

Frank Kidson's 'Collector' articles in *The Choir*

Between February 1913 and August 1922 an occasional series of articles by the musical antiquarian, Frank Kidson appeared in the monthly journal *The Choir*.

In devoting his life to the study of old English music Kidson had amassed a private library which was probably unrivalled in its particular specialisations. This library provided the basis for both further research and Kidson's own authoritative writings. Kidson adopted the guise of the 'Collector' for this lighthearted series of twenty-two articles. Fellow folk-song enthusiast Annie Gilchrist, a subscriber to *The Choir* who had been Kidson's close friend for many years, evidently considered Kidson and his literary creation to be one and the same person. 'Pray don't think 'The Collector' is me! He is purely fiction, mixed with fact' Kidson tried to persuade her when all but the final article of the series had been published.

It cannot be denied that the Collector possessed characteristics that Kidson did not. The Collector, for instance, habitually drank whisky and smoked a pipe. The abstemious Kidson had never indulged in either activity. Yet the Collector was allowed to share other attributes and experiences. Amongst other things the articles reveal that, in common with Kidson, the Collector kept a cat and a fiddle; that both Kidson and the collector knew the singer Mary Wakefield and had met the composer Samuel Coleridge Taylor; and that both men had once bought the entire stock of a ballad seller encountered by chance outside Hull Parish Church. Moreover, in old age both Kidson and the Collector would fret over the likely fate of their collection when its owner was no longer alive to care for it.

The Collector's primary function, however, was to give voice to Kidson's own views on music in particular and 'art' in general. To this end no fewer than fifteen of the articles feature discussions between the Collector and the Collector's great friend the Musician. Through his unquestioning advocacy of modern music and modern values, on each occasion the Musician provides the opportunity for the Collector to champion the timeless virtues of amateur endeavour instead.

In keeping with his populist outlook, and only hinting at the level of knowledge which underpinned them, Kidson's 'Collector' articles still retain extraordinary vitality and relevance almost a century after their publication.

Dr John Francmanis, Harrogate, Jan 2006