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MATTHEW CRAMPTON

Human Cargo

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This collection, subtitled *Stories And Songs Of Emigration, Slavery And Transportation*, is a well-researched and presented treatise on the songs written about the movement of people, for whatever reason, and the historical background to their stories. From the earliest broadsheets to Mike O'Connor's *Carrying Nelson Home*, an incredible amount of ground (and sea) is covered in 164 pages. Some of the back stories of the songs are fascinating, and the research is first class, but no longer has the reader engaged with one theme than he is swept on to the next, in quick succession – tea clippers following slave ships, clearances following conscription, though the important bedrock of this book is the song lyrics that are carefully transcribed. No music is provided – the reader is prompted to do their own research for accompaniments – but nevertheless, it is an enjoyable read, despite the challenging subject matter.

The original gathering of these songs and stories was for a stage show commissioned in 2014, aiming to raise funds for The Refugee Council. Yup, some of these issues are still with us sadly, and Matthew Crampton's commitment to this good cause is commendable. I just would have been more impressed if there were some accompanying tunes with the lyrics. I know that the original broadsides of the earlier ones would have been printed as words only, and singers would have added their own tunes, often using existing tunes that they knew. However, some of us like to at least have at least a melody to go on.

All Around My Hat is yet another variant, with only passing similarity to the Steeleye Span standard (which in turn was a pastiche of an 18th century song of the same name and *Farewell He*). *The White Cockade* text is more familiar to Artisan and Show Of Hands fans as *The Blue Cockade*, but I think there are multiple regional variations with that one. All in all this is a great read, and provides more than a little food for thought.

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Grem Devlin