

## Traditional Song Forum Meeting, 19<sup>th</sup> February 2009 held at Exeter

### Meeting Report

Chair: Martin Graebe

This was our first meeting in the South-West and it was well attended (over thirty people in the afternoon) and enjoyable, with some interesting presentations from Devon and the neighbouring counties.

#### *Member's Activities*

After an introduction by our hosts, Marilyn Tucker and Paul Wilson of Wren Trust, the meeting started with our usual review of recent activity by those present.

**Andy Rouse** was visiting from Hungary, though he had been a student at Exeter and knew the cities pubs well. He has now been teaching there for 30 years. He was passing through on his way to a conference in Corunna where he was planning to sing about the burial of Sir John Moore. He reminded us that Pécs, where he teaches, will be the cultural capital of Europe in 2010 and looks forward to welcoming TSF members to celebrate.

**Marilyn Tucker** is the Chief Executive of Wren Music and also sits on the Folk Roots and Traditional Music Section of the Musicians Union. She is also on the steering group for the Folk and World Music Initiative started recently in the South-West Region. She visited Andy in Pécs as part of a Devon Cultural contingent last year. She reported that Wren have just heard from the Heritage Lottery Fund that they have been awarded a significant sum to digitise the Baring-Gould folk song manuscripts and get them onto the Web and, as part of the same project, to digitise and put online the Paul Wilson collection of recordings made in Devon over the last 30 years. As well as the community choirs and other initiatives in Devon and the South-West Wren Music has an international dimension. Marilyn and Paul are hoping to go to Newfoundland next year to help with celebrations of the first settlement there at Cupids - only recently discovered. One of the first artifacts discovered was a cittern peg. They have relationships with singing groups in Brittany, South Africa and Sardinia. She suggested that people keep in touch with what if going on with projects related to regional identity as part of the Olympic programme.

**Peter Robson** has finally retired and is working on his backlog, including calendar customs as well as continuing work on Thomas Hardy - currently witchcraft and cunning men.

**Gwilym Davies** is still doing a bit of collecting when opportunity arises - revisiting some of his old singers with a camcorder, which he regards as important. Has also been working on wassails and has given talks on the subject. He recently visited the local history society at Tetbury and took Carpenter's photos of the 'Tetbury Broad', an animal figure paraded by the wassailers. Also following up on collecting done by Bob Patten in Brockweir, near Chepstow. The local people knew about the wassail songs but were not aware of the carols. They had a recording of the wassail made in about 1954 which Gwilym now has a copy of. They are keen on reviving the carols and Gwilym is working with them. Peter Robson mentioned that he had read about a Christmas bull near Shaftesbury.

**Bob Patten** (speaking also for Jackie) reported that they are looking at aspects of west gallery music, mummers, carols and wassail songs and the influences on them. He is particularly interested in the output of the provincial printing houses which, from 1700, grew rapidly in number and started to be a big influence in the areas where the presses operated. He has looked at the distribution of different types of wassail and the variation between counties. Often particular wassail types seem to be centred on a radius of a few miles of a printing press. Singing masters were another important influence, because of the music they taught. A part-time singing master had a radius of influence of about 7 miles, a full time one nearer 25 miles. All these spheres of influence piled up on top of each other and fed a constant demand for new, novel versions of songs. This continued until the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when, Bob suggested, the concept of 'tradition' developed, giving rise to Victorian bodies like The Royal Society, Folk Song Society and The National Trust, and the songs became (sometimes) living fossils.

**Ian Spring** was with us for the first time since joining. Though he lives in Edinburgh he works in Cardiff. He has been interested in folk song since the 1970s. He has a particular interest in Scottish ballads and did his PhD with Hamish Henderson. He moved away from folk song for many years but now teaches courses in the School of Lifelong Learning in a number of areas, including folklore and folk song. Found his students (including Frankie Armstrong) knew more than he did. Revisited his previous work and found that there had been a lot of new material published since the 1980s, so he has done a lot of catching up. He and his partner

are starting a venture, the Hogs Back Press to publish books on folk song (a not for profit venture) their first two books are both previously unpublished Scottish manuscripts - Peter Buchan's 'Secret Songs of Silence' and George Kinloch's 'Burlesque and Jocular Songs'. These are on their way. By a coincidence he found that the Kinloch manuscript had been owned by a man who used to own his Edinburgh House at one time. He is interested in talking to other members about future projects - provided they are not expecting to make money out of it. Another interest is collecting autographed copies of Scottish ballad books.

**Yvette Staelens** has recently discovered that she shares her birthday with Lucy Broadwood. She is based at Bournemouth University where she is working on the Singing Landscapes project (to be covered in her afternoon talk). She continues her work with the Tribe of Doris, sneaking the English tradition into their programme. Last year the Minehead Hobbyhorse came along to perform amidst the African dancers, to great acclaim. She has also organized concerts in West Somerset for the Gillette brothers, cowboy singers who run a ranch in Texas.

**Bob Askew** is still working on George Gardiner - has heard from Malcolm Taylor that a scrap book from Vaughan Williams has been found in which there is a letter about phonograph recordings sent by Gardiner to RVW. A number of songs that Gardiner collected in this way have been misattributed to Vaughan Williams. Also working on singers near Candover in Hampshire, including one (Sarah Goodyear) who acted as a host for singers to meet Gardiner. A concert is planned at Preston Candover with the hope of getting local people along who might have memories and photographs. He is also involved in the 'Take Six' project in Hampshire.

**Derek Schofield** had the proofs of the next issue of English Dance and Song in the bag - literally, as he was carrying them with him. He summarized the contents of the issue for us and then went on to talk about some other matters related to EFDSS. The Take 6 collection is scheduled to go online in late May. The new edition of 'The Wanton Seed' (the second volume of Frank Purslow's collections of songs from the Hammond and Gardiner manuscripts) is in progress and it is hoped that the plan will not be affected too much by the illness of the editor, Malcolm Douglas. Another TSF member who has been ill is George Frampton who is also on the mend. Best wishes were expressed for both of them by those present. The book on A.L. Lloyd by Dave Arthur is scheduled to appear in May. And Derek told us that he is retiring from the day job near the end of the year.

**Paul Wilson** is the Music Director of Wren Music. Since coming to Devon in 1969 and becoming a working musician, song writer and song collector his passion has been to bring folk song to all sorts of different people. He believes strongly that English Folk song should be seen as a kind of world music - which it isn't always at present. Trying to get the folk repertoire into new places, such as the 'Sing Up' project, where they have an article coming up shortly. In the last 18 months he has been co-opted onto the Music Manifesto Partnership and Advocacy Group. They are taking the Simon Bolivar Orchestra as a model but Paul feels that they have not recognised that the success of that orchestra is founded on a Venezuelan folk tradition. He is aiming to convince them that, in the same way, British traditional music should be at the root of music education in Britain. He said that there has never been a better time to get involved in music education, since there is a lot of funding going into the area at the moment (£332 million). Wren has been successful in getting one of the five music partnerships between an Arts Council RFO (Regularly Funded Organisation) and the local authority. Their project, 'Mix for Six', is the only such project not involving a major orchestra. Paul is going to Newfoundland in July to talk about the work they have been doing in education. He talked about the Mayor's Music Education Summit in London a few weeks ago. A report has been drawn up on young people's music in the capital. The report only identifies only a few areas of folk music activity and Paul believes that they must have missed some. He asked that people look at the report, see if they are aware of other things that should be included and let him know, so that he can take action. Folk Arts England has issued a questionnaire which people might like to have a look at and complete, if they wish. Jackie Patten suggested that all this might be a good topic for an English Dance and Song article. An interesting discussion ensued about the funding of folk music in England. Paul finished the discussion by suggesting that the successful dissemination of the outcome of the sort of research we had talked about today, particularly to teachers, was important and a great opportunity.

**Tony Reader** is a former drama teacher who has taken a life-long interest in folk music. As a singer and musician he plays for a lot of re-enactment events. His personal ambition is to bring English song and the hurdy gurdy together successfully.

**Ali Burns** is a music educator, based in Galloway and working with community choirs and doing workshops. She is trying to get more traditional material into the repertoire of the choirs she works with - less of a problem in Scotland. Not many of the people in the 'natural voice' world teach traditional song. She has been pillaging various archives, including the Baring-Gould archive, and has used many of them in her work. She talked about 'reconditioning' songs (though the idea of 'pre-loved songs' had been suggested to her). At Kirkcudbright there is a collection made by Edward Hornel, one of the artists known as the 'Glasgow Boys', He had bought up a number of books, including a number of scraps of music which interest her. She is also continuing her work on William McMath, who worked with Francis Child, passing Scottish ballads to him over

30 years. He also made his own collection of other songs, which are of great interest. She is also working on a performance based on material from Burns, for the Homecoming Year. She is also working on carols, aiming to produce a collection of Scottish carols at the end of the year.

**Mike O'Connor** - 'a general purpose folkie' - fiddler and session musician. Added 'folklorist' to the list of occupations when he was made redundant 12 years ago, focusing on Cornwall. He is now working as a post-grad researcher at the Institute of Cornish Studies. The number of manuscripts turned up in the last 8 years is absolutely huge. The amount of knowledge pulled together by those working in the field has, consequently, grown proportionally. Also producing CDs and books through his own imprint Lyngham House. He has also produced a CD of Cornish music for Muji (Time-Warner) which has been launched in the rest of the World and will, he hopes, soon be available in Cornwall. He is giving a number of talks on his work as well

**Bill Murray** has been interested in folk song as long as he can remember. He has recently set up a group of shanty singers, 'Mariners Away' - named because Sticklepath, where they meet is on the 'Mariner's Way' from Dartmouth to Bideford. He was asked to sing some shanties to the sailing club in South Zeal (30 miles from the sea!). Most of the men involved have never sung before and their enthusiasm is, Bill finds, very refreshing and reminiscent of the earlier days of folk clubs.

**Shan Graebe** is still transcribing the Baring-Gould manuscripts. She brought along some examples of the transcripts and the index (marked up to show what had been completed) and asked people to comment on them.

**Martin Graebe** has been very lazy recently and, since the meeting in November, has taken a nine week holiday. Baring-Gould was not forgotten - since he delivered two presentations in Australia while there, but it was an opportunity to reflect and to think about the book that needs to be written. The plan is now taking shape and the serious writing starts shortly.

A number of people who were unable to attend sent messages:

From **Steve Gardham**

1) Child Ballads

Johnny Adams and I have now set up this forum on Folkopedia. Each of the 305 ballads has a separate entry where unusual/rare versions can be posted and where the veracity of each ballad and other issues can be discussed. I have already done a general intro and have written intros for about 40+ ballads. Obviously it will take time to get something on each ballad and summaries of the collectors. (You might like to comment on my intro to 295!). Like any forum you have to join to become a contributor but this is free. (When I get round to writing about the bogus material BG sent to Child no doubt you will want to contribute)

2) Seventeenth Century unpublished ballads.

I have now had several long stints in the BL looking at collections of Garlands and there's some remarkable stuff in there, a lot of late C18<sup>th</sup> garland ballads that we previously thought were nineteenth century in origin are there. Ongoing laborious work copying out in pencil but very worthwhile. What I propose to do is put a list of the trad ballads on Tradsong list and if anyone wants a particular text I will eventually get round to posting it.

3) Fred McCormack is also going to work with Johnny to set up a section on Folkopedia for references to, and texts of, folk ballads in novels. Rider Haggard, Hardy etc.

From **Ray Padgett**

Yorkshire Garland continues its collection of Yorkshire songs majoring on mining/industrial and children's songs with the addition of any we missed first time round. I am busy on song lyrics and recording and sourcing while Steve (G) is looking at provenance where any needed

From **Ian Russell**

Apologies for the 21st, Martin. We will be in Sydney meeting our first grandchild; Thomas William Russell (aged 6 months).

You may like to know that *The Sheffield Book of Village Carols*, ed. Ian Russell (Sheffield: Village Carols, 2008), casebound ISBN 0-9524871-3-6, 192pp. is available from Village Carols, P.O.Box 2099, Sheffield S35 0XU (01224 645486), £16.00 plus £6.00 p&p (UK). See <http://www.villagecarols.org.uk/>. Any suggestions for places to get it reviewed (beyond FMJ, ED&S, Mustrad) would be most welcome

From **Steve Rowley**

We are planning a Take 6 day at C# House on 27th June. Talks in the afternoon and concert in the evening. I think I have the concert performers sorted, but could do with some help on the talks front. Bob Askew has agreed to do a Gardiner talk - possibly about the Axford songs (CMR and the Askew sisters are launching their Axford CD at the event). George Frampton will do a Collinson talk. I am struggling on the others. Alan Bell is not available to talk on Gilchrist.

[The six collectors included in the projects are Blunt, Butterworth, Collinson, Hammond, Gardiner and Gilchrist - mrg]

### *TSF Business*

- **Subscriptions** for 2009 (£8) are now due and should be sent to Doc Rowe at 4 Vesage Court, Leather Lane, London EC1N 7RE
- **Further meetings** - no meeting have yet been arranged but we are talking with EATMT (Katie Howson) about a day in Suffolk. We are also looking at a meeting in London and hope to return to the North early in 2010.

### *Forum Focus - 'Folk song in the South-West'*

**Martin Graebe** - 'Sabine Baring-Gould - The Broader Picture'.

We were meeting in a building less than 200 yards from the site of the house where Sabine Baring-Gould was born 175 years, so it seemed appropriate to mention him, if rather more briefly than usual. In this presentation Martin listed some of the work that has been going on in other areas of his life and work. He listed some of the researchers in these other areas and said a little about what they were doing. They included:

- Dr. Roger Bristow - compiling a bibliography of Baring-Gould's books and articles
- Dr Ron Wawman - transcribing and publishing his diary and letters
- Dr Jane Marchand - reviewing Baring-Gould's archaeological studies (particularly Dartmoor)
- Dr Andrew Wawn - evaluating Baring-Gould's work on the Icelandic sagas
- Dr Moira Harris - PhD on the opera 'Red Spider', Libretto by SB-G, Music by Learmont Drysdale

Martin also suggested that there were areas where he had done significant work which were yet to be covered. These include folklore and fairy tales, popular literature and his hymns, among others.

You can see a copy of Martin's slides [here](#)

**Yvette Staelens** - 'The Singing Landscape'

Yvette talked about the 'Singing Landscape' project she has been doing with Dr Chris Bearman on gaining the interest of the general public in the folk singers of particular geographical regions in a novel and engaging manner. The first stage of their work together was to produce, for Somerset County Council, a map that showed the locations of the Somerset singers that Sharp collected from and gave some details about them and about Sharp's work as a collector with photographs of the singers, based on Chris Bearman's research on Sharp's work. 20,000 copies of this map were printed and given away free. The map set up a trail which people could follow round Somerset but it also created a dialogue by giving a list of Sharp's singers and asking 'Is your ancestor here?' This enabled Yvette and Chris to reach local history enthusiasts and descendants of the singers and to get extra information about them. This project has now been extended as 'The Singing Landscape' and an exhibition based on their work will shortly be touring Somerset. Yvette explained a little about the way they had used available data and Cecil Sharp's photographs from the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library to locate the singers and to explore the relationships between them. They are now working on similar projects for Hampshire and Gloucestershire.

'The Singing Landscape' exhibition can be seen at the Somerset Rural Life Museum in Glastonbury from 21<sup>st</sup> March to 9<sup>th</sup> May 2009. It will then tour to the Bishops Palace in Wells: Autumn 2009, and the Brewhouse Theatre, Taunton, Bridgwater Arts Centre and Radstock Museum in 2010.

14:45 **Marilyn Tucker** - 'Traditional song in community arts

Marilyn talked about the way that Wren Music work with groups of young people in Devon aged from 8 to 18. They have three groups at present and, though they often start with modern material, they encourage them to explore the traditional repertoire, particularly the Baring-Gould collection. Marilyn took as her example the group 'Hocus' who started with them at the age of 7 and continued until they reached 18, three years ago. They took songs from the Baring-Gould manuscripts, re-worked them and introduced them to their regular repertoire. Marilyn played three examples of songs they had worked with and recorded.

**Mike O'Connor** - 'Cornish Language and Folksong'

Mike introduced his talk by singing part of the song 'A Granken', collected in 1890 from John Davey of Zennor. At that time the Cornish language was very nearly dead (earlier reports of its death were exaggerated) - only hanging on by its fingernails in the far West of Cornwall. There are traditional songs, composed songs and rhymes from antiquity in Cornish. Now there are songs being written in Cornish or translations being made of old songs - a very confusing picture. Mike gave a short history of the history of the Cornish language and its retreat from Western England.

The first songs known in Cornish are from late Medieval verse dramas, the first of which was 'The Ordinalia'. Another was 'Bewnans Ke' in which the macaroni song 'Ave Pater Arthore' appeared. In 1698 there were two songs in Cornish collected by Thomas Tomkin - though the tunes were not noted. Delkiow Seve (Strawberry leaves), collected from Edward Chirgwin, 1698 and A Mi a Moaz ('As I was a'going') collected from Capt. Noel Cater (or Carter), 1698. Sharp knew about 'Strawberry leaves' and it was the title of a broadside. He also gave three other examples. The Cornish language revival started in the 1890s and grew during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Cornish language lyrics have appeared in a number of sources. James Madison Carpenter collected some, including a version of 'The St. Day Carol' sung in Cornish from a

There are, in fact, only a dozen songs that are definitely known to have been sung in Cornish. Though there would have been others, the majority of Cornish language songs are not 'genuine' examples, but were created with the positive intent of promoting the language. It is now very unlikely that any more medieval song manuscripts will turn up. There are, though, a number of people who are writing very good songs in Cornish, with great skill and based on a good understanding.

In answer to a question Mike confirmed that all Cornish language carols are translations, mostly from English. To another question he replied that Cornish words do still turn up in conversation.

You can see a copy of Mike's slides [here](#)

**Bill Murray** - 'Down 'pon Ole Dartymoor'

Bill has lived on the Northern edge of Dartmoor for most of his life, though he was born in London. He got involved in the folk club that met in basement of his father's hotel as a teenager, which Cyril Tawney helped them get going. That early experience brought him into contact with many of the musicians, like Bob Cann, who played around the area and the step dancers like Les Rice and Dickie Cooper that Bob played for. He sang in the scouts and rugby clubs and got used to singing in public. He took an interest in local lore and language and met a number of the old singers from the area, whose songs he now includes in his own repertoire. In his presentation he told his own story, shared some anecdotes and sang a number of the old songs from Devon and Dartmoor. He also used his collection of books and sheet music to illustrate the sources for many of the songs. His personal test for a traditional song is 'can you remember the name of the writer?' In folk clubs he will sing traditional songs. When he is singing in a village hall he will sing the songs he learned from the 'old boys' - mainly variety songs from the 20s and 30s. He talked about Charles Laycock who collected a number of songs. His collection of 120 songs was presented to Torquay museum, though, sadly, the first volume of 69 songs has gone missing.

Bob Cann was a great influence. He met him in 1969 when he went to the 'Pixie Club' where he found the amazing mix of song, stories, dance and music - as well as good company - that makes 'folk' so enjoyable. He saw Dickie Cooper step-dance for the first time after making an entry with a somersault across the floor - at the age of 75. He heard singers like Bill Ellis of Belstone who had a mix of variety songs and old songs that he'd learned from the Westaways like 'Harry the tailor' and 'The butcher boy', and Reggie Sandercock of North Tawton. He regards himself primarily as an entertainer, relying on his memories of the old singers to re-create the style of performance - though not imitating them completely. With 'Mariners Aweigh' they will sing a range of songs before settling in with something like 'Drunken Sailor'.

## *Meeting Close*

### **Thanks**

The chairman thanked all the speakers who had given up their time to come to the meeting and Paul Wilson and Marilyn Tucker of Wren Music for hosting the meeting. There followed a short but enjoyable song session, featuring songs from the South-West.

### **Recordings of the talks given:**

You can get a CD-R containing recordings of the presentations by Bill Murray, Mike O'Connor, Marilyn Tucker and Martin Graebe. There is small charge of £1-50 to cover the cost on the disk and postage. Pay through PayPal to martin.graebe@btinternet.com or send a cheque to 100, Cheltenham Road, Gloucester, GL2 0LX. Non-UK residents please e-mail Martin for the appropriate price.

### **Next Meeting**

Firm plans are not yet in place for meetings for the rest of 2008. We are hoping to have a meeting in London in the Summer, to travel to East Anglia in December and then to head up to Newcastle in the Spring of 2010. We will let everyone know when arrangements have been made. If anyone has any suggestions or offers for future meetings please contact Martin Graebe.

Martin Graebe

March 2009