

The King's Shilling

Words and Music: Nigel Harbron

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is accompanied by a series of chords: A, E, D, E, F#m, C#m, F#m, C#m, A, E, D, E, F#m, C#m, D, E, A, E, D, E, A, D, E, A. The lyrics are: A life on the land is no life at all, You're wor-king in mud from dawn to night-fall. The food it is stale and the beer it is flat, There are times when I'd ra-ther be ea-ting my hat. When there's trou-ble a-brew-ing on some for-eign shore, I'll take the King's Shil ling— and I'll go to war.

A life on the land is no life at all,
You're working in mud from dawn to nightfall.
The food it is stale and the beer it is flat,
There are times when I'd rather be eating my hat.

*Ch: When there's trouble a-brewing on some foreign shore,
I'll take the King's Shilling and I'll go to war.*

I once had a wife and a family as well,
But where they are now only one man can tell.
When you work in the fields you're the lowest of low,
When you fight for the King, you cut a fine show.

The army's the place where I now want to be.
The army is where I know I'll feel free.
If there's danger abroad, I'll meet it head on,
From this dreary old country at last I'll be gone.

In time to this country I may well return,
Fine clothes on my back, and with money to burn.
A trader or merchant I think I will be -
I'll give thanks to the shilling the King gave to me.



A George the Third Shilling from 1758



Some of the Nice People Who Would Give You One!

Press Gangs were the main means of recruiting armed forces' personnel during the 18th and early 19th centuries, and it was difficult for recruits to object! Rumour has it that glass-bottomed pint pots were created so that potential 'recruits' could see if someone had slipped a shilling into their beer, but I don't think that there is universal agreement about this.