



James Raynard **"Strange Histories"** Unearthed Records

Raynard's album is the first release on Unearthed Records, the new folk music subsidiary of One Little Indian Records. Ten of the eleven songs on **"Strange Histories,"** albeit with musical contributions by folklore graduate James Raynard, have been drawn from trad. arr. sources. The exception is the Raynard and Richard Masters collaboration "The Cat With The Cream." Masters played guitar on the album sessions. The album was recorded in Kinnersley Castle in rural Herefordshire, and was produced by English folk music wunderkind Jim Moray. Where Moray's 2003 album **"Sweet England"** wed traditional/arranged English folk songs to the sound of acoustic and electric instruments plus tape loops, the instrumentation on Raynard's album is strictly acoustic, and apart from numerous stringed instruments only features the sound of piano, concertina and melodeon.

The opening track "Begone Dull Care," underpinned by a jauntily paced jig, dates from the eighteenth century and attests that boredom was also an aspect of life in olden times. The basic premise of the lyric, in modern parlance, being to *"get over it, and straighten up and fly right."* An evil stepmother who casts a spell on her step-children turning them into a man-eating serpent and a fish, gets her comeuppance when their father, a knight, returns home in "The Loathsome Worm And The Mackerel Of The Sea" aka "The Laily Worm And The Mackerel Of The Sea." "The Overlander" was written in Australia during the nineteenth century, the lyric mentions Queensland and the Maranoa [+], and the title is a reference to the *rough and ready* cattle drovers, in the early days of this British colony, whose task was to take herds of the beasts across the plains from ranches to market. The song was recorded by the late, and legendary British folk singer, A. L. Lloyd, on his 1960 Topic Records album **"Outback Ballads Songs From The Australian Bush And Outback."**

The melodically mournful "We Be Soldiers Three" dates from the sixteenth century and like "The Overlander" is a drinking song, while, historically speaking at least, the subject matter of "The Grand Conversation On Napoleon" dates from early the following century. The latter lyric focuses on Napoleon's ill-fated foray into Russia with the aim of capturing Moscow, his subsequent defeat at Waterloo and his death in exile on the island of St. Helena. A cuckold is a, now, little used term for a "husband whose wife has been unfaithful" and "Cuckolds All Of A Row" is a popular English square dance. Vocally Raynard performs "Yonder He Goes" as a multi-voice round, while the aforementioned original composition, "The Cat With The Cream," is an instrumental played on acoustic guitars with support from a fiddle.

According to the liner "A Caveat For Cutpurses" dates from Ben Jonson's seventeenth century play **"The Cutpurse."** A cutpurse was a common thief whose trade was to steal purses, and the song is a cautionary tale that purposely mentions the hangman's noose awaiting anyone caught stealing. By far the longest track here, of almost eight minutes duration, "The Outlandish Knight" is the tale of the courting of a young princess by a false knight. Having run away from home with some of her father's fortune and his horses, the knight informs Pretty Polly that he has already drowned six princesses and is about to drown her. Employing a wily ruse, Polly tricks the false knight. Variations of this song, also in terms of the final outcome, include "May Colvin," "Lady Isabel And The Elf Knight" and from the America's "Pretty Polly." The Border Ballad "Jock O'Hazeldean" closes this recording, and portrays a young lady in tears at the outset. Having accepted a proposal of marriage from a wealthy local landowner, in the closing verse she steals away across the border with her true love, Jock O' Hazeldean.

Doubtless the black and white photography employed on the four-way, fold-out liner was shot outside and inside Kinnersley Castle. One of the shots portrays Raynard pouring over ancient tomes and is intended to add weight to the historic musical context of James Raynard's appropriately titled debut release "**Ancient Histories.**"

Note.

[+] – A river in Queensland, Australia and also an Electoral District in that state.

Folkwax Score 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 08/05.