

Chairs To Mend

Words & Music:
Traditional English

Chairs to mend, old chairs to mend?
*Mackerel, fresh mackerel!
Any old rags? Any old rags?

* subsequent parts enter here

I have this bit of score from an old page of a songbook (title page of the book is long lost. Please let me know if you have the author so I can cite it correctly.)



Obviously, the words and score are not to scale. "Chairs to mend..." goes with the first two measures. "Mackerel..." goes with the middle two measures and "Any old rags..." goes with the final two measures.

This round clearly comes from:

"Three Oxford Cries" made into a round by W. Hayes; published in 1786:

Chairs to mend, old chairs to mend,
Rush of cane bottom'd old chairs to mend,
Old chairs to mend.
New mackerel, new mackerel.
New mackerel, new mackerel.
Old rags, any old rags,
Take money for your old rags,
Any hare skins or rabbit skins.

These would have been the cries made by a chair-mender, fishmonger, ragpicker & skinner in turn as they plied their trades daily on the streets of Oxford in the 1700s & 1800s. The closest modern equivalent is what happens when you hear the bells of the ice cream truck in summer.