



Traditional Song Forum Meeting, 6th May 2006 held at Cecil Sharp House, London

Meeting Report

Twenty two members and guests enjoyed another good day's discussion and presentations held at Cecil Sharp House. We were also pleased to be associated with the official launch of the excellent new website for the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library. A number of members again enjoyed the opportunity for an early evening session of songs at the close of the meeting.

Member's Activities

As usual, the meeting opened with a round-up of recent activity by members

Martin Graebe opened the discussion, confessing to a disturbing lack of activity having been pre-occupied by preparations for his recent marriage to Shan. Normal service will be resumed shortly and will focus on the next stages in indexing the Baring-Gould manuscripts and on continuing the transcription of songs.

Andrew King has been accepted by the University of Sussex to do a PhD on the EFDSS Phonograph cylinder collection. At present he is seeking a bursary to enable him to take up the offer

Bob and Jackie Patten have now collected over 1000 items. Bob's retirement presents an opportunity to review the collected material and to understand it as a whole. They have been asked to revise their book on Exmoor custom and song for re-issue. They reported that, in the period since the book was originally published, a lot of material that was in private hands has been lost (this provoked a discussion on the topic of lost manuscripts and collections). They have also been asked by EFDSS to write a book on West Gallery music.

David Gregory is on a sabbatical from Athabasca University, N Alberta (where he is Associate Professor of History and Humanities) researching a book on the Victorian revival to follow his recent "Victorian Songhunters: The Recovery and Editing of English Vernacular Ballads and Folk Lyrics, 1820–1883" (Scarecrow Press, 2006). He told us a little about his teaching work. Athabasca is a distance learning establishment with no students on campus. David is also the editor of the Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Traditional Music. See indexes for the bulletin and access the archive online at <http://cfmb.icaap.org>

Fred McCormick is currently involved in a project involving an interview with the Irish Fiddler Sean MacNamara, from Liverpool. He is also reviewing the possibility of producing an edited version of the 9 Volume Lloyd-McColl Ballad set - probably as a single CD but he would like to produce the full set. The ownership of copyright has proved immensely complicated. This sparked a lengthy discussion on copyright and the expected increase in the period for which Mechanical Copyright can be held to 90 years. This change, though intended to protect the pensions of the likes of Sir Paul McCartney and Sir Cliff Richard is expected to have a significant impact on small labels re-issuing old jazz, music hall and folk material.

Lewis Jones regrets that he is not yet retired and, therefore, unable to do as much as he would like in folk song research. Ferret Publications (<http://www.geocities.com/ferretpublications>) is still his pride and joy. By way of reminding us that he has been responsible for the Project Gutenberg edition of Isaac Watts songs Divine Songs (http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=95352) and his Hymns and Spiritual Songs (http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=92678) Lewis revealed that Watts is buried in Bunhill Fields along with many leading dissenters who could not get a burial in the conformist cemeteries. Lewis also revealed that he is having some success with the music character recognition software 'Sharpeye'. The Chairman would not allow a technical digression but I can reveal that you can learn more at <http://www.visiv.co.uk> should you wish.

Derek Schofield is finding the task of editing English Dance and Song is absorbing a lot of his time but that he feels (and people present agreed) that the result has been good. Themed issues with links to additional

material on the EFDSS website, have proved a success and will be continued. The next issue will feature articles on the singer Charlotte Dunn and Ella Bull who collected from her. When he does get some spare time Derek is intending to write a book on the history of the EFDSS for publication in 2007, marking the 75th anniversary of the merger of the two societies. The Chairman commended Derek, with the support of those present, for his efforts on the magazine and for his authorship in general.

Malcolm Taylor was to talk more in the afternoon about the VWML website but he did reveal that work is in hand to create a database of the work of Anne Gilchrist and, in the future, it was hoped that a database of Janet Blunt's work would be compiled. EFDSS are trying to get money to re-develop the Library and create proper facilities - the estimated cost is £5 million. A new book is planned for November called 'Travellers Joy' based on the Mike Yates collection. There will also be an associated CD of original recordings. Shirley Collins will be giving a talk about Gypsies at Cecil Sharp House on November 6th. Malcolm Douglas and Steve Gardham are working on a revision of 'Marrowbones' (the first volume of Frank Purslow's collection of songs from the Hammond and Gardiner manuscripts with a view to re-publishing. Malcolm is making a documentary about Doc Rowe for the BBC's 'Archive Hour' series. That is, when he can find him. There was another discussion about the position with copyright on archive material. Since much archive material has never been published it remains the property of the owner of the Ms. This applies to much of the material recorded for the BBC, for example, which, since it has never been published, cannot be used without their permission. Less than half of Peter Kennedy's material was used on air - some of the Irish material has never been broadcast at all.

George Frampton has also been busy with a number of projects with, for example, Paul Cowdell on songs and traditions of the Dungeness peninsula and collaborating on a programme with the Smithsonian Museum on folksong in Kent. He is also working with Simon Evans on Mumming traditions and continues his work on the Webb family. George is also organizing talks on aspects of song and custom at the Sidmouth Folk Festival in August, several of the talks are being given by TSF members. George will also be responsible for the traditional song sessions at the Volunteer during Sidmouth week.

Jon Boden talked about his interest in promoting social singing and about a system he has devised for teaching harmony singing to groups, based on words and colours. This has been tried with some groups at festivals and he is hoping to expand its use for getting people singing traditional songs.

Fay Hield has continued working on her PhD at Sheffield on the Huddleston collection, though she is currently taking time off to look after her new baby, Polly (the youngest person ever to attend a TSF meeting). She is on leave until October but is trying to keep in touch with Steve Gardham and the Yorkshire Garland project. She is focusing on the uses the collection might be put to and, particularly, best practice in getting it back to the community

Andy Rouse was passing through on his way to a conference in Spain. He was currently interested in time in songs and reading about clocks (Did you know? Queen Elizabeth 1st had an alarm watch - a needle scratched her wrist when the appointed time was reached)

David Atkinson has continued his work on the Carpenter collection and grappling with aspects of ballad editing. Work on the Folk Song Journal occupies a significant amount of time

Bob Askew is studying the work of George Gardiner in Hampshire and has recently given a talk on the subject in Fareham. He gave a brief outline of Gardiner's collecting career and future plans for his work

Steve Roud continues to write prolifically - emphasizing the importance of his daily railway journey to the process. Current work includes customs and superstition about babies and a major work on children's folklore - the first since the Opie's major work 50 years ago. His song index forms part of the VWML, though the on-line version contains only the song part of the index. He will continue to produce the CD version, though with fewer types of database supported. A new CD will be produced in the near future.

Irene Shettle continues her work on Lucy Broadwood, particularly focusing on work with her diaries at Woking. She and colleagues have presented a show based on Songs from Broadwood and Baring-Gould

Peter Robson has now completed his PhD on Thomas Hardy's collection. He has also published some supplementary work on the topic. He will be making a presentation on his work at Sidmouth in August. His PhD studies are leading to a number of projects and he is writing a book on Dorset customs

TSF Business

Forthcoming Meetings

The next meeting of the TSF will be held on Saturday 2nd September at Cecil Sharp House and will be another in the series 'Life and Times' in which a group of collectors/researchers currently working in the field are asked to talk about their work in detail. This time the focus will be on people working in Ireland and the invitees include John Moulden, Tom Munelly, Jim Carroll and Pat Mckenzie. The final list will be confirmed nearer the time but please put this date in your diary.

We are looking to arrange another meeting in November, probably returning to Sheffield and in the Spring of 2007 we are hoping to be able to offer a very special day focusing on the work of George Gardiner in Hampshire. Details and dates when we have them

Subscriptions

It is planned that, next year, we will invoice everyone for their subscriptions to avoid any confusion. It is hoped that we will also be able to offer an easy way to pay such as PayPal.

Forum Focus

The presentations this time were focused on London and the South-East. First up was **George Frampton** who talked about "**Albert Richardson and his Songs**"

Richardson was a singer who bridged the gap between being a traditional singer and a stage performer and was influential in the revival of interest in a number of 'folk songs' in the early 20th Century such as 'Buttercup Joe' and 'The Old Sow' which were issued on 78 rpm discs by Zonophone in 1928, followed a few years later by 'A Farmers Boy and 'Sarey' on another. Contemporary publicity photographs show Richardson in a smock-frock, playing the part of the 'yokel' singer but his style was some way from the traditional. He later performed with The Crazy Gang and with Lesley Saroney (Who also recorded Buttercup Joe). George spent a fascinating 40 minutes unraveling Richardson's history from his 'discovery' to his later years as The Singing Sexton' in Burwash with many fascinating by-ways. This was a precursor to a great article that George is going to write some day.



Derek Reid spoke about Jewish Street Songs of the East End of London, based on collecting that he has done in the Jewish community. Most of these songs are from vaudeville/music hall origins but have been modified at street level. They emerge from a tradition that might now be seen to be a stereotype. Comedians like Izzy Bon based their acts on caricatures of Jewish family life. The cantors of the Synagogue were a strong influence on singing style but the music of the Synagogue often drew on popular tunes. In this context the adaptation of popular songs for use in the community became common.

Derek grew up at a time when the London markets attracted a number of street performers of all kinds. He talked about 'Prince Monolulu' (the tipster - 'I gotta Horse!') as an example. He also referred to Solomon Levy who was such a performer, playing his fiddle for dancing and was the subject of one of the songs he played. Having set the scene, Derek then played a number of examples from his collection, mostly in Yiddish but bringing in English words and proper names. Derek provided translations from the Yiddish and the context to the songs, which drew touching portraits of the community and the people. Here is an example, with the translation:

My Home in Morgan Street
Ver ich hob voynen git
Ich hob mine eygen shtip
Nor es schmacked fun fershtinnkener fish
Dort shtayt a maidel, mit a kladel
Unt shrart 'Zecks a penny bagels!
Un a yidl, mit air fidl
Unt air shpielt as violin

My home in Morgan Street
Where I've lived very well
There I have a space that's mine
Though it smells of stinking fish
There stands a young girl in a dress
And she shouts 'six a penny bagels
And a little jew with a fiddle
Which he plays like (a concert) violin

(Sung to the tune of 'Back home in Tennessee')

The VWML Website Launch

At this point in the meeting we were proud to be able to host the official launch of the VWML Website. This is the result of ten years work by a number of people though, in his introduction, Malcolm Taylor picked out two people for special mention; Richard Butterworth, who led the project and Steve Roud who extensively modified his index to meet the needs of the website. It is still work in progress and probably will be for many years to come, but it is already a formidable resource with databases on several of the major collections in the VWML, including those by Sharp, Vaughan Williams, Karpeles, Broadwood, The Hammonds, Gardiner, Collinson and Grainger. It is possible to search across the collections as well. Also included, as mentioned above, is Steve Roud's Song Index as well as photographs and a lot of really useful stuff. This is a remarkable achievement and, if you have not already visited it, you should go to <http://library.efdss.org> immediately!



A Bit of a Sing!

We said, after the Gateshead meeting, that we would continue with the idea of having a song session after the meeting. A number of members stayed on and were joined by a few other people who happened to be in the building for a couple of hours of excellent singing. This is, after all, what songs are for!

Thanks:

Thank you to Derek Reid and George Frampton for their really interesting presentations. To the EFDSS and, particularly to Malcolm Taylor and Peta Webb for their help with the arrangements for the meeting and practical assistance on the day. This was another very enjoyable day.

Martin Graebe

12th June 2006