Pack Up Your Troubles

Narrated by Gareth Malone

Video transcript

Pack Up Your Troubles is the song at the heart of the launch of the BBC's World War One Centenary.

Written by two Welsh brothers in the early days of the war, the words and tune are still familiar to us a century later, yet back then even its writers did not expect it to catch on.

The song would have originally been performed in music halls like this one. During the war music hall was thrived on the home front as people would head out each night for an evening of entertainment and song.

These were the days before radio and gramophones were expensive so people would have to turn to their on talents to share music.

The piece of kit that made the song accessible was this, the piano. The 60 years leading up to 1914 were a golden era for piano production. So these would have been in every pub, in every house because you could hire them for a few shillings a week.

Whereas today we download songs or buy CDs in those days sheet music was the most popular way of getting hold of a song.

So the sight and sound of people gathered around a piano for a sing-song would have been very familiar.

This is an original copy of the music sheet of the song and these sold in their thousands. Pack Up Your Troubles was a huge success.

[Gareth plays the piano and sings]

Already popular on the home favourite on the home front it became a firm favourite with soldiers away on the western front, and its spread didn't stop there. Before the end of the war the song went global. It had been released on record in the UK and the United States and even featured in a successful Broadway musical.

But what was it that made this song popular? How did Pack Up Your Troubles become the viral hit of World War One?