

Recording of the week: pond life

This week's selection comes from Cheryl Tipp, Curator of Wildlife & Environmental Sounds.

Have you ever wondered what a pond sounds like? Most of us will have spent some time dipping for tadpoles, watching insects glide across the surface or looking out for flashes of colour as fish move beneath the water, but our interactions with ponds are usually visual. For some people though, the promise of what's going on sonically is just too hard to resist.

Most wildlife sound recordists will have a hydrophone somewhere in their arsenal and are only too happy to investigate this otherwise silent world. While visiting a smallholding in north Wales, Peter Toll's curiosity was piqued by a little pond that had been carefully created to give life to as many creatures as possible. In his accompanying notes, Peter remarked:

"It looked so still and tranquil above the surface, until I lowered my hydrophones and was truly amazed by what sounds I could hear below the surface."

What Peter heard was an ecosystem brimming with life. The sounds of newts, invertebrates and oxygenating plants came together to create a vibrant aquatic soundscape, as can be heard in the following excerpt. As the old adage goes, looks can definitely be deceiving.

[Pond atmosphere recorded by Peter Toll in Llandrindod Wells, Wales on 30 Sept 2011 \(BL ref 212534\)](#)



A selection of underwater sounds from the archive was put together for a special programme broadcast by NTS Radio in October 2017. To find out more and listen again please click [here](#).

Follow [@CherylTipp](#) and [@soundarchive](#) for all the latest news.

[Recording of the week: whistling Wigeon](#)

This week's selection comes from Cheryl Tipp, Curator of Wildlife and Environmental Sounds.

Right about now, hundreds of thousands of birds will be en route to the UK, returning to wintering grounds that have provided their populations with food and shelter for millennia. The Wigeon is just one of the birds that will be making this journey. This medium-sized duck usually congregates around the British coastline but, despite the large numbers, you're more likely to hear Wigeon before you see them. Males announce their presence with an excitable, high-pitched whistle which, teamed with their pretty plumage, helps bring some cheer to the most desolate winter landscape.

[Wigeon whistles recorded in Northumberland, England in Jan 2012 by Simon Elliott \(BL ref 199321\)](#)



Male and female Wigeon taken from *British Gamebirds and Wildfowl*, 1855 (courtesy of the Biodiversity Heritage Library)

Many more wildlife recordings can be found in the [Environment and Nature](#) section of British Library Sounds.

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Recording of the week: Ancient Evenings

This week's selection comes from Stephen Cleary, Lead Curator of Literary & Creative Recordings.

It is now 10 years since the death of Norman Mailer, one of the best-known and most widely read US authors of the post-war period. This week's recording features Mailer in discussion with Melvyn Bragg at the ICA, London, in 1983. Mailer's epic novel of ancient Egypt, *Ancient Evenings*, had been published just a few days previously. Mailer discourses on the 'class system' of Ancient Egypt, among related subjects. It didn't pay to be poor in those days either, apparently.

[Norman Mailer and Melvyn Bragg in conversation \(C95/55\)](#)



This recording comes from a [substantial collection](#) of talks and discussions held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London between 1982-1993.

Follow [@BL_DramaSound](#) and [@soundarchive](#) for all the latest news.

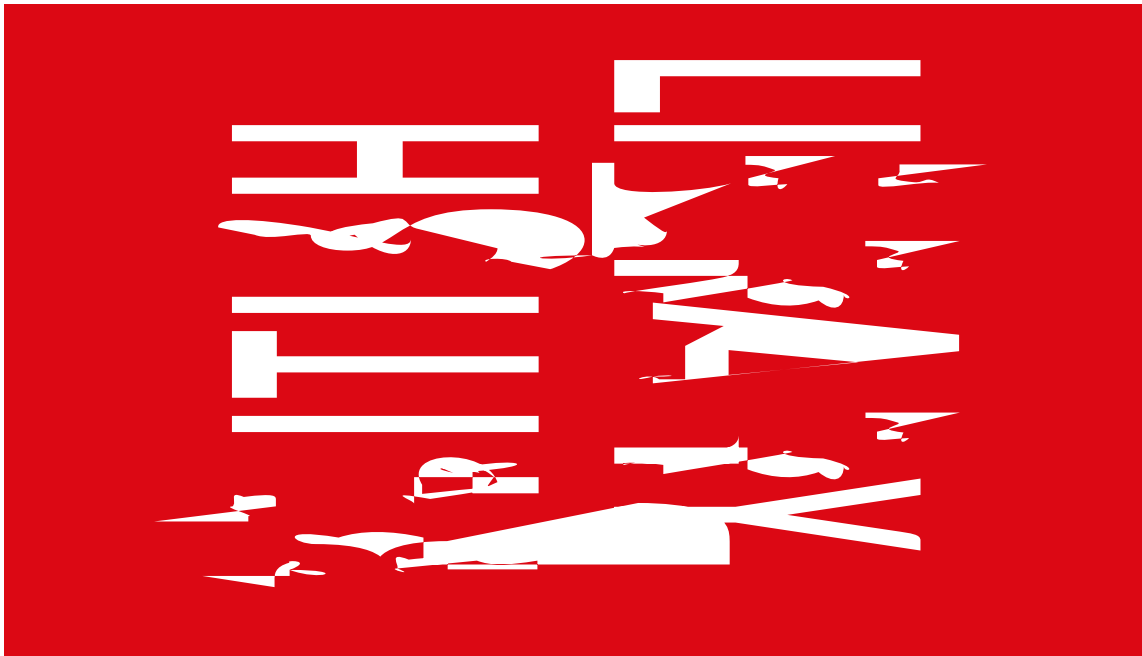
Recording of the week: watching

Britain's nuclear bomb tests

This week's selection comes from Tom Lean, Project Interviewer for An Oral History of British Science.

On 8th November 1957, hundreds of British military and scientific personnel gathered at Christmas Island, a remote speck of land in the Pacific Ocean. They were there for Operation Grapple X, the first successful test of a British hydrogen bomb. At 1.8 megatons, the blast was about a hundred and forty times more powerful than the atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima, and signified Britain's mastery of the secrets of thermonuclear power. Amongst the witnesses to the mushroom cloud rising above Christmas Island was a 35 year old technician named Frank Raynor. As he recalls, in perhaps something of an understatement, it was "quite impressive" to watch:

[Frank Raynor_C1379/76](#)



The tests were also witnessed by Laurence Reed, a naval officer on HMS Warrior. He describes a shipboard atmosphere of excitement, anxiety and awe when the first bomb was dropped.

[Laurence Reed_C1503/37](#)

The full interview with Frank Raynor can be found in the [Oral History of British Science](#) collection on [British Library Sounds](#).

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Made-up about this boss new Liverpool Dickie

Jonnie Robinson, Lead Curator of Spoken English, writes:

We can all probably remember the first time we met a *Scouser* [= 'person from Liverpool'] face to face. Leafing through Tony Crowley's excellent [Liverpool English Dictionary](#) immediately transported me back to 1983 and a fellow first year student in halls of residence who regularly described himself as *dead made-up* [= 'really pleased/excited'] or disdainfully proclaimed *that's last* [= expression used dismissively of e.g. unpleasant drink or food/embarrassing choice of clothing/dismal taste in music]. *Made-up* and *last* are both in Crowley's wonderful new dictionary, which is the culmination of years of research into Liverpool English. There have been countless entertaining and informative treatments of *Scouse* [= 'the dialect of Liverpool'] – both in print and online – but Crowley provides a long overdue authoritative inventory of Liverpool vernacular based on evidence from published works, thus enabling a reader to trace the provenance of over 2,000 fascinating expressions.



It's intriguing, for instance, to be able to consult his entries for items in the Library's own [Evolving English WordBank](#) – examples of contemporary dialect and slang words and phrases submitted to the British Library by members of the public in 2010/11. The following items that feature in both resources include established Liverpool favourites such as [made-up](#) [= 'pleased']; forms that reflect local pronunciation, like [antwack\(y\)](#) [= 'antique']; references to local specialities, customs and folklore, such as [Wet Nellie](#) [= type of bread pudding] and [Hickey the Firebobby](#) [= bogeyman evoked to frighten children/deflect them from asking awkward questions]; and recent coinages, like [jarg](#) [= 'fake, useless, rubbish']. Returning to 1983, it turns out my new friend was actually from Formby, so might potentially be dismissed by sticklers as a *Plastic Scouser* [= 'person from the Liverpool hinterland rather than the city itself']. Intriguingly, there's no entry for *Plastic Scouse(r)* in Crowley's dictionary, although there are several (conflicting) definitions in *Urban Dictionary* and elsewhere online including [this BBC Voices Recording](#). Opinions as to the exact geographic boundary of *Scouseland* [= 'Liverpool'] inevitably vary, but towards the end of our first term my mate from Formby certainly staked a genuine claim to membership of the wider *Scouse* community by asking me if I was intending to put up any *chrizzie dezzies* [= 'Christmas decorations'] in my room. This brilliantly playful construction is an example of a highly productive process of word

formation in Liverpool English – abbreviating the stem of an existing word and adding the suffix <-y> or <-ie> (e.g. *plastic* → *plazzy*) and/or changing the final consonant of the stem before adding the suffix (e.g. *plastic* → *placcy*).

Crowley includes several of these highly distinctive hypocoristic forms. Many are arguably universal in colloquial speech, like *bevvy* [= 'drink' (from 'beverage')], *bezzie* [= 'best mate'], *butty* [= 'sandwich' (from 'bread-and-butter')], *chippy* [= 'chip shop'], *footy* [= 'football'], *offy* [= 'off-licence'], *pressie* [= 'present'], *sarnie* [= 'sandwich'], *trackie* [= 'tracksuit'], *tranny* [= 'transistor radio'] and *wellies* [= 'Wellington boots']; others are probably more geographically and/or socially restricted, such as *bezzies* [= 'best clothes'], *cozzie* [= 'swimming costume'], *lazzy* [= 'elastic'], *lecky* [= 'electricity supply'], *lippy* [= 'lipstick'], *photie* [= 'photograph'] and *trainies* [= 'trainers']. Even more noteworthy, though, is the set of entries that are, if not absolutely unique to Merseyside, then much more common there than elsewhere. Several refer to significant local landmarks, such as *Dellie* [= 'Adelphi cinema'], *Mizzy* [= 'Wavertree Playground' (known locally as 'The Mystery')], *Parly* [= 'Parliament Street'], *Scotty Road* [= 'Scotland Road'], *Sevvy Park* [= 'Sefton Park'], *Tocky* [= 'Toxteth'] and *Vauxy* [= 'Vauxhall Road' (I've never heard *Vauxy* in reference to the Vauxhall Road in London, for instance)]; others refer to municipal institutions or authority figures that have special local significance, including *binnie* [= 'binman'], *bizzies* [= 'the police' (from 'busybody')], *corpy* [= 'Liverpool Corporation'], *cuzzies* [= 'customs officer'], *lanny* [= 'landing stage'], *ozzy* [= 'hospital'], *plaine* [= 'plain-clothes detective']; while several relate to domestic objects and/or cultural activities including food, daily routine and leisure pursuits, such as *avvy* [= 'afternoon'], *conny onny* [= 'condensed milk'], *cowie* [= 'cowboy film'], *finny addy* [= 'finnan-haddock'], *loosie* [= 'cigarette sold individually'], *mobie* [= 'mobile phone'], *muzzy* [= 'moustache'], *emmy oggie* [= 'empty house'], *rollie* [= 'roll-up cigarette'], *squashies* [= 'squashed/broken chocolate sold at reduced price'] and *sterry milk* [= 'sterilised milk']. As a productive form, Crowley's dictionary cannot possibly hope to be comprehensive, but forms like *conny onny* and *mobie* demonstrate how this process applies equally to traditional and to modern household items and my mate's use of *chrizzie dezzies* shows how it can be used to create highly original forms that may or may not be adopted more widely – the *BBC Voices Recordings* captured [basies](#) [= 'baseball boots'] and [grungies](#) [= 'fan of grunge rock music'], for instance.

Crowley's dictionary is a unique celebration of the extraordinary ingenuity and creativity of Scouse vocabulary. To explore the equally distinctive Scouse accent, try [this](#) recording in the Library's [Evolving English VoiceBank](#).