



Traditional Song Forum Meeting, 12th June 2010, held at Cecil Sharp House

Meeting Report

Chair: Steve Roud

Our meeting was, once again, held at Cecil Sharp House as guests of the EFDSS and was attended by 14 members and guests (apologies were received from 15 members). The morning session was taken up with a review of members' progress and with aspects of Traditional Song Forum business and projects. In the afternoon session we viewed a number of films of interesting traditional singers.

TSF Business

Future Meetings – the next meeting will take place on 13th November in Dublin, as guests of the Irish Traditional Music Archive. Planning for this meeting will now start in earnest. The intention is that the focus for the meeting will be on aspects of Irish song in the English language and on the movement of songs between Ireland and Britain. We have already approached some speakers but further suggestions for topics and speakers would be welcomed

The possibilities for 2011 were discussed and a number of suggestions were made. It has not, as yet, been possible to turn past suggestions for visits to East Anglia and Sussex (based on Lucy Broadwood) into concrete proposals, though these remain desirable. Other counties mentioned as being worth consideration included Kent, Cornwall and Somerset. It was suggested that we might look at the possibility of meeting in Birmingham, since it was some time since we had been there. The Secretary will follow up on these suggestions. Other suggestions and offers to host meetings would be very welcome

Subscriptions – are now (over)due for 2010. The treasurer was not able to be present but reminders will be issued shortly to those who have not paid up.

TSF Projects – Steve Gardham was not able to be present, but sent some notes about progress on the projects that he has been involved with.

C18th Ballads – Steve has now visited the British Library a number of times and has started the process of cataloguing the C18th broadside ballads in their collection. Steve Roud has also taken part of some of these visits. Though not a part of the project, Steve Roud reported that Mike Heaney's proposal to revise and improve the Bodleian Library ballad website has not been successful in securing funding so far. He is now revising the proposal and intending to re-submit it.

Master Titles – Steve has completed his list of master titles for English songs. Steve Roud reported that one of the difficulties in using it was that it was not easy to apply in diverse geographical areas where different titles might be more appropriate. So the system is useful for some people, but not for all.

Child Ballads on Folkopedia – Steve has, so far, added about 60 ballads to the Folkopedia website with background material. There is plenty of opportunity for others to add material to the collection, should they wish.

'Voices from the Attic' – Paul Cowdell reported that John Adams has done some more work on this project but that it was still some way from the original concept. It may prove impractical to provide the systematic means of accumulating and storing collections and sound recordings in the way that had been envisaged. He feels that the greatest benefit of the project, so far, has been to raise awareness and for people, as a result, to find and report previously unknown material

Revised listing of web resources – After some discussion, it was agreed that it was more valuable to have a list of the sites that had useful resources, as a guide for newcomers to song research, rather than to try to

catalogue all the individual books, collections or other items of interest. Martin Graebe will re-check and update the current listing, with input from members. Lewis Jones will look at the feasibility of producing a list of known folk song texts, based on his searches. While it is recognized that it will never be fully comprehensive it was felt that even a partial listing would be of value.

Member's Activities

The meeting continued with the usual review of recent activity by those present.

David Atkinson is currently putting together the next issue of the Folk Music Journal. He recently gave a talk on ballad editing at London University as part of a seminar on textual editing. He has started attending the meetings of the European Society for Textual Scholarship and has found it interesting to compare what he is doing with ballads with others working on other forms of text. The idea that a book is not a fixed text is a novel one. Preparation for the next Ballad Conference, taking place in Amsterdam on July 10th, is also occupying his time. He has had a letter seeking support for a Swedish project which is aiming to put a lot of ballads online. This looks like a worthwhile and interesting project. He will be giving a talk about 'Sir Patrick Spens' at the conference in Germany in September.

Elaine Bradtke is continuing work with the Carpenter Project. Plans to open the on-line archive to the public have been delayed because there are still some issues with copyright. No date is set for its launch but there is still hope that it will appear one day. Her job with EFDSS has now changed and she is working on the project to produce the online catalogue for the VWML archive. The first stage is to catalogue the Sheppard collection and this is going well.

Lewis Jones reported that he has been looking at the Laycock manuscripts in Torquay. One of the two manuscript books is missing, though he lives in hope that it will one day re-surface. He has completed transcription of Isaac Watts' 'Essay on Psalmody' for Project Gutenberg, which sits alongside the other texts he has done on hymns, psalms, etc. As an antidote to all this hymnody he is currently transcribing Harris's 'Book of Covent Garden Ladies' - a directory of London Prostitutes from the 1780s. He is also working on transcribing and setting songs from the Butterworth collection. He described plans to put the transcriptions online and there was a discussion about the value of 'midi' files in this context.

Bob Askew is busy in the centenary year of Gardiner's death, with various concerts and talks. The Hampshire folk map is in distribution. Some of the songs from the Isle of Wight published by WH Long in the 1880s have been recorded by 'The Dollymops', an Isle of Wight harmony group.

Paul Cowdell is recovering from an altercation with a bus which has delayed progress on his thesis and other work. Those present wished him well for a continued recovery. His paper on Cannibalism in ballads was published in the current Folk Music Journal. He delivered a paper about a ghost song from the Canadian Maritimes for the Folklore Society. He has also been looking at a manuscript from Belgium that he has been lent by his Dutch teacher which contains songs in French and Dutch. He is saving this as a post-doctoral treat.

Chris Foster is continuing his campaign, with his partner Bara Grimsdottir, to raise the profile of Icelandic song both inside and outside the country. One of their projects is working with two other people the island of Vestmannaeyjar on a collection of hymns from a priest killed in the Turkish pirate raids on the island in 1627. They have taught two course units on folk music in the Arts Academy in Reykjavik - they have been shocked how little Icelandic students know about folk music in Iceland or in the wider world. They have spent time in primary schools using traditional songs. They have also been working in a cultural society in Reykjavik, and there is now a monthly session for people to come and sing songs - not just from Iceland but also from other cultures. They have also been working with the same centre for a kindergarten group with songs focussed on Ravens. He commented how bizarre it was to perform in front of a thousand kids wearing raven masks. He and Bara have just produced an EP as a step towards their next CD

Paul Davenport reported that the Sheffield Ballad Session now takes place monthly. He is working on the Gatty song manuscripts. He and Liz are also assembling an archive of modern newspaper stories that reflect in our own time the plots of ballads. He is recording a CD of his own songs, including one based on Child 23 - 'Judas' which he has translated from the old English and set to a tune of his own making. He highlighted the availability of Kidson material from the Leeds Mercury in a scrapbook in Leeds library which they have put on their website (www.hallamtrads.co.uk). The site also includes film of Fred Jordan singing at Whitby.

Eileen Richardson is continuing her informal research on songs from Wear. She is now singing a version of a song that she found on broadside which was set to music by a friend and more are on the way. She described finding a song about local hero Joseph Hodgson who, through his skill as a swimmer, saved a

number of people from drowning in the mid C19th. She found a copy of a song from a newspaper which had been used as a bookmark.

Malcolm Taylor reported that they are building on the success of 'Take 6' and have now been successful in getting agreement in principle for the inclusion of other archives as part of the next phase. The archives that they hope to get include those of Cecil Sharp, Frank Kidson, Alfred Williams, Vaughan Williams and Percy Grainger. Proposals are now being constructed and funding being sought from the Lottery Heritage Fund. They will also include other manuscripts in the VWML such as Carey, Albino, Karpeles and others. Taken with the planned inclusion of the Baring-Gould manuscripts this will cover the majority of collectors of English song from the late C19th and early C20th within the next 2 - 3 years. This is possible because of 'climate change' in the world of archives. There is even hope for working with the BBC on their archive, though this is some way off. He also reported that they now have a new archivist, Alice Meesom who has worked at the BBC, BLSA and the Tate Gallery. He said that plans to continue the work of electronic cataloguing of the VWML collection, once Sheppard is completed.

Steve Roud reported that he has nearly finished 'The Lore of the Playground', which will be available to solve your Christmas present problems. He is also working on the 'New Penguin Book of English Folk Songs' with Julia Bishop who will be doing the music. It will focus on the songs that were most frequently encountered by the collectors, rather than the odd and unusual songs included in the original publication. There may, possibly, be a companion CD. This is aimed at people coming new to folk song. This was also the target for the series of evening classes held earlier this year in association with EFDSS which had been very successful. It is planned to repeat the series in the autumn. It is hoped that it will also be possible, as originally planned, to take the classes outside of London next year. There may be a second level course next year to follow up.

Martin Graebe reported on his world travels, including talks about Baring-Gould in Australia and California. He had now seen the images of the Baring-Gould manuscripts that have been produced for the *Devon Tradition* Project which is working, with EFDSS, to put a complete set of images of the manuscripts online by the end of the year. The quality of the images is superb and will allow a number of issues to be resolved. Otherwise his life has been dominated by an article that he has been writing for Folk Music Journal about Gustav Holst and Folk Music. As a result of this he has become much more aware of the importance of classical music as a means of disseminating folk tunes in the first part of the C20th and the influence of the EFDS on this.

Shan Graebe continues to work on transcribing songs from the Baring-Gould manuscripts and we are starting to look at how these can be presented online alongside the manuscript images. She has also been doing workshops and coaching on aspects of voice and has made the handouts for this work available on www.martinandshan.net under the 'Voice' tab.

Saturday afternoon at the pictures

Despite the fact that it was a beautifully sunny day in Campden, the afternoon was spent indoors, with the blinds drawn, looking at films of traditional singers and related topics. The subjects of the films included: the singing at the Blaxhall Ship, Sam Lerner, Harry Cox, Cecilia Costello, Phoebe Smith and a selection of Devonshire singers and dancers featuring Bill Westaway and Bob Cann. Though some of the material was familiar it was enjoyed by all present. We reflected that, though the production values may not have been those of the 21st Century, we owed a debt of gratitude to those who had captured these performers in action and who had sought to capture not just the songs but something of the people's lives.

Meeting Close

Thanks

Thanks to the EFDSS for hosting the meeting and to Malcolm Taylor and the VWML for providing some of the films shown during the afternoon.

The afternoon closed with an hour or so of songs from those who chose to stay

Next Meeting

The next TSF meeting will be held in Dublin on Saturday 13th November 2010. Full details will be made available nearer the time.

Martin Graebe

21st June 2010