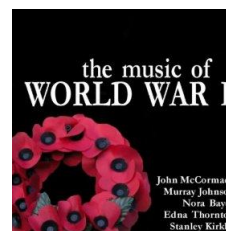


The First World War's most famous marching song (its A Long Way to Tipperary) was composed in a pub in Balsall Common, Warwickshire in the British midlands.

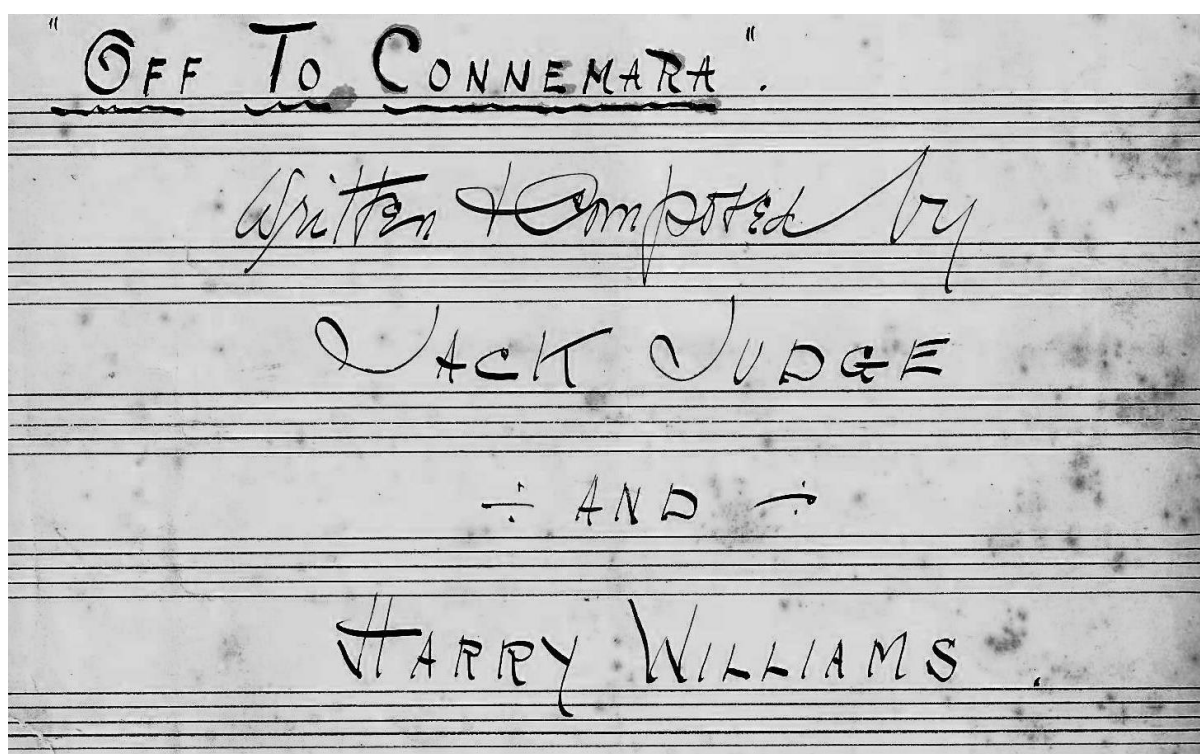
With the pending 100th anniversary of the beginning of World War 1 I have been reflecting on the origins of its most iconic marching song *Its A Long Way To Tipperary*. My interest was kindled by the fact that I hail from the premier county of Tipperary and the pub in which the song was penned is in Balsall Common in the leafy agricultural county of Warwickshire. Originally called the Plough Inn but now it is the Tipperary Inn and this is the story....

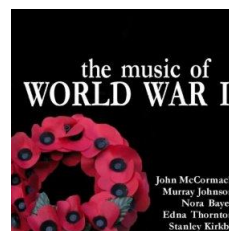


In 1900, the shy introvert Harry Williams lived with his family in the Plough Inn pub which his father managed. From an early age he showed a talent for writing songs. During his adolescence he spent most of his time studying music and poetry, becoming an accomplished pianist and mandolin player. Harry was confined to a

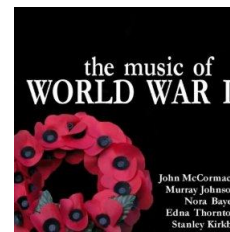


wheelchair following a childhood accident, breaking both of his legs. By contrast the extroverted singer and music hall showman Jack Judge sold fish regularly outside the pub and struck up a friendship with Harry and together they composed many songs together. So like Gilbert and Sullivan, Percy French and William Collison, Simon and Garfunkel they started a musical collaboration which has stood the test of time. Their partnership lasted fifteen years and they wrote thirty two songs. So how did a song which started life in 1909, as a nostalgic Music Hall Irish Ballad *It's A Long Long Way to Connemara* (where a young Irish emigrant is yearning for his girl in Co. Galway); become the most famous worldwide army marching song ever. ?





PEN FRIENDS... Harry Williams (in wheelchair) and Jack Judge



Jack was a regular music hall performer and had the lyrics and music of their sentimental Connemara song and could not resist a bet he was given in 1912 while performing in the Grand Theatre, Stalybridge, near Manchester. A fellow performer challenged him that he could not “come in tomorrow night with a brand new song he had composed overnight”! Jack could not resist the challenge, he just simply changed Connemara to Tipperary (as his grandfather hailed from there) Jack ‘brought the house down’ as the curtain and sun set on the premiere performance of *It's a Long Long Way to Tipperary*.

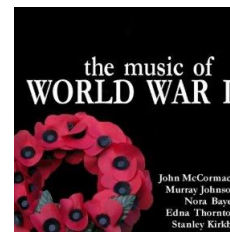
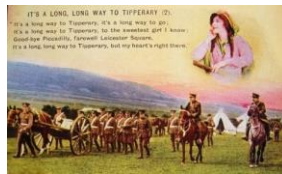
“ Up to mighty London came

An Irish lad one day “

(opening lyrics)

The London publisher Bert Feldman promised he would publish the song but on two conditions. Whether he had a premonition of the pending war; for he suggested that they delete one ‘long’ from the title and change the ballad into a marching song for both solo and choral singing. So as the printing presses cranked up in London in 1912, three million copies of the sheet music were printed for sale and even many million more after the War. Both men earned £164,000 between them. Many would regard that as a fortune today it was an absolute fortune in the first few years of the 20th Century. This allowed Harry to buy the Plough Inn for his father and they duly changed its name to the Tipperary Inn and it stayed in the family for forty years. Today the pub is highly rated for its wholesome food menu and I can attest to that. The walls are adorned to the memory of Harry and Jack.

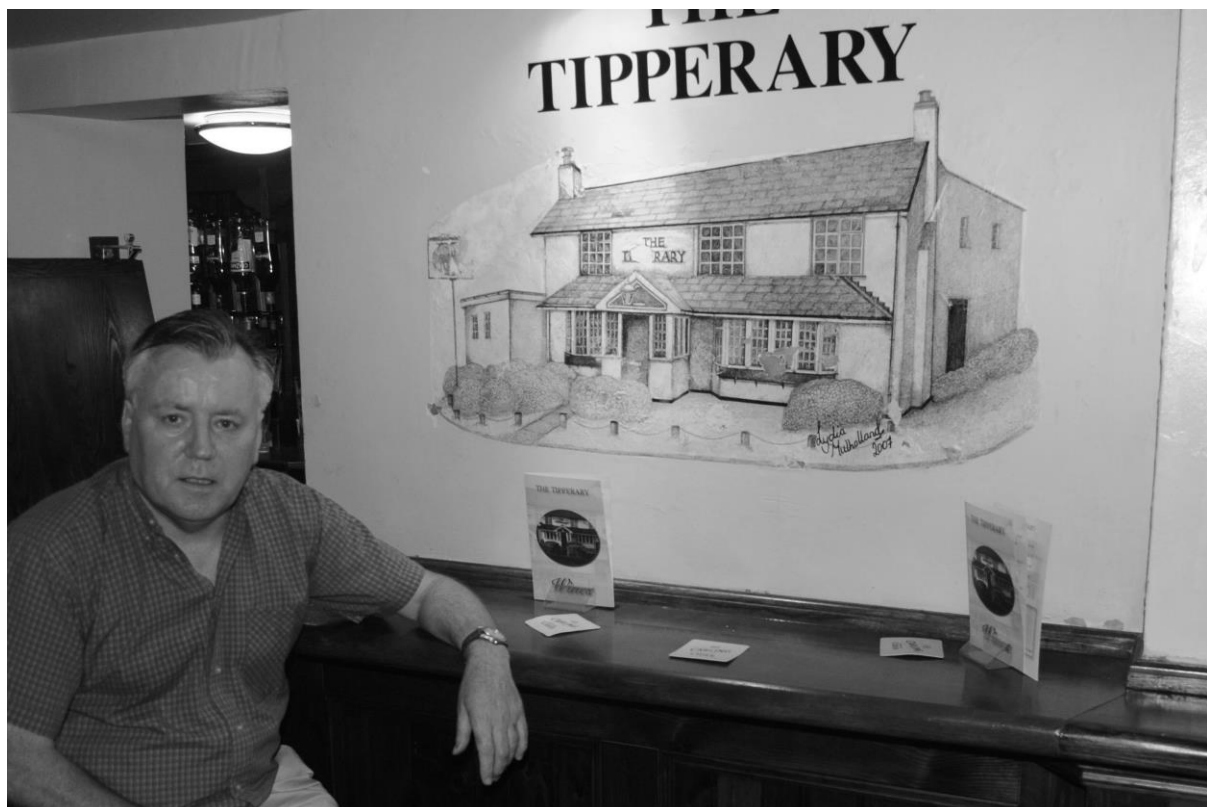
During the First World War the *Daily Mail* correspondent George Curnock saw the The Connaught Rangers Irish Regiment singing the song in full tenor voice as they marched through Boulogne on 13th of August 1914. No surprise that the very popular Irish tenor of the time the great Count John McCormack recorded it two months later. Then the regiments from other countries of the Empire took it ‘home’ with them in 1918 and all this helped its worldwide popularity and endurance. Other composers cashed in on this popularity by writing other “Tipperary” themed World War I songs: “I’m a Long Way From Tipperary,” “I’m Going Back to Tipperary,” and “It May Be Far To Tipperary It’s a Longer Way To Tennessee” are a few examples.

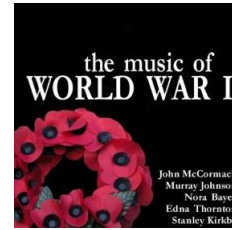


Its endurance and popularity continued into the Second World War and it was featured in the 1951 film *On Moonlight Bay* and in the stage show *O What A Lovely War*. It even featured in the popular American tv series *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*.

It's A Long Way To Tipperary continued its fame in World War 2 and is up there with other songs of its time like *Keep The Home Fires Burning* and consoled to some degree the soldiers to just wanted to return home "to the sweetest girl I know".

Story and pictures ~ Gerry Molumby





Further information:

Siobhan Harrison from BBC Warwickshire recorded a radio programme from the Tipperary Inn called *World War 1 At Home* and local folksinger Wes Finch sang the song in its original ballad format and you can listen to the documentary on this link. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01svw1q>

Tipperary Inn – address and post code:

Meer End Rd, Nr Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 1PW

Its a Long Way to Tipperary

Up to mighty London came

An Irish lad one day,

All the streets were paved with gold,

So everyone was gay!

Singing songs of Piccadilly,

Strand, and Leicester Square,

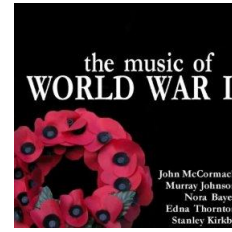
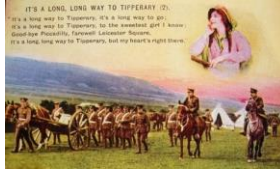
'Til Paddy got excited and

He shouted to them there:

It's a long way to Tipperary,

It's a long way to go.

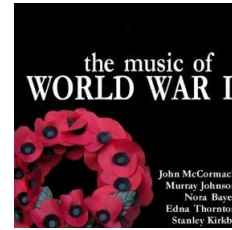
It's a long way to Tipperary



To the sweetest girl I know!
Goodbye Piccadilly,
Farewell Leicester Square!
It's a long long way to Tipperary,
But my heart's right there.

Paddy wrote a letter
To his Irish Molly O',
Saying, "Should you not receive it,
Write and let me know!
If I make mistakes in "spelling",
Molly dear", said he,
"Remember it's the pen, that's bad,
Don't lay the blame on me".

It's a long way to Tipperary,
It's a long way to go.
It's a long way to Tipperary
To the sweetest girl I know!
Goodbye Piccadilly,
Farewell Leicester Square,
It's a long long way to Tipperary,
But my heart's right there.



Molly wrote a neat reply
To Irish Paddy O',
Saying, "Mike Maloney wants
To marry me, and so
Leave the Strand and Piccadilly,
Or you'll be to blame,
For love has fairly drove me silly,
Hoping you're the same!"

It's a long way to Tipperary,
It's a long way to go.
It's a long way to Tipperary
To the sweetest girl I know!
Goodbye Piccadilly,
Farewell Leicester Square,
It's a long long way to Tipperary,
But my heart's right there.

PICTURES: Fully captioned .