

The Boar's Head Carol

(Christmas)

English tradition  
(Fyfe, 186)

Lively

VERSE  
f SOLO

weston

1. The ~~boar's~~ head in hand bear I, Be-decked with bays and rose - ma-ry; And I

horse's

5 pray you my mas - ters be mer - ry, Quot es - tis in con - vi - vi - o.<sup>1</sup>

I

REFRAIN  
FULL  
p (repeat f)

9 Ca - put ap - ri de - fe - ro Red - dens lau - des Do - mi - no,

p (repeat f)

13 *f* lau - des Do - mi - no, lau - des Do - mi - no, Do - mi - no.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> as many as are at the feast <sup>2</sup> I bring in the boar's head, giving thanks to the Lord

## ALTERNATIVE REFRAIN

(The Queen's College, Oxford 1901)

1. The boar's head in hand bear I bedecked with  
bays and rosemary  
And I pray you my masters be merry Quates tis  
in convivio

2 The boar's head, as I understand,  
Is the bravest dish in all the land  
When thus bedecked with a gay garland;  
Let us *servire cantico*.<sup>3</sup>

3 Our steward hath provided this  
In honour of the King of Bliss,  
Which on this day to be served is  
In *Reginensi Atrio*.<sup>4</sup>

English traditional  
(Fyfe, 1860)

<sup>3</sup> serve it with a song <sup>4</sup> in Queen's Hall

The carol sung every Christmas at The Queen's College, Oxford. An early version of the text is 'A caroll bringyng in the bores heed' in *Christmasse Carolles Newly Emprynted at London in the flete strete . . . by Wynkyn de Worde* (1521). No early musical setting survives, and the tune to which it has been sung from at least the eighteenth century probably derives from a Restoration bass pattern. The version we give was printed in William Wallace Fyfe's *Christmas, its Customs and Carols* (1860) and, unlike those in Rimbault's *Little Book of Christmas Carols* (1863) and Husk's *Songs of the Nativity* (1864), represents the carol as it was sung at that time. In 1901 the refrain was rewritten, and we give this as an alternative. (For a fifteenth-century boar's head carol see 'The Exeter Boar's Head Carol', 37.)

Boar's head feasts were particularly popular at Christmas—in Edward II's time the open season for boar-hunting ran from Christmas to Candlemas. Their origin was probably the Norse custom of sacrificing a boar to the goddess of fertility, Freyja, at her midwinter feast, a custom that persisted in the north of England and was adapted for various festivities. Queen's, a college with north-country connections and a strong attachment to tradition, almost certainly adopted rather than invented both feast and carol,

and hung on to both even after the wild boar became extinct in seventeenth-century England. Ceremony, words, and music have all evolved over the years at Queen's, and the 1901 arrangement of the music is the one still sung. Nowadays the feast is held not on Christmas Night but on a Saturday shortly before, when old members are entertained at a 'gaudy'. The Provost and Fellows enter after the trumpet call that announces dinner each evening during Full Term:

The Provost having then said grace, the boar's head is carried in by three chefs on its silver charger, surrounded by rosemary and gilded sprigs of bay, stuck with flags, and magnificently crowned. On either side are torch-bearers, and in front walks the solo singer and (proceeding backwards) the choir. The procession halts for each verse, moving forward during the refrains. When the charger is set down on the high table the Provost distributes the herbs among the choir and presents the solo singer with the orange from the boar's mouth.

PERFORMANCE Choir.

SMILE Ü