



Traditional Song Forum

Traditional Song Forum Meeting, 20th April 2013

Held at the Scottish Storytelling Centre, Edinburgh



The meeting was held in the theatre at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh and was attended by more than 50 TSF members and guests over the course of the day. The meeting received support from The University of Edinburgh, TRACS (Traditional Arts and Culture, Scotland) and the Traditional Music Forum.

TSF Members and guests were welcomed by Chris Wright who had led the organisation of the meeting and who outlined the programme for the day. He then handed over to the Chair for the day, Ian Russell, who added his own welcome, before opening the session with a brief look at TSF business.

TSF Business

Future meetings – The next meeting of the TSF is currently under discussion. As ever, we welcome suggestions for places where we might meet or invitations from groups willing to host a meeting.

TSF Finances –In a brief appearance at the meeting, Doc Rowe confirmed that, before the costs for the Edinburgh arrangements were taken into account, the Forum had a total of £1,154 in the bank.

Networking Session

As is the practice at all TSF meetings we then took the opportunity to go round the room and hear from those attending about their interest in traditional songs and any work that they had been doing that might be of interest to those present.

Rena Gertz has lived in Scotland for 18 years and sings traditional Gaelic songs though she has recently become interested in the songs and ballads of her native Germany. She is on the board of Margaret Bennett's charitable trust, Grace Notes Scotland, which supports and promotes traditional music in Scotland. They have just received funding for a project, 'The End of the Shift' which will involve collecting stories, songs and oral history from the miners and weavers of Perthshire and Fife.

Frieda Morrison is artist in residence, Scots dance and Song with a focus on the Greig-Duncan collection at the School of Celtic and Scottish Studies, trying to highlight the way in which people are using language, by showing students some of the films she has made over the last twenty years. She has also been helping with a programme in primary schools, working with a drama teacher to dramatise a song from Greig-Duncan in a way that demonstrated the use of the language. They also got the students involved in making a film to make it come alive in a C20th context – including the award of Oscars at a ceremony that showed the film to the whole village. An article about the project has appeared in the *Times Educational Supplement*.

Aileen Carr is a singer with a lifelong interest in traditional song and a background in special needs education.

Maggie Smith is based on the Isle of Lewis and is a singer, working with the *Tobar an Dualchais* (Kist o Riches) archive. She is involved in community arts projects using Gaelic language song and poetry.

Kathy Hobkirk is another singer working with Scottish traditional songs and was involved in the afternoon presentation *Reiving and Bereaving*

Joe Rae comes from Ayrshire and is an avid reader of Sir Walter Scott. Ian Russell added that Joe is a magnificent singer with some great songs and well worth having a chat with.

Paul Davenport (and his wife, Liz) have just published a book, *Down Yorkshire Lanes* on the folk song collection made in 1907 by Reginald Gatty and Ralph Vaughan Williams in the Rotherham area – the result of ten years work. Their organisation is Hallamshire traditions (www.hallamtrads.co.uk) and they support a number of activities in the Sheffield area, more of which can be seen on their website.

Liz Davenport added that they both grew up singing and are working on their fourth CD.

Sinead Leach is from Edinburgh but is a student at St Andrews University where she is involved in the Traditional Music Society where they have regular sessions

Amy Leach is a singer of who is studying at Newcastle University on the Traditional Music course. She is involved in the Feis Rois Trail, taking traditional Scottish songs to a wide range of venues. She was recently a guest at the Innishowen Festival.

Edith Lewis was Secretary of the Keith Festival of the Traditional Music and Song Association (TMSA) for many years and maintains a strong interest in traditional song.

Clare Button is currently living in Edinburgh and is involved in the local branch of the TMSA as well as a number of local singing sessions. She is a singer and loves traditional music, particularly that in Gaelic.

Tracy Boyle, is studying for an MA at the Elphinstone Institute where her dissertation is going to be about singing weekends – particularly that held at Cullerlie. Likes to sing songs with strong women – and is discovering ballads. She has used *Tobar an Dualchais* and has been particularly interested to discover some of the spoken records about song competitions.

[There was a brief discussion arising from this about Tobar an Dualchais and some of the practical limitations encountered in its development and construction. Chris Wright reported that the use of key words is still being worked on, which makes searching for some topics such as 'competitions' difficult as the search is not yet as refined as it could be. There is also the problem of getting permissions from singers and their relatives to include material, which means that the site is only about 50% complete at the moment. Out of 12,000 hours of material that could be included 6,000 hours have been catalogued and about 3,000 hours are online at present. They are running with a skeleton staff, since funding ran out two years ago, but they still have some support from the Scottish Government. In answer to another question it was explained that it has not been possible to provide translations into English for all of the material. Again, this is something that might be possible in the future.]

Virginia Blankenhorn has had a lifelong interest in Traditional Irish and Scottish songs in Gaelic and prefers singing in those languages. She got a degree in Celtic at Harvard and then a PhD at Edinburgh University and worked for three years in Ireland on Traditional Irish song in Connemara. She is currently doing research into Gaelic song at the School of Scottish Studies.

Lena Shephard came across ballads at school but not as something sung – it was as a punishment for bad behaviour. Luckily she found the Folk Song Club at University discovered that ballads could be sung. She met (and married) Peter Shephard and has helped him with his work on song collecting and publishing.

Hannah Shephard is not a singer but, as Peter and Lena's daughter, spent her childhood surrounded by traditional music. Now works with refugees and their families

Peter Shephard was a founder member of the St Andrews Folk Club back in the 1960s. He has been collecting songs since the 1960s in Gloucestershire as well as Scotland. He has a large collection of recordings of traditional singers and started Springhyme Records in the 1970s to make some of them available. He is currently involved with the East of Scotland Song Group, founded with Arthur Watson and Tom Spiers. He has been running the Fife Sing Traditional Song Festival for 10 years. They had been involved in the Auchtermuchty Festival but this involvement has now ceased and the traditional element of that festival will now be transferred to a new event in Falkland in June. He is revisiting the work he did in the 1970s recording the Border fiddler, Tom Hughes from Jedburgh, who was a major carrier of traditional **styles of fiddling**.

Sheila Gammon enjoyed singing when she was at school, discovered folk clubs and married Vic – providing him with the support he needs for his work with folk song. Doesn't sing but joins in the choruses.

Vic Gammon is still loosely associated with Newcastle University and is carrying out research on folk songs as well as performing them and writing about them. At present he is putting together a presentation at an early modern conference in June on Barbara Allen (for which he may ask TSF members for their responses to the song) and has found it fascinating

to delve into C19th women's magazines, finding items about the song. He is also preparing a talk on Cecil Sharp's skill as a transcriber – comparing (few) transcriptions of the recordings he made with his notation. This work will be reported at the EFDSS Conference in October. His long term study on street singers is continuing and plans to review and revise his southern English material. He is discussing the possibility of working with Dave Harker on the songs of Ned Corven. Working on an HRC project with Christopher Marsh on a book (and recording) of the top 100 songs of the C17th. He is particularly interested in why some of these songs have lasted so well. Finally he reported that had been filming with TV historian Lucy Worsley about the background to 'Murder in the Red Barn'.

Peter Wood is also from the North-east and has been working on a chapter on Newcastle Chapbooks for the forthcoming book on broadsides. Many of the chapbooks that he studied came from an enormous collection made by Robert White in the C19th, which also included a number of Scottish chapbooks. He has also been cataloguing the broadside collections of Cecil Sharp and Ralph Vaughan Williams for the Full English Project - a kind of useful slave labour. He is currently interested in Napoleonic songs, which is turning out to be fascinating. He now has 160 separate broadsides of songs on Napoleon. The 1803 invasion scare prompted a large outpouring of propaganda ballads. Ian Russell pointed out that there are ballads about Napoleon throughout Europe. Peter will be giving a talk at Whitby called 'The Napoleonic Ballads: Just how Irish are they?'

Alex Patience was born and brought up in Fraserborough and is a Doric speaker, interested in the culture of the emigrant as a theatre maker and story teller. She has more Gaelic songs than Doric at present. Records Gaelic speakers and has produced translations of material which is in the School of Scottish Studies archive. A lot of her work in the far north is about combining song and story, but there were relatively few songs collected there.

Matthew Edwards has only been singing for about ten years but since he did he has found so much more feedback from other singers, as well as the insight gained by singing a song, rather than just seeing it on the page. The internet has made it possible to find out much more about the people who sang the songs. One of his discoveries has been that Sister Emma, who gave Sharp her version of 'Long Lankin' was a member of the Rankin family from Northumberland. Working with Martin Graebe it has also been established that her sister, Lady Lethbridge, gave several songs to Baring-Gould. Their common source was their grandmother and that there was some overlap between the two women's repertoires. He intends to write more about this story.

Bob Askew, from Hampshire, is interested in Hampshire songs and particularly those collected by George Gardiner. He had led a walk through Edinburgh, his home town, the previous day. Gardiner maintained his interest (and presence) in Scotland throughout his life. Bob has also instituted a monthly session at Cecil Sharp House in London – 'Ballad Chat – where enthusiasts gather to discuss ballads.

Fred McCormick is from the Wirral and is a singer-songwriter with an interest in English and Irish song traditions, particularly political songs. His is a former editor of *Musical Traditions* magazine and has lectured on Irish music and early American Country music. He has also produced a couple of records for Topic.

Derek Schofield edits English Dance and Song. One of the features is the 'Singer, Song and Source' series which looks in depth at particular songs. He reported that the 'Full English' project will launch on 20th June, which will include the manuscript collections of all the

major English collectors on a new website. There will be a number of educational projects associated with the project as well as one day courses led by Steve Roud at venues around England.

Steve Byrne is originally from Arbroath on the East coast but has lived in Edinburgh for nearly 20 years. He has recently been working in his home town on a project based on the material in *Tobar an Dualchais* which he would be talking about later. He is a member of the team working on the 'Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border Project' which is being run jointly with Gutenberg University, Mainz aimed at producing a critical edition of Scott's book, working with modern singers to get their views on the usefulness of the book as a resource for singers. He also reported that work with the Hamish Henderson Archive trust has secured an agreement that the archive will be purchased by the University Library and will be available in the next academic year. He is curating some Bothy songs events for Tradfest. He reported that Jarndyce booksellers are offering a large number of items from Leslie Shepherd's collection for sale. Derek Schofield reported that among them are the ballads that had belonged to Harry Cox, which Steve Roud has purchased.

Lewis Hurst is a student at the School of Scottish Studies. He has had a long-term interest in traditional culture in general. His undergraduate dissertation was on traditional narrative, but it included some material on traditional music and ballads, Came along because a number of his tutors and lecturers were presenting in the afternoon and because it all looked interesting.

Geordie Macintyre talked about a conversation with Hamish Henderson about the poor quality of some of the material in Greig's Folk songs of the Northeast and he said that there were songs in there which no-one sang. The book had no music, which did not make it easy for them to be sung. As the years have passed he has recognised that the relationship between what is in print and what is actually sung. Many books published recently have focused on the singers background much more than on the song itself, its importance to the singer, and to the mechanics of creativity. He came back to the example of Barbara Allen and its enduring popularity – why is it so. Young singers should be looking at texts and asking why they were important to the singer. A song only comes alive when it is sung.

Alison McMorland expressed her delight at being among people who love the songs, and that the afternoon would celebrate the achievements of the School of Scottish Studies. Hamish Henderson had been a great friend and a great encouragement and the old singers and their songs still interest her.

Doc Rowe said that it was, for him, a bit like coming home because he spent a lot of time at the School of Scottish Studies 20 years ago with Hamish and with Margaret Bennett, filming and also recording and that he has a lot of film of Scottish singers which ought to come back to the archive. For the last two years he has been sorting out his archive. Sadly he is finding that material that he purchased as photocopies can now be obtained at the press of a key on the computer and that a lot of expensive paper is heading to the dump. He will shortly be off to record the Padstow custom for the 50th time – an amazing landmark. The recording of his life story for the National Sound Archive continues. So far they have recorded 28 hours and have got him up to 1964.

Martin Graebe reported on two projects, the first being on Marianne Mason, the first woman to collect folk songs in England. This work will be covered by an article in next years Folk Music Journal and, more briefly, at the EFDSS Conference in October. The other project

has been in association with the American Wind Band specialist, Prof Bob Garofalo, looking at the songs that Vaughan Williams used in his 'English Folk Song Suite' for a book that has now been published. These songs came from the collections of Cecil Sharp and Lucy Broadwood and Martin helped with research into the background of the songs as well as, with Shan Graebe, making recordings of modern performances of the songs for a CD that goes with the book. He is now re-focusing on Baring-Gould and is getting on with writing the long-promised book about him and his song collection.

Shan Graebe reported that she has now finished the transcriptions of the songs in Baring-Gould's Personal Copy manuscript and it is planned that these will, eventually, go online alongside the images of the manuscript on the 'Full English' website.

The morning session concluded with the announcement by Chris Wright that Sheila Douglas had, sadly, passed away the previous day. He played a recording of her song 'The Men of the North' from the *Tobar an Dualchais* collection as a memorial to her.

Forum Focus Session

Local Voices : Local Tradition in the Global Age – Steve Byrne and Chris Wright

Steve Byrne and Chris Wright talked about their project working with young people, Local Voices. The project is a logical development from the *Tobar an Dualchais* project which they had been engaged in developing. The project enables visitors to identify songs and other material from their own area.

Steve Byrne started with the example of 'Sweet Willie and Fair Annie', which had been collected as early as 1800 by Robert Jamieson in Arbroath. They played a recording by William Montgomerie of Jessie Cargill who came from Auchmithie, a short distance from Arbroath, singing the ballad 150 years later. This is Steve's own home area and he was intrigued by what could be found around Arbroath. In fact there are about 50 people from the area who have items in the archive. This led to the question of how they could take those songs back to the locality. His attention was drawn to the book by Sven Lundquist, 'Gräv där du stå' – 'dig where you stand' in which the author, targeting people who wanted to research the history of an organisation, asserted that the real experts were not the outsiders, but the people who had lived and worked in the place. He believed that this could be applied to the study of folklore in a locality (for more on this see www.digwhereyoustand.org). This then translates, when working with schools, to place-based education – the children relate to places and ideas which they recognise, and learn songs that mean something. The pilot project in Arbroath has had some good feedback and publicity.

Steve, meanwhile, has been working in Dundee with 12 classes, reaching about 300 students. They used recordings as a basis for wider exploration, connecting them to other school projects they were working on, such as the Jute industry. Start by talking about their own favourite bands and songs and what they mean as a way to get them thinking about the meaning of traditional songs. One way of getting them to connect to the idea of tradition by thinking about heirlooms, family recipes etc as well as songs – emphasising the

importance of family. Steve used songs from his own granny as an example with the children.

Knowledge of the Scots language is not common and the children couldn't recognise what language the phrase 'Kist o' Riches' was, whereas they knew that '*Tobar an Dualchais*' was Gaelic, even if they didn't know what it meant. You can read more about Steve's work (and see a picture of his granny) at <http://thekist.blogspot.co.uk/>

Steve and Chris have now set up a community interest company, 'Local Voices', to carry the work forward. You can read about the aims of the organisation at <http://localvoices2013.wordpress.com/about/>

Songs and Sustainability: Exploring a Cultural-Ecological Approach in a Scottish Context - Mairi McFadyen

Mairi's background is in ethnology, studying the persistence, adaption and function of tradition in complex societies, studying the way in which tradition is used to express the values of society in its arts, including song and stories. She is currently researching the connections between ethnology and ecology at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities, Edinburgh, looking at the role of story in the integration of knowledge in a Scottish context. In particular she is studying the work of Patrick Geddes in this connection; looking at his ideas on cultural sustainability, in which the idea of place is central. She is studying the role that song plays its value in maintaining diversity in a modern global context. She does not consider herself to be a ballad scholar in the traditional sense, preferring to explore the emotional richness of the ballad experience, rather than to conduct etymological autopsies.

The discussion about songs and sustainability starts with Alan Lomax's appeal for cultural equity in 1972, when he talked of the dangers of mass-produced 'Global' songs driving traditional song off the airwaves. It is now recognised by UNESCO that intangible cultural heritage is indispensable and needs its support. It is now recognised that the diversity of life comprises both biological and cultural diversity. Culture cannot be treated as a commodity. Arts funding is often tied up with questions of value, measured in terms of economic growth and traditional culture becomes a commodity or an asset with staged authenticity.

She went on to explain her ideas about what ecology is and the interconnections that are important to human life. Her vision goes beyond the scientist's view of ecology, considering what it means to be alive, and takes art, literature and culture into account. It is like untangling a ball of wool. You pull on one loop and find it is connected to all the rest. A cultural ecological approach forces consideration of all levels: global and local, past, present and future.

Traditional song is informed by its place and the community in which it exists and represents a human investment by the community over a period of time. She went on to talk about Patrick Geddes and his concepts of sympathy, synthesis, and synergy, to which the idea of cultural sustainability is central.

A song is nothing until it is performed, and a great singer will challenge the listener to feel the emotions conveyed by the performance of that song. It is a multisensual encounter. The

act of singing connects us to our environment, bringing us into contact with other places and beings in time and space, creating a continuity between the world which the song depicts and that in which the performer and listener live. We are moved by song – to another place in our imagination. And that is a shared experience, bringing people to the same place.

Place-based traditional song, like other aspects of traditional culture, forms a root for the localism that flows into a global tradition. Traditional culture has the power to create a sense of responsibility to the wider environment, counteracting the negative aspects of globalisation. Real people in their place can bring their own version of who we are to a global world. Song has a restorative effect in the modern world and can make the ordinary seem extraordinary.

Reiving and Bereaving – Lucy MacRae and Kaye McAlpine

Lucy and Kaye from the Department of Celtic & Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh were joined by singers Kathy Hobkirk and Henry Douglas, who provided some illustrations for their presentation about the border ballads and the history behind them, with a particular focus on Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. Their event, 'Reiving and Bereaving' performance was created at the suggestion of Emily Lyle for the Innerleithen Music Festival and has now been performed at number of venues, including the Walter Scott Club.

The performance includes ten ballads and, as well as performing them, they say something of their history and relate some anecdotes connected with them. One of the aims is to present the ballads in an accessible and engaging way while not dumbing them down. They placed some emphasis on the musical aspects of ballads as there are some older people who have only encountered ballads in print and learned them at school as recitations.

The ballads came from a frontier culture with a distinct identity in which a number of men were celebrated – more for their notoriety than for their humanity. Our knowledge of the historical background has increased considerably since Scott's time as more documents have been discovered. They also described the way in which Scott was supported by a number of other people who guide him towards the ballads and their background. They are developing a new programme for the Innerleithen festival, *Bonnie than Moonlight and Cauld as the Clay*, based on supernatural ballads. They have also carried out a pilot project in the primary school in Innerleithen. They are also working on the 'Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border Project', previously mentioned by Steve Byrne. This is a joint project between the Universities of Edinburgh and Mainz, led by Sigrid Rieuwerts. Scott actually translated German ballads before he started work on the Border ballads.

The ballads sung as examples were 'The lament of the Border Widow' (derived from 'The Famous Flower of Serving Men') by Kathy Hobkirk while Henry Douglas recited 'The Fray of Suport', a dramatic ballad describing a border raid in some detail.

Answering a question from Vic Gammon about the authenticity of Scott's collection, Kaye and Lucy said that Scott (trained as a lawyer) was very careful with his words. He later had

some regrets about his editorial policy, and that he felt he may have over-polished the ballads.

Working on Song in the School of Scottish Studies (1970- 2013) – Emily Lyle

Emily Lyle talked about her remarkable career working with traditional song, starting with the time she spent at the School of Scottish Studies in the 1970s. She had realised that the study of ballads was very much an open field, and that there were a lot of possibilities for study. Her studies of ballad manuscripts led her to take an interest in Child's work and she took advantage of a fellowship to work at Harvard for a year. This led to an article comparing the manuscripts he had used with what was available in Scotland. People had been using the copies at Harvard, not realising that the originals were still safely kept in Edinburgh.

She also had the opportunity to go to Australia at short notice so she went there to investigate and record Scottish traditions. She heard about the project to publish the Greig-Duncan collection and she was brought in to help Pat Shaw – initially with the shorthand notes by James Duncan. They discovered, after a while, that Duncan's notebooks included some shorthand transcriptions of material sent in as longhand Mss – a minor hiccup. She was appointed as an associate editor, when Pat Shaw died she was asked to take over the editorship. She is not a musician so it was decided that they would reproduce the music from Greig and Duncan's originals. There was a lot of enthusiasm for the publication and it occupied her time well for several years.

She was keen that the collection of ballads from the Harris sisters from the mid C19th should be published. Child had got a bit mixed up about the history of the collection. The Amelia and Jane Harris had sent their songs in manuscript to William Aytoun who died before he could do anything with it. The manuscript was lost but the two sisters wrote out another version for Child. Then, in the 1940s, the original manuscript turned up and there was the opportunity to look at the two side by side and publish it as a parallel text.

She has never had a fully established academic post, though she has worked in the same room at 27 George Square under different auspices – currently the Scott project mentioned earlier. This is now in its final year and they are hoping to publish 3 volumes, the third of which will be devoted to answering many of the questions that have arisen about the book.

Margaret Bennett: A Life in Song – Margaret Bennett and Ian Russell

Ian Russell talked with Margaret Bennett about her life – starting at the very beginning when we discovered that she was born in Glasgow, the youngest of four sisters. She grew up on Skye. Her mother was a fluent Gaelic speaker and her father spoke Scots, but her parents insisted on the children being taught in English. She had polio as a child and she thinks that the long period that she spent immobile gave her enhanced listening skills.

Her mother sang in a Gaelic choir and the house was full of music. Song was all around her, and they would frequently sing as a family in the evening. Eleven of her great-grandfather's

songs were recorded by Helen Kennedy Fraser. Her mother was recorded for the School of Scottish Studies. She talked about the unique qualities of Gaelic psalm singing, which she grew up with. Her mother taught her that she should sing women's songs. Her father was a medal winning piper, but he also sang – particularly the songs of John McCormack. Her paternal grandmother was source of impolite ditties – of which she gave us a sample – though she sang much else as well.

When she went into teacher training in Glasgow she started to sing in folk clubs. Her father was working in Newfoundland and, while visiting him, she discovered that there was a degree course in folklore at St John's University. She learned more about Scottish songs than she had in Scotland, largely because of her teacher, Herbert Halpert. From there she returned for a field trip to record Scottish singers, including Belle Stewart among many others. She also recorded Scottish songs in Newfoundland. In the early 80s she worked with Kenneth Goldstein in Newfoundland, helping him to record singers in Gaelic, English and French. One of those singers was Jerome Downey, a woodsman who had a remarkable repertoire of songs from Irish music hall songs to local political songs. Margaret has now published a book about him and his songs.

It was a fascinating interview, with many personal anecdotes that revealed much about Margaret herself, but which gave us a valuable insight into life in Skye in years past and into her life in folk song – though we only got about half-way through her life.

Supporting Programme



On the Friday afternoon Bob Askew led a walk round sites in Edinburgh associated with George Gardiner, starting with a visit to his grave in Warriston Road Cemetery. Finding this was quite an achievement on Bob's part, as it was in a remote and neglected part of this large cemetery and was invisible until he pulled away the ivy. We also visited Gardiner's old homes and school, as well as Edinburgh Academy where he taught for many years.

On Friday evening a number of members went along to the 'World's Room Traditional Singing Club and joined in with some fine singing.

After the meeting on Saturday there was a concert featuring Margaret Bennett, Scott Gardiner and Emily Lyle.

On Sunday the proceedings were brought to a close with another excellent walk organised by Tracy Boyle, starting with the quotations on the outside of the Scottish Parliament and ending in Greyfriars Churchyard, with a brief interruption for a rain shower which was timed perfectly for a cup of coffee. In the churchyard Chris Wright showed us the precise spot where he believes that Andrew Lammie is buried – nicely rounding off our visit to Edinburgh

with a reminder of our visit to Aberdeen in 2011, where we saw the beginning of the story of Tifty's Annie and her trumpeter.



Thanks:

We would like to thank all the speakers and singers for their contributions to the meeting. Particular thanks are due to Chris Wright and Steve Byrne but there were many others who made the day possible. We are also extremely grateful to those who gave practical and financial support to the event: TRACS, the Traditional Music Forum and the University of Edinburgh. Thank you all!

Martin Graebe

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