

Lucy Broadwood's Diaries

The Early Years¹

by Lewis Jones

There is good news for folk song fans. The 40 or so volumes of Lucy Broadwood's diaries, covering the years from 1884 to 1929, are now available for study in the Surrey History Centre (formerly the Surrey County Record Office).

Lucy Etheldred Broadwood (1858-1929) was wont to refer to herself as "LEB." She was probably the most important scholar of the first folk song revival. In 1898 she was one of the founder members of the Folk Song Society, of which she later became secretary, journal editor and, in the 1920s, president. She was solely or jointly responsible for the publication of Sussex Songs (1890), English County Songs (1893), and English Traditional Songs and Carols (1908). In addition, in the words of one of her obituarists, "scarcely a number of the Journal (of the Folk Song Society) has appeared without some valuable contribution from her hand, and many have been almost entirely her own from beginning to end."²

This brief survey of LEB's diaries covers the period from her first entry, for 24 October 1882 when she was 24 years of age, up until 22 September 1893, when she returned from her one and only stay with the Rev. Sabine Baring Gould in Devon. The entries for these years contain a wealth of fascinating detail. Here you can read, among many other things: that, on 18 June 1888, LEB had her teeth "vigorously stopped" by the dentist; that, on 6 March 1890, she took a Turkish bath; and that, on 8 June 1892, she shared a 3rd class railway carriage in Scotland with "a baby & 2 Scotch women who ate peppermints all night."³ As a discerning reader of the ED&S, however, you may be particularly interested in LEB's references to folk song and... to sex.

With regard to the latter, so far the most vigorous and meticulous investigations by your prurient researcher have failed to dig out anything of tabloid interest. On 11 July 1883 our diarist "received ...a hoaxing letter (handwriting completely unknown) purporting to come from a tailor in Regent St. offering to make me a very masculine sporting costume!" On 24 December 1891 there was actual cross-dressing when LEB "disguised as Father Christmas." And what was she doing sending a valentine to Marion Birch Reynardson on 12 February 1883?⁴ As for male admirers, on 6 July 1884, at the family home at Lyne, a young man "performed perilous feats of climbing on the beech tree, and carved my name for me high up on the main trunk." On 22 September 1886 a nosegay arrived from a "Mr. O.F." On 22 July 1888 a gentleman gave a Delft china house, and on 8

December 1892 a Colonel Palmer sent “a lovely casket of bonbons & eaudcologne (sic).” Colonel Palmer called on 16 December 1892, but was presumably sent packing since he is heard of no more. We might have learnt more about LEB’s amatory entanglements from her correspondence. Unfortunately, however, on 27 April 1890 she “burnt heaps of old letters –not without a few melancholy pangs.”

So, is there no evidence then, not even of mere sexual innuendo? Well, is this riddle (to which no solution is given) typical of what respectable young ladies were laughing at in late Victorian Britain? “Laura had a big one, Emily had a small one, but lost it when she married Mr. Brown. Poor Mrs. O’Callahan had two close together... Girls have it once, boys never. Lilian had a big one in front, Ethel a small one behind.”⁵

Later, the Yorkshireman Frank Kidson was to become one of LEB’s closest collaborators. The first reference to him in the diaries is for 30 June 1891, when LEB describes his Traditional Tunes (1890) as “very interesting.” On 16 and 18 January 1892 there was an exchange of letters, and this was to start a correspondence which continued for many years.⁶ On 24 February 1893 Kidson sent LEB a “handsome bound edition of his Traditional Tunes annotated and interleaved” and returned some books which she had lent to him. On 10 April 1893 LEB, who was staying with Lady Dartmouth at Wordsome Hall near Huddersfield, went with two lady companions “to Leeds, to see Mr. Frank Kidson, who introduced his niece, showed us his old songbook library, etc., and old china, and gave us tea.” On 10 May 1893, LEB sent Kidson 19 songs collected from Henry Burstow in Sussex.

The Devonshire collector the Rev. Sabine Baring Gould is best known as the main editor of Songs of the West, published in 4 volumes during the course of the 1890s. Letters in the Broadwood Collection lodged in the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library indicate that LEB soon became critical of Baring Gould, and of what she considered to be his rather cavalier methods of collecting and editing folk songs. In the diaries the first mention of the Devonshire squarson is for 2 July 1888: “Read Richard Cable, clever book by Baring Gould.” Then, the next day, “finished Richard Cable (very good).” On 14 December 1889 LEB wrote to Baring Gould, and on 17 December she received a reply. This began a correspondence⁷ which culminated in a visit by LEB to Lew Trenchard. This lasted, with intermissions for other trips around Devon, from 4 to 22 September 1893. During her stay LEB “looked through many volumes of Mr. Baring Gould’s MS traditional songs, broadsides, etc., and had long talks with him.” She also “went... with Mr. B. Gould to Milton Abbott ...to hear Mrs. Can at (the) Rectory, and to Mrs. Jeffrey, an old singing woman” who “sang us ‘Cold Blows the Wind,’ etc.” Later, at Lifton, LEB “noted down 3 songs from Mrs. Fletcher, farmer’s wife.” On 20 September, on a journey to Lew Trenchard from Ashbury, Baring Gould and his guest went past “a ‘white witch’s’ house,

roofless, doorless, windowless, and with the upper floor entirely fallen in. The ‘white witch’ lives under her umbrella, and has no furniture but 3 Bibles which she knows by heart. She is a Celt.”

The first reference in the diaries to the collecting and editing of folk song is for 27 October 1885 when LEB “heard from Mr. Bray with very many songs.” Thereafter, there are fairly frequent details, and it is possible to reconstruct much of the process by which LEB and her coadjutors prepared Sussex Songs and English County Songs (ECS) for publication. As a brief case study, let us take “Twankydllo,” the entry in ECS for the county of Sussex. On 10 May 1891 LEB “heard from ...S. Baring Gould with 2 versions of ‘Twankydllo.’” One of these was published by D’Urfey in the eighteenth century, and the other came from Devonshire. The ECS version, however, had been sent by S. Willett four days earlier, on 6 May, together with 2 other songs. On 7 May, LEB “paid Mr. S. Willett of Cuckfield for 3 songs.” He had already provided some songs on 1 May 1891 (when LEB records that he was a baker), and 2 more arrived on 17 October. On 1 July 1891 LEB sent Willett “27 shillings for 27 songs.” ‘Twankydllo’ was harmonized by LEB on 3 and 4 September 1891 and sent to her co-editor, JA Fuller Maitland, on the 5th. You can find it on pages 138-9 of ECS. The guitar chords in my setting were added by Margaret Crosland, and are based upon LEB’s harmonisation.⁸ LEB explains in her notes that “bagpipes” is a corruption of “blowpipes” or bellows.

¹ This article was first published in English Dance & Song in September 2000.

² Ford, Walter. December 1929. Obituary: Lucy Etheldred Broadwood. Journal of the Folk Song Society 33: 168-9. Information in this paragraph is taken from: Jones, Lewis W. Winter 1995. Lucy Etheldred Broadwood: Poet and Song Writer. English Dance and Song 57 (4): 2-3.

³ All words are quoted as they appear in the diaries, but I have spelt out abbreviations and altered punctuation as appropriate.

⁴ Perhaps attempting to foment a little sexual *frisson* between Marion and her husband Herbert. The Birch Reynardsons were constant companions of LEB, and Herbert wrote the piano accompaniments for Sussex Songs.

⁵ 13 February 1883. For the answer, try “the letter ‘L.’”

⁶ See, for example, 27 February 1892, 3 August 1892 and 20 September 1892.

⁷ See, for example, 19 and 31 December 1889, 25 April 1890 and 16 May 1890.

⁸ The sheet music is in .pdf (portable document file) format, and can be opened, read and printed off with Adobe’s Acrobat Reader, available free from <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>. The .mid (MIDI) file is intended to support musical sight reading. You should be able to open it, and play the tune, with any of the standard media players.