

Peter Howell & John Ferdinando

This duo released five highly acclaimed psych folk items.

John Ferdinando was the co-writer for all four known psych folk releases. He wrote the music for their band Ithaca and cooperated in the other releases.

Peter Howell, writer for Alice Through The Looking Glass and for Tomorrow Come Someday, had two periods in his music. The first were the psych folk releases (so little were being made!) of **Alice Through The Looking Glass, Tomorrow Come Someday, Agincourt** and **Ithaca**.

Peter then worked in cooperation with the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, where he released a few solo albums and had several appearances. Most known is his contribution on "**Dr. 'Who - The Music'**".

Agincourt and the first Ithaca album were the first to be reissued on the Background label, whilst Alice Through The Looking Glass, was reissued by 10th Planet Records.

Information about the first four records and mostly about the Alice project can be found on the liner notes from David Wells, July 1997 from the Alice Through the Looking Glass LP:

*"Although the British music industry of the late 1960s was firmly anchored in London, with a handful of larger cities like Liverpool and Manchester acting acting as minor tributaries, the more tranquil backwaters of rural England continued to hold a considerable fascination for some of the country's major musical talents. Ray Davies view that the capital city was a corrosive influence on the traditional British way of life, already posited in classic cautionary tales like big Black Smoke and Polly, reached its fullest flowering with The Kinks Are The Village Green Reservation Society, while **Mark Wirtz's** aborted **Teenage Opera** project also centred around events in a mythical village. At the same time groups like **Traffic** achieved copious amounts of publicity by retreating far from the madding crowd in order to get it together in the country, conveniently weaving a new strand of rock star chic in the process. But such ventures were inauthentic. Motivated as they were by varying degrees and combinations of urban disillusionment, empty nostalgia, pop star affectation and an idealised, sentimental view of country life held by city dwellers with no real experience of life outside the metropolis. Bona fide village voices were harder to find. The Troggs, for example, may have been hicks from the sticks, but their Andover roots failed to inform their music and were only in evidence when it came to scoring cheap publicity. It is for these reasons, although not solely for these reasons, that Alice Through The Looking Glass, made both by and for a tiny village*

community and with no intention of reaching a wider audience may well be a unique document.

Our story begins (and pretty much ends) in the late 1960's in the small Sussex village of Ditchling, just a few miles from the sprawling seaside resort of Brighton. Two Ditchling residents, Peter Howell and John Ferdinando, had played in a variety of local groups (the **Tudor Mood**, **Merlin's Spell**, **The Four Musketeers**, etc) since the mid-Sixties. However, a change of emphasis occurred around 1967 when Howell acquired a Philips tape recorder initially as a means to demo material for the group's consideration. Howell and Ferdinando quickly became more interested in the tape deck as an instrument of creativity rather than for mere reproduction purposes, and the equipment began to exert a greater fascination for both men than the dubious pleasures of playing live with a group of limited ability and horizons. Howell and Ferdinando slowly retreated into the subterranean world of makeshift home studios, writing songs whilst improvising and experimenting with various aspects of recording techniques including bouncing tracks, tape loops and echo.

Had the duo been conducting their modest experiments from some anonymous bedsit in the heart of the city, their backroom activities would doubtlessly have passed unnoticed. In a small village community like Ditchling, however, where everybody not only knew everyone else but also their business, their dabblings became common knowledge. Thus it was that, in late 1968, they were approached by a local amateur dramatics group called the **Ditchling Players** to provide a musical backdrop for a stage version of Alice through the Looking Glass. The duo eagerly set to work, using Lewis Carroll's surreal verse as the bedrock for the project, although to a certain extent they were restricted by the need for much of the music to be of an incidental nature.

Whilst neither man would claim to be a musical technocrat, both were capable of playing a wide variety of instruments with enough proficiency to create a pleasingly varied canvas, with flageolets, glockenspiels and mandolins coalescing with more familiar late 1960s pop instruments such as organ and an assortment of guitars. Having established their broad musical template, the duo then added a bewildering variety of studio trickery - backward tapes, sound effects, distorted vocals etc - to create a uniquely English hybrid of folk and pastoral psychedelia.

The results of their endeavours met with a favourable response when unveiled at the play's rehearsals, in fact, feedback was so positive that the duo decided to press a limited edition vinyl album as souvenirs for participants and audience alike. Howell and Ferdinando edited together the songs and incidental music with extracts of dialogue from the stage production, strengthening the project with three tracks ("The Walrus And the Carpenter", "Through Looking Glass Wood" and "Whose dream") that

had been excluded from the show as surplus to requirements. Fifty copies of the album were pressed in January 1969 by a London pressing plant called SNP, who specialised in religious recordings. These quickly sold out, and the duo optimistically pressed up another 20-30 copies. As can be seen from this reissue, the sleeve artwork utilised a sketch by Sir John Tenniel (the original Alice", illustrator) of Alice encountering Tweedledee and Tweedledum, although whether this image was chosen to represent Howell and Ferdinando must remain open to conjecture!

Their appetite whetted both by the creative nature of Alice Through The Looking Glass and the excitement engendered by the subsequent vinyl pressing, Howell and Ferdinando continued to record together over the next few years, issuing the results in LP format. **Tomorrow Come Someday** (a concept piece revolving around a village threatened by motorway expansion), the heavily Moody Blues-influenced *To Fly Away* (credited to semi-fictitious group **Agincourt**) and **A Game for All Who Know** (this time as **Ithaca**) were recorded and issued between 1969 and 1973 in limited edition pressings of between 50-100 copies. By this stage the Howell family had moved to a larger house in Hove, enabling Peter to exchange what was essentially a glorified den for a more professional, mini home recording studio. Pride of place went to a Hohner electronic organ ("extraordinarily good at simulating strings and oboes", he remembers), which was actually stored in his parents study but had been surreptitiously wired up by Peter to the recording equipment upstairs! His new premises were booked by local rock acid folk bands to record their own demo material, although this minor business venture always took second place to his own musical experiments.

A fifth Howell/Ferdinando album entitled "**Friends**" had just been completed when the partnership came to an abrupt halt. Howell had already been working at the BBC as a studio manager since 1970 (he'd provided a stiff upper lip voiceover for John Peels Top Gear shows), but he was now offered a position with the **BBC Radiophonic Workshop**. His new job combined tape recording with various compositional duties to create primarily background music for film, radio and television use (he was also responsible for updating the **Dr Who** theme tune, but we won't hold such a sacrilegious act against him). His new job description was indistinguishable from his extracurricular collaborations with John Ferdinando, and the duo's spare-time activities duly fell by the wayside. Without his longstanding partner, John Ferdinando drifted away from the music scene to concentrate on his day job as a chartered surveyor, although he now plays bass in a local pub band.

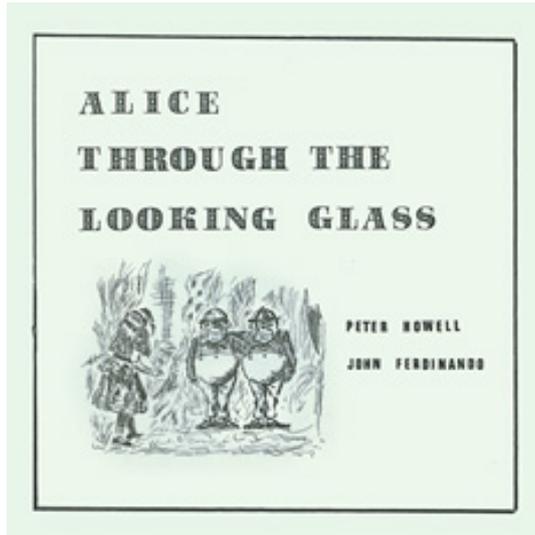
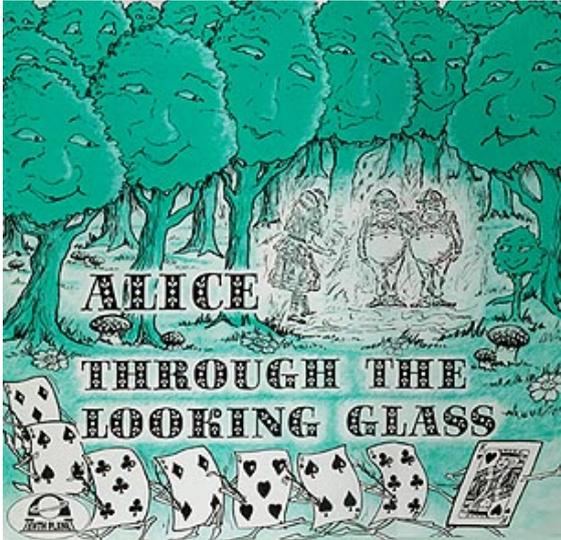
Both men could hardly have expected that their collection of juvenilia would come back to haunt them, out in 1987 a record dealer in Birmingham stumbled across a second hand copy of the Ithaca LP which, when advertised, attracted considerable interest on the burgeoning collectors

market. As a result John and Peter were contacted, found to have recorded other albums, still to be in possession of a handful of copies and persuaded to part with them. These subsequently sold for increasingly outrageous sums of money as collectors fought over the more obscure artefacts of the era, although demand for the **Ithaca** and **Agincourt** titles was assuaged to a certain extent in the early 1990s by unauthorised reissues on the aptly-named Background label. Ironically Peter and John made far more money from setting spare copies of the albums than they had seen during their partnership some 20-25 years earlier.

Given the circumstances behind the original recording, this reissue of **Alice Through The Looking Glass** (which has been taken from the original master tapes) is a faintly bizarre postscript to the Peter Howell/John Ferdinando partnership. As Howell pointed out to interviewer Geoff Penn in 1994, Alice.. was pieced together solely for a small, self-contained local community. Taken out of its original context by strangers with the latest push-button technology at their disposal, the project is inevitably flawed when viewed from the conventional critical perspective, and a surfeit of incidental music and spoken extracts from the play undoubtedly hamper the pace and invite accusations of gaucheness. But even without knowledge of the project's genesis such criticisms miss the point. Alice.. is a charming, ornate slice of English whimsy with an appeal that surely extends beyond the limited audience at which it was aimed back in 1969. Much of the attraction obviously delves from Lewis Carroll's surreal poetry, but some of the musical templates are genuinely inspired, and the project is clearly coloured by the more melodic English psychedelic acts of the late 1960s such as the **Moody Blues** and the **Pink Floyd** (indeed, Alice has been compared elsewhere to a more pastoral equivalent of "Piper At The Gates of Dawn"). There are numerous highlights scattered throughout the album, but pride of place must go to Jabberwocky, an impressive melange of treated vocals and backward tapes that is worth the price of admission alone. With its drowsy atmosphere, myriad sound effects and languid organ-based sound, Alice certainly invokes the spirit of the psychedelic age, albeit from the perspective of photogenic Middle England rather than hallucinogenic Middle Earth. Rarely can an album or book have ended with a more apposite line. Life - what is it but a dream?"

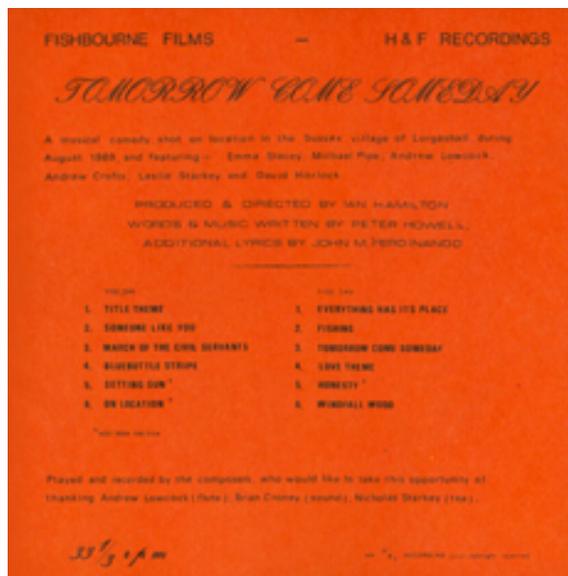
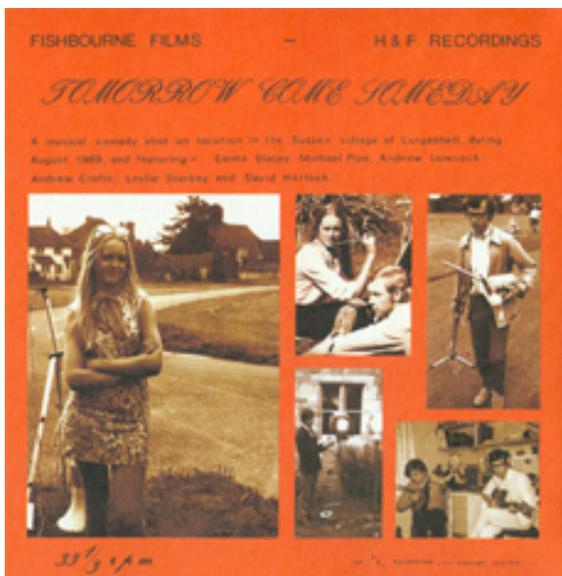
David Wells, July 1997, Special thanks to Geoff Penn

1. ALICE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS



A very fine record; half of it is a play of the Lewis Carol story. The other half are beautiful songs and instrumentals. I like this record mostly, although all are highly recommended. All projects are influenced psych folk with a let's say Moody Blues touch. The album was reissued on CD by Lion Records

2. TOMORROW COME SOMEDAY



Tomorrow Come Someday, the liner notes say, is "a musical comedy, shot on location in the Sussex village of Lurgashall, during August 1969". Tomorrow Come Someday was re-released by Sound News Production. It seems that it was originally pressed for "Fishbourne Films".

It featured **Emma Stacey, Michael Pipe, Andrew Lowcock, Andrew Crofts, Leslie Starkey and David Horlock**. Produced and directed by **Ian**

Hamilton. Words and music by **Peter Howell.** Additional lyrics by **John M.Ferdinando.** Played and recorded by the composers with cooperation of **Andrew Lowcock,** flute, **Brian Croney,** sound, **Nicholas Starkey,** tea.

Tracklist :

Side A:

- 1 Title Theme
- 2 Someone Like You
- 3 March Of The Civil Servants
- 4 Bluebottle Stripe
- 5 Setting Sun*
- 6 On Location*

Side B:

- 1 Everything Has Its Place
- 2 Fishing
- 3 Tomorrow Come Someday
- 4 Love Theme, 5 Honesty*
- 6 Windfall Wood

* not from the film

Reissue reviewed:

Lion Productions **Peter Howell & John Ferdinando** : Tomorrow Come Someday -CD+DVD-(UK,1969, released 2010)

Tomorrow Come Someday was one of these projects from Peter Howell & Jon Ferdinando which were only re-released as a few hundred copies after the even more rare test pressings. It was related with an early film by TV director Ian Hamilton, a musical comedy shot in Sussex. Without the movie it sounded like the least successful, still charming of all releases by the group, but now, having seen the charming movie with it, on this re-release with DVD I can feel and understand its full charm, the innocence of country life, the sort of uniqueness which not only in the movie was considered as something which is in danger, of being lost by the growing road and human expansion. Living in Belgium myself I can also see how the amount of people around has been tripled, and a countryside, as a small place of peace has become rare. Thus a document like this gives a feeling of losing it, underneath its smile of recognition.

Label : www.lionproductions.org/

3. AGINCOURT



This record is very **Moody Blues** influenced and has several beautiful psych folk tracks. Agincourt is **Lee Menelaus, John Ferdinando** and **Peter Howell. Andrew Lowcock** played flute on "Joy in the finding", "Dawn", "Kind Sir". **Brian Hussey** played drums on "Mirabella", "Barn owl Blues". Graphics were done by **Veronica Ruddin**. Engineering by **Brian Croney**.

4. ITHACA: A Game for All Who Know



This album opens the music with the sounds of turning pages in a book, has a flamenco traditional interpreted (the same track also known for its Doors version on Gypsy Caravan) and it sounds more like a folk version of Pink

Floyd. Beautiful interwoven songs with nice tape experiments of additional sounds.

Words and music: **John Ferdinando**; **Lee Menelaus**, female voice; **John Ferdinando**, guitars, vocals, bass, organ, auto harp; **Peter Howell**, guitars, piano, organ, mandolin, percussion, recorder, tape effects; **Brian Hussey**, drums; **Robert Ferdinando**, classical guitar on "Journey"; **Andrew Lowcock**, flute on "Did You Know" , timpani; **Martin Garrett**, 12 string, backing vocals on "Cement"

5. FRIENDS: Fragile





Acme / Lion Prod. Friends : Fragile (UK,1972)

A year ago a friend told me he'd heard of a Japanese guy who had a CD-R copy taken from an acetate copy of a second 'Ithaca' or "Friends" album, recorded in 1972. When half a year ago after the official reissues of all the Howell/Ferdinando related albums, this album was announced. It was followed by a wave of disbelief as if it couldn't be true, as if these musicians and label would do a con trick with a new recording, to make it sell better.

Compared to the earlier reissues, there are new liner notes with additional info on the developments of the music from Peter & John, explaining how the story evolved. Shortly after the Ithaca release which was a bit more a Ferdinando Project, Peter was invited to work at the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, so their last recording "Friends", a mainly Peter Howe Project, was never released. The label had made a test pressing which dates it as 1972 while the members thought it was done in 1974. In 1974 they had done a few more collaborations on musical comedy sketches for theatre, with two tapes issued as "The Whizz Theatre Company". But so far no tapes of these had been traced back.

"Friends" strangely still has the recognisable Ithaca / (or even more) Agincourt sound, mostly with different lead vocals, by Peter Howell mostly, but with all the same elements and participants, with 4 tracks featuring Ruth Cubbin on vocals. I had to listen a few times to be sure of what to think. The sound is very close to Agincourt, with a definite 60's sound. Just a few tracks are more 60's soft psych-rock.

Very good !!

As stated in the liner notes from *Through The Looking Glass*, Peter Howell ended the cooperation with Ferdinando and started to work for the Radiophonic Workshop of the BBC.

Abridged and corrected by Ray White, December, 2016.