do, about
the other I’ad rough enough,
I would go home if I were you and
never bother about such stuff,
Back again then she did go as fast as
she was able,
She went unto another man they call
him Abraham Trenchle.

But Abraham said I will not go for I
shall have all the blame,
I tell you so before you go I’m sure I
cannot clime,
His brother BOB then climbed the
tree which made the people laugh,
The boys they hallow’d after him and
called him Calcraft.

This image it was taken down and
took to the Vite Hart,
The boys they took it away again de-
termined to have some sport;
A Coffin it was carefully made with
the Informers name in full,
T’was took to a field ealled the Dry-
laze to be thrown into a Pool.

But a second thought came in their
head’s but whose I can’t remember,
Thay said the’d take it back a gain and
burn it in November,
The Fifth of November being a day
that never will be forgot
They said they’d burn the Informer for
he had began to Rot.

Than Nibley street it was well lined
with Boys of every size
And more than that I tell you what
there was Lobsters in disguise,
Then n Fire been made on Nibley
Hill one of a goodish size
The coffin it was thrown thereon and
it began to blaze.

The Boy’s the all began to laugh and
said it was burnt e nough,
The Peelers took it off the Fire and
gave it to Tom Tuff
This Tuff man he then took it home a
Pigs Trough for to make,
But when he came to serve the Pig’s
he found that it did lake.

The Tuff man look’d at it again as sly
as any Fox,
He took it to his chimney corner and
made it a salt box,
Another night they said they’d have
another bit of fun,
The people all then did agree they
would not be done.

A harrel of tar and faggots of wood
about three score or nearly,
Was burnt on the top of Nibley hill
where it made a jolly blizy,
Now for fear you’r getting tired I’ll not
keep you much longer,
On the twenty-eighth of the same
month they burnt the bold Informer

Now this Informer is hung and burnt
t’will never be forgot,
Folks say it was a dirty shame to In-
form against poor Cat,
And now my song I must conclude
without once telling is name,
But if you wish any more advice go to
the Pl-ugh on Charfield green.