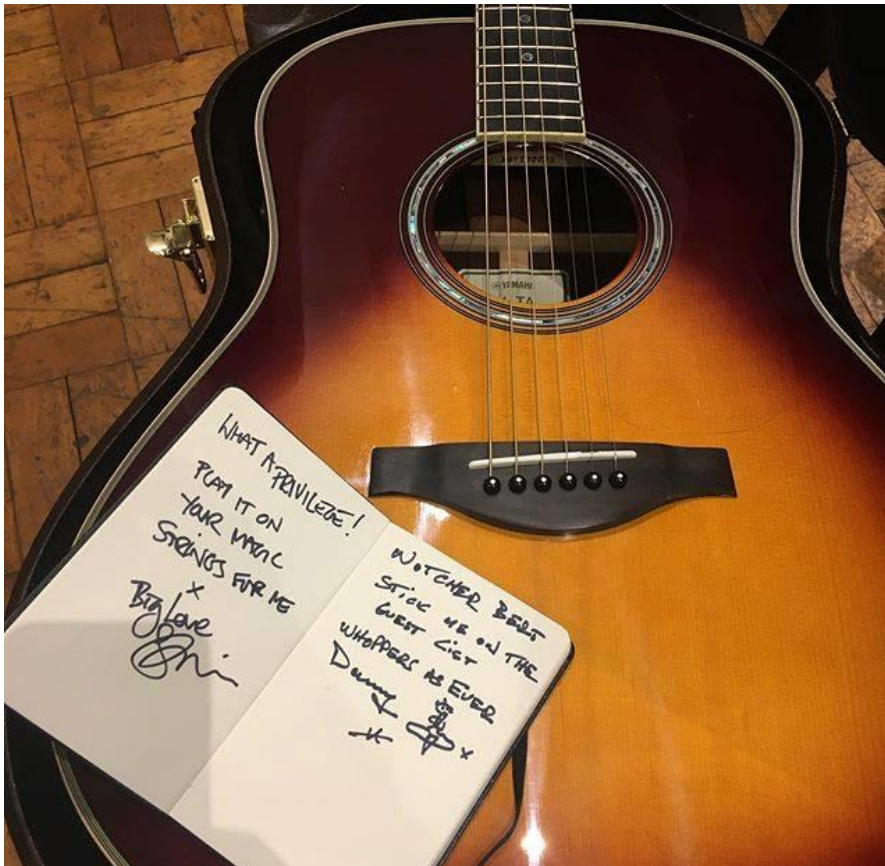


4 The 'Pilgrim' Guitar's Journey, April 2019 – September 2023

The Pilgrim travelled to many places in England's green and pleasant land, making a few trips across the border to Scotland. It started in Surrey, travelling widely south to north and west to east: Shropshire, Essex, Hampshire, Tyne and Wear, Derbyshire, Merseyside, Glasgow, London, Edinburgh, Argyll, Glasgow and back to London.



From Paul Weller's **Blackburn Studios in Surrey**, with Steve Pilgrim and Danny Thompson to

Shrewsbury, Shropshire with Clive Carroll

Harwich, Essex to Kete Bowers

Fleet, Hampshire with Jack Theaker and Peter Ivey

Gateshead, Tyne and Wear with Ben Church

Atlow Moat, Derbyshire with Nick Jonah Davis

Liverpool with James John Turner

Glasgow to Mike Hastings and Robin Adams

London to Campbell Baum and Broadside Hacks

Edinburgh with Rory Butler

Argyll with Robin Miller

Glasgow again to Jamie Flett

In April 2019, when the four travelling guitars were well into their journeys that had started in December 2018, we had call from **Steve Pilgrim** who was rehearsing with **Danny Thompson** – Pentangle’s double bass player – at Paul Weller’s famous Blackbarn studios in Surrey.

Steve, from Liverpool had been Paul Weller’s drummer for ten years but had recently turned to playing guitar and writing songs. He was thrilled to team up with Danny Thompson, 40 years his senior, for his recent albums. They were rehearsing for a tour together called ‘Magic Strings’. They were ready, and before they set off, had a strong desire to play a song for Bert and to be part of the 80 Plays journey.

Well, we were caught short: The Johnny Guitar was in Denmark; the Beth Guitar was doing the rounds in Scotland; the Wildcard was with Richard Thompson in London from where we were loath to dislodge it; and the Graham Guitar was in California. What could we do? An SOS call to Yamaha miraculously produced a fifth TransAcoustic guitar with its ‘magic strings’ that was rushed down to Surrey to the happy hands of Steve and Danny. And guess what they played – a song called **Magic Strings** that Steve had written inspired by collaborating with Danny, so, very a very apt piece to play on the TransAcoustic for Bert.



Steve passed the guitar to Clive Carroll who took it to Shrewsbury.



Charismatic Clive Carroll is said to have created a sound world all his own, with influences mined from the delicate cadences of Elizabethan England to the striking

harmonic sensibilities of composers Bartok and Ligeti—with nods to jaunty music hall melodies and Delta blues riffs. This broad array of musical influences places Clive firmly in the footsteps of British guitar legends such as Davy Graham, Bert Jansch, and John Renbourn. John Renbourn had encouraged Clive to record his first album, deemed it “a milestone in the journey of the steel-string guitar”. and took Clive on the road with him.

Clive videoed a medley of very old Irish tunes, saying, “John Renbourn and I often played duets and sometimes he would give me Bert’s part to work on. This gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in Jansch’s style and voicings, which always complimented Renbourn’s equally distinctive sound.” Now, at the end of 2023, Clive is touring the UK with a tribute to John Renbourn programme and has invited Dariush Kanani (a Bert Jansch Foundation featured artist) to be his partner for this extensive British tour.

Chris Quinn – Shrewsbury, Shropshire

While in Shrewsbury the Pilgrim joined Chris Quinn who tackled ‘the Curragh of Kildare’ for his song for Bert. Being not only a singer and songwriter and guitarist, Chris is also a teacher. He even gave a lesson on the piece. Chris arranges week-long ‘Blues Retreats’ in his hometown.



Kete Bowers – Harwich, Essex

The Pilgrim then crossed the country to another guitar enthusiast and singer-songwriter Kete Bowers on the East Coast in Harwich. Kete who came from the West Coast in Birkenhead and now lives in Essex says: “I have been a fan of Bert Jansch for many years, he has influenced my writing in many ways. In my book he is the finest and most original song writer, singer and acoustic guitar player I have heard. One of my favourite Bert Jansch songs is ‘Back Home’ from his album *When the Circus Comes to Town*. That song helped inspire me to write my song **A Fine Day to Leave**. Thank you for all the music, Bert – forever a fan.”



Jack Theaker and Peter Ivey - Hampshire

The Pilgrim then went on to a pair of players in Fleet Hampshire from different parts of the age spectrum – teenager Jack Theaker and his mentor, retired diplomat Peter Ivey. Peter came across this brilliant young guitarist when Jack was busking in Fleet High Street playing Beatles songs. He invited him along to the local folk club –



which reduced the average age considerably. That opened up a new vista for Jack. They both loved how the TransAcoustic sounded in the folk club. Without recourse to cables and amplifiers it sounded just great for that kind of ambience. The electronics inside it give it a great lift for playing in a room like that. Jack says it feels like it almost plays itself. Not only did they each play a piece, but you can also hear them together, tackle a really complicated Bert and John piece 'Lucky Thirteen'.

Peter Ivey, played 'Bridge' in September 2019, said: "I love this instrumental piece composed by Bert for the 1980 *Thirteen Down* album with Conundrum. I lived in Putney in the early 1980s and would sometimes see Bert in the Star and Garter or Half Moon – so in my mind it's about Putney Bridge! Bert's incredible guitar playing and songwriting have been an inspiration to me for the past 40+ years!"

Jack played a traditional piece that he arranged himself. He said: "I chose the piece 'Lovely Joan' as it was an old folk melody that I adapted to a folk guitar setting—much in the style of Renbourn/Jansch's 'folk baroque' songs. The composition features a stark lack of static harmony, an aggressive timbre, and stylistic polarisation of the bass and melody—all idioms of Bert's style. Not only playing Bert's music but listening to it time and again gives me an experience I have never had with any other artist."

The Pilgrim took off North again, to Ben Church in Gateshead.

A Manchester lad, now based in the North East, Ben's debut solo performance was at the BBC Radio 2 Young Folk Award semi-final, aged 17 and he went on to study music at Newcastle University. His debut EP, *My Lot* earned him radio play, extensive performances around the UK. Ben has been awarded a Danny Kyle Award at Celtic Connections for his solo performance. The children's CD he released with his wife, Rachel, has also been well received among folk-loving parents around the country.

Ben played 'Dreams of Love' for Bert in November 2019. He said: "I've written a number of pieces influenced by his playing over the years but feel I'd rather play one of his own for this. I hadn't played this song for years, then it just popped into my head one day and I've not been able to stop playing it since. The chord sequence's sudden transition to and heavy focus on the second chord gives it a very distinctive, melancholic edge that works wonderfully with the haunting lyrics."



West again to Atlow Moat in Derbyshire for Nick Jonah Davis

fRoots Magazine said: "Nick Jonah Davis is one of the select band of living solo acoustic guitar players whose music is not only virtuosic, but genuinely exciting." Nick played 'Henry Martin' for Bert in February 2020. He said: "I have chosen to play the version from the *Jack Orion* album, which is a touchstone for any serious guitarist, and this piece in particular shows Bert in full flight with his foil John Renbourn. It's heady, relentless, hypnotic, timeless, magical, hinging as it does on a bold re-imagining of a traditional theme. To my ear it foreshadows so much of what has followed in guitar playing. Although my own contribution to music is a tiny, tiny fraction of what he achieved, I owe so many of the best things that happen in my life to those first sparks from Bert."

Nick added "Bert inspires me every time I pick up a guitar. I began, as so many have, to try and get my fingers to follow his mercurial lead, a struggle that continues to this day. I remain awestruck and baffled by what he was able to do. Seeing him play live was a further revelation – in my mind he was almost unreal, and yet there he was in front of me, humbly working his magic. It's paradoxical that a musician so rooted in tradition would so thoroughly reinvent the approach to an instrument."

The Pilgrim continued its journey in Liverpool with James John Turner

He said: "I've always loved the 'troubadour' aspect of Bert, and his work with The Pentangle. It is only later on, for me, when I was looking for inspiration for my own music that I realised what an amazing and natural guitarist/musician Bert was. His playing reached into me and spoke to me; Bert was a person of integrity who always stuck to his musical guns, which has inspired me to try to do the same."

James played his own piece 'Silver and Gold' that he says was inspired by Bert Jansch. He said: "I wrote this for my second solo album *How Could We Be Wrong?* At the time, I was listening to Bert Jansch and Pentangle all the time. I also attended one of Pentangle's last concerts at the Liverpool Philharmonic. I think some of his energy soaked into the songs on this album, including this song. People have consistently referenced Bert Jansch when describing my music."



To Glasgow for Mike Hastings and Robin Adams

Mike Hastings was pleased to be nominated on this journey by **Mike Heron** of the **Incredible String Band**, with whom he performs regularly. Mike Hastings has played with *Trembling Bells* for the past ten years. He is currently one half of folk duo *Mike & Solveig*. The piece he composed, called 'GnomeLikeDivas' – and if you are confused about the title – it is apparently an anagram of Mike and Solveig!

He said: "When I played the Pentangle album *Basket of Light* (after purchasing a record player from a nearby jumble sale) I was immediately blown away and felt that I had discovered the music that I'd always wanted to hear! Soon after, I attended a small folk festival in Southern Scotland where Bert was playing. He has been a huge influence on my guitar playing."



Robin Adams said



"The first time I heard Bert, I was around 19, and immediately reached for my guitar to learn 'One for Jo', 'Needle of Death' and 'Strolling Down the Highway', one after the other. I couldn't get enough. Bert's ability to tap into timeless streams of tradition, blues and folk, while sounding like nobody but himself, still amazes me."

By this time the guitar was locked down with Robin, so as well as playing 'One for Jo', he took the opportunity to join others on the journey in playing 'Blackwaterside'.

The Pilgrim was called to London to Campbell Baum.

Campbell Baum is a singer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist. He plays bass and saxophone in the band Sorry, who released their debut album *925* on Domino last year. As well as performing, he has promoted shows in London for over five years, founding *Black Cat White Cat Promotions* and *Ra-Ra Rok Records* along the way. In 2020, he started Broadside Hacks, which operates as a label and a promotion company, focused on folk music. The launch event featured Jacqui McShee's Pentangle, Junior Brother and Wizz Jones.

For the arrangement of 'The Game of Cards', Campbell brought in some of his Broadside Hacks mates, Naima Bock – Vocals, Oliver Hamilton – Violin, Frank Wright- Double Bass and Oscar Browne – Banjo, who also recorded 'All My Trials' with Naima, Oliver and Frank.



Campbell said: "I have been aware of Bert's legacy since I was very young. But it was only when I discovered his discography with Pentangle that I became committed to listening to the vast musical output he left us. It took a few years of listening, before I began to attempt to learn his unique playing style. Since then, my admiration for him has only grown."

Campbell has regular club nights at the Moth Club. On 3 October 2023, he presented an evening 'Celebrating the life and songs of Bert Jansch'. Special Guests were Jacqui McShee, Wizz Jones and Sam Grassie.

Then the Pilgrim hotfooted back up to Scotland to Rory Butler in Edinburgh

Rory said: "My job as a teenager was stripping wallpaper on a building site in Dumfries. I would get paid at the end of the week and armed with pockets full, I went to this wee record shop around the corner. This is where I met Bert Jansch! I remember finding his debut album one day. Recognising the name, I already knew how important he was to the music scene that I loved. That album went on and it was a bit of a shock. It just made me want to play my guitar all the time. Really imaginative songs. So aggressive on the strings and yet so carefully melodic. So separate yet together. The marriage of guitar and voice is everything in my own songs, and Bert Jansch had a big impact on that. Rory sang 'Poison' for Bert

Next, Robin Miller took the Pilgrim right up to Argyll, Scotland

Born on the island South Uist in 1972 Robin (below, right) grew up in a remote part of the island of Islay in the Hebrides in Scotland. He first heard Bert after finding his records at a furniture auction on Islay, bought with money saved from stacking peat. Busking and playing in folk bands in Glasgow in his late teens, Robin watched Bert and his contemporaries close up in small venues, as they thrilled a room with nothing but their music and charisma. He chatted with Bert a couple of times. Robin became part of a multi-cultural Glasgow-based world music act Zuba, playing



fingerpicked and open-tuned electric guitar. In 2006 he moved back to Argyll and returned to roots-based playing. As well as solo, he plays in a harmony blues/folk duo Miller*Crossan.

Robin says "I recorded and filmed two videos for inclusion. 'High Emotion', Bert's song from his *From the Outside* album and my own tune 'The Beehive Mandalas'. I loved this Bert song when I first heard it on the Acoustic Routes documentary and learned how to play it shortly afterwards. It is one of the many lesser-known gems from Bert's catalogue. Bert's music is like 'going home' for me and his influence is in nearly everything I write and play... My instrumental tune uses an unconventional tuning and bears the influence of Bert's Celtic ornaments."

Robin then brough the Pilgrim back to Glasgow and passed it on to Jamie Flett (above, left)

Jamie Flett writes and sing songs, plays live, and makes recordings. Jamie has supported Joan Armatrading, Malcolm Middleton and more recently the Scottish Album of the Year Award winner Kathryn Joseph. He has set up the micro label Rain Goose Recordings to release some of the auditory explorations of friends and collaborators.

Jamie chose 'Poison' "because the groove instantly jumped out at me and I needed to find something that would work in my own flatpicking style. I wanted to keep Bert's groove and attack. I hope I'll be able to set it apart a little from the beautiful Martyn-esque version Rory Butler has already contributed. The lyrical content seems to contain fear and anger about issues that we still seem to be grappling with, so the song seemed evergreen. That prompted me to try my own song



'Season of Storm' on the TransAcoustic, since I think it may have a bloodline from 'Poison' thematically but also from Bert more generally in its sound and the detail of its picking.

"I was drawn in by the depth of Bert's acoustic guitar playing and his sometimes unusual grooves and voicings. I feel I've probably absorbed some of those rhythms and timbres from him though I'm not going to pretend I ever learned to play like him! I've since enjoyed discovering albums like Avocet, watching footage of Bert and John Renbourn as well as Pentangle playing together on YouTube and I did finally manage to see Bert playing live at the Glasgow Barrowlands with Bernard

Butler during the Celtic Connections festival.

Jamie puts the last signature on the Pilgrim TransAcoustic, before, Sam Grassie, (a Bert Jansch Foundation featured artist) took a trip up to Scotland to fetch it home again.