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Opening extract from  
**ABC My Grannie Caught a Flea  
Scots Children's Songs and  
Rhymes**

Written by  
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# Introduction

Scotland is rich in many things, not least in our traditional children's songs and rhymes. Every Scots child and adult can sing 'Ally bally bee' and 'Ye canny shove yer grannie'. The other small rhythmic words we use to comfort or amuse very small people, and the vigorous games and funny rhymes we recall from playground days, will vary according to our age and where we were brought up. Older people lament that the young 'don't sing in the playground any more', but school playtimes are hotching with song and rhyme.

True, few of the pieces popular 40 years ago can be found in action today. The kids casually make new rhymes from snatches of TV commercials and popular song. They remake – and sometimes mangle – old pieces, and ruthlessly discard most that are fondly remembered by adults, but this has always been the case. Look into collections in books and archives – you will find thousands of childhood rhymes and songs that flourished, then faded away.

This book celebrates the richness of those older sources, combined with the fruits of the author's visits to Scottish schools from 1991 to 2006. The songs and rhymes are rich in vigour and bounce, direct language, the Scots voice, humour, observations on adult relationships that are sometimes sharp and sometimes naive, and surreal imagery.

As you read them, you will half recognise old favourites but often say, 'Those are the wrong words' because they are not what was used in your street or playground. Elements were trimmed off, shuffled, recombined, pruned, turned into nonsense, then into a new form of sense. I have included varying versions of a few to show how they grow and decline.

What are they for? For the children, amusement and to accompany physical activity, of course, but also for practising, developing and showing off language skills. For adults, fond memories of simpler times?

# *Sittin on Yer Mammie's Knee*

Though few readers of this book were raised in a nursery, the term 'nursery rhyme' is usually attached to songs and rhymes that adults use when hushing and calming, manipulating and entertaining and developing language knowledge of babies and very small children. 'Baloo' was a favourite old Scots term for a lullaby, and our lullabies can be simple croons or wordy small songs. The rhymes to accompany 'teaching' body parts, bouncing, clapping and tickling are direct and rhythmic.

## HUSHABAWS, BALOOS AND LULLABIES

*For rocking the baby*

Baloo lillie beetie  
Mammie's at the creetie  
For tae plick an tae pu  
For tae gather lammie's woo  
For tae buy a bullie's skin  
Tae rock wir bonnie bairnie in  
*Orkney, Gossett, 1915*

Baloo ma peerie lamb  
 Cuddle close to mammie  
 Mammie'll sing a bonny song  
 Ba ma prettie lambie  
*Orkney, 1961, SSS*

Bonnie Jean o Fogioloan, she langed for a baby  
 She took her father's grey cat and rowed it in a plaidie  
 'Hishie bishie bow row, lang leggies ow ow  
 And twerna for your hairie mouthie  
     I wad kiss you now now'  
*Aberchirder, 1905, GD*

Now balaloo lammy, now baloo my dear  
 Now balaloo lammy, ain mammie is here  
 What ails my wee bairnie? What ails it this night?  
 What ails my wee lammy? Is bairnie no right?  
 Now balaloo lammy, now baloo my dear  
 Does wee lammy ken that its daddie's no here?  
 Ye're rockin' fu sweetly on mammie's warm knee  
 But daddy's a-rockin upon the saut sea  
*Moffat, 1933*

Hurr hurr dee noo, hurr hurr dee noo  
 Noo faa dee ower, my lammie  
 Hurr hurr dee noo, hurr hurr dee noo  
 Dere nane sall get my lammie  
 Hurr dee, hurr dee, mammie sall keep dee  
 Hurr dee, hurr dee, mammie is here  
*Shetland, Hendry & Stephen, 1982*

Hush ye, hush ye, little pet ye  
 Hush ye, hush ye, dinna fret ye  
 The Black Douglas sall not get ye  
*Fraser, 1975*

Hush-a-ba baby, lie doon  
 Your mammie's awa tae the toon  
 And when she comes back, ye'll get a wee drap  
 Hush-a-ba baby, lie doon  
*Aberdeenshire, 1908, GD*

Hushie-ba, Burdie Beeton  
 Your mammie's gane to Seaton  
 For to buy a lammie's skin  
 To wrap your bonnie boukie in  
*Chambers, 1842*

#### BALOO BALILLI

Baloo balilli, baloo balilli  
 Baloo balilli, baloo ba

Gae awa, peerie fairies, gae awa, peerie fairies  
 Gae awa, peerie fairies, fae oor bairn noo

Dan come boanie angels, dan come boanie angels  
 Dan come boanie angels ta wir peerie bairn

Dey'll sheen ower da cradle, dey'll sheen ower da cradle  
 Dey'll sheen ower da cradle, o wir peerie bairn  
*Shetland, Buchan, 1962*



## CAN YE SEW CUSHIONS?

O, can ye sew cushions and can ye sew sheets?  
And can ye sing Bal-lu-loo, when the bairn greets?  
And hee and ba birdie, and hee and ba lamb  
And hee and ba birdie, my bonnie wee lamb

Hee o, wee o, what would I do wi you?  
Black's the life that I lead wi you  
Owre mony o you, little for to gie you  
Hee o, wee o, what would I do wi you?  
*Chambers, 1842*

## HEY DAN DILLY DOW

Hey dan dilly dow, how den dan  
Rich were your mither, gin ye were a man  
Ye'd hunt and ye'd hawk, and keep her in game  
And water your father's horse in the mill dam

Hey dan dilly dow, how den flowers  
Ye'll lie in your bed till eleven hours  
If at eleven hours ye list to rise  
Ye'll get your dinner dicht in a new guise  
Laverock's leg and titlin's tae  
And aa sic dainties my mannie sall hae  
*Herd, 1776*

## HUSHABA BABIE

Hushaba, babie, lie still, lie still  
 Your mammie's awa to the mill, the mill  
 Babie is greeting for want of good keeping  
 Hushaba babie, lie still, lie still

Hushaba, babie, lie still and sleep  
 It grieves me richt sairly tae hear ye weep  
 Hee and ba lilliloo, down dilly dan  
 Sing hee and ba, birdie, my bonnie lamb  
*Moffat, 1933*

## HUSH-A-BA BIRDIE

Hush-a-ba birdie, croon, croon  
 Hush-a-ba birdie, croon  
 The sheep are gane to the silver wood  
 And the coos are gane to the broom, broom

An it's braw milking the kye, kye  
 An it's braw milking the kye  
 The birds are singing, the bells are ringing  
 The wild deer come galloping by, by

Hush-a-ba birdie, croon, croon  
 Hush-a-ba birdie, croon  
 The gaits are gane to the mountain hie  
 And they'll no be hame till noon, noon  
*Chambers, 1842*

## CHIN CHAPPIE MOU MERRY

*Face-tracing – fingers climb  
over the baby's head*

Chin chappie  
Mou merry  
Nose nappie  
Cheek cherry  
Ee winkie  
Broo brinkie  
Ower the hills and awa  
*Forfar, 1948*

Come ower the hillie  
Chap at the doorie  
Keek in  
Lift the sneck  
Dicht yer feet  
And walk in  
*Forfar, 1948*

I'll tell you a story  
Aboot Johnnie Norry  
He gaed up twa stairs  
And in at a wee doory  
*MacLennan, 1909*