

Traditional Song Forum Meeting, 19th January 2008 held at Newcastle

Meeting Report

Chair: Steve Gardham

This was a very well attended meeting with 35 people during the afternoon session. Since this meeting marked the 10th anniversary of the Traditional Song Forum it was a great pleasure to welcome so many members and guests for what was an excellent meeting.

Member's Activities

The meeting started with our usual review of recent activity by the members present.

Steve Gardham reported that work on the Yorkshire Garland project, of which he is Chair, is going well. Most of the recording is now done and transcription of the tunes is in progress. It is expected that the complete collection of 85 songs will be on line by the end of April. The site can be found at www.yorkshirefolksong.net

Vic Gammon hoping that his book on traditional song will be published in the next few weeks. Price is £50 (ouch!) so he urged people to talk to their local libraries. The title is *Desire, Drink and Death in English Folk and Vernacular Song, 1600-1900* and the publisher is Ashgate - search for 'Gammon' on www.ashgate.com.

Fay Hield is working on her PhD at Sheffield University - her topic is Folk Singing Communities. Has just completed a diary project with 25 people reported their activities and also has an on-line survey which those present were invited to try (go to www.fayhield.com). The survey looks at wider aspects of what it is to be a participant in folk singing today.

Sandra Kerr talked about the project on research on children's songs that is being led by Malcolm Taylor and mentioned that she had offered to contribute to the project, revisiting the wealth of material discovered in the northeast in the 1960s.

Poppy Holden is continuing her PhD research on border ballads (interrupted briefly by moving house) and is keen to talk to people who are singing border ballads.

Jude Murphy just finished PhD looking at the second folk revival in the North-East based at Northumbria University (supervised by Mike Sutton). Her topic was chosen as a response to the fact that much of what has been done before is London-centric. Now working as cultural co-ordinator at Northumbria University.

Mike Sutton described himself as a retired historian, fellow of Centre for Northern Studies, active morris dancer, seeker after the lost Hexham Sword Dance and writer of (occasionally provocative) articles.

Sue Allan recently embarked on a PhD with Lancaster University, working part-time. Her original title was 'Creating a sense of place - traditional music, customs and dialect in Cumbria since 1750. She has found that this is too broad and that she needs to focus on the song, which will be quite enough.

Sheila Gammon reported (modestly) that her key role was to clear up Vic's debris - odd bits of research, tidying up the prose, general editing and, of course, the accounts.

Susan Tilley is one of Vic's students and is researching how women are portrayed in song from the North-East from 1790 to 1850.

Ali Burns feels as if she should have her learner plates on. She is about to start work on the McMath collection of songs. McMath worked with Child but also collected songs in his own right from the south of Scotland. There are about 500 songs to look at and bring back to life. She has made a proposal to the National Trust of Scotland for funding but is also looking for help and advice.

John Shapley is a first year undergraduate on the Newcastle course and, in his native Devon, is involved with the organisation of Bampton Fair, helping to recreate the song programme

Sally Humphries is also a first year undergraduate on the course - and that's it for now

Gill Cawley has completed her degree and has awarded herself a gap year - but being unable to stop altogether she has been making a small collection of songs about knitting - and if anyone knows any knitting songs she would be really pleased to hear from them.

Piers Cawley is a singer and on the degree course and his key activity is searching out songs to sing. He offered his 10-year experience in computer programming and working with the web to anyone who might wish to talk to him.

Stuart Hardy was introduced to the North-East by Gill Cawley and has become a resident. He is a musician and interested in the music of the region - came along, in a spirit of curiosity, to hear what the singers have got to say.

Matt Prior is a third year student and has recently been looking at Iranian folk music.

Pete Wood was to talk in the afternoon about his work on the Elliots of Birtley. He will be publishing a book in the summer and he is still keen to hear anecdotes and other contributions, particularly in respect of their contribution to the revival. He is also looking more broadly at folk families. He is also involved in a folk play called 'Selchie'.

Chris Coe teaches on the folk music degree course and also in the drama department at Huddersfield. She is still working on the visual project based on 'The Wife of Usher's Well' that she talked about at a TSF meeting a couple of years ago. Using more traditional song in the drama course. She is also continuing her work with the Vaughan Williams collection made in East Anglia - 'lifting songs from the silent page'. She is increasingly interested in the idea of performance and what it means to the drama department compared with its meaning for a folk singer.

Fynn Tifford-Mock is on the second year of the degree course. He has been doing work on west gallery music of the Midlands and has also transcribed a book of country dance tunes.

Johnny Adams is coming to the end of an eight year stint on the National Council of the EFDSS. He has a number of projects under way, many in partnership with others, including EFDSS. The Village Music project has 2500 tunes on the web and has been frozen for a while, but due to the hard work of Chris Partington, in particular, another 5000 to be put up shortly. They are now seeing the same tunes coming up time and again so they think this will be about it. Has concentrated on electronic access and the latest venture has been 'Folkopedia' which is slowly growing, with many people in the room being contributors. Johnny sees that there will be about a two year period before it fattens up enough for a full public launch. Another project is 'The Common Genius' (working title) which will make a number of audio collections available in the next few years. One of these is the Paul Graine collection - a huge collection of recordings, 2.5 terabytes of material recorded off air from 1952 - 1982, including a number of Bert Lloyd documentaries the BBC doesn't now have. Also has collections from Peterborough Folk Club (including some of Harry Cox), a collection of actors rehearsals, London Folk Clubs, Cheltenham Folk Club and others. This is going to be a big job, cataloguing etc. and is looking for help to work through the material and identify clubs, people, songs etc.

Dave Eckersley - a singer and publisher (Herron Publishing) and is working on Pete Wood's book and also a new book on Industrial Song from Roy Palmer - his first 'big' book for twenty years.

Dave Eyre is best known as a seller of books to most people in the room. He now has his own folk radio programme 'Thank goodness, it's Folk', on the community radio Sheffield Live as a broadcast and as a podcast. Mainly trad song and music and interviews.

Shan Graebe, Baring-Gould research associate, described the work she has done on songs from women in the Baring-Gould manuscripts, much of which is now available as printed and sound recordings on the recently relaunched website www.sbgsongs.org.

Meanwhile, Martin Graebe, with Shan's help, continues with work on Baring-Gould's life and work. About half of the songs in the Personal Copy manuscript have now been transcribed. A project is being put together by Wren Music to digitise the collection - a project for which funding is currently being sought. Prototype databases and indexes are in preparation and Martin has now added Roud numbers to the index of songs in the Personal Copy manuscript as far as possible, leaving Steve with a few hundred new numbers to assign. He is now preparing to start work on the book about Baring-Gould's song collection, for which the talks and articles written in recent years have been a rehearsal. Martin and Shan are also doing a new CD this year.

TSF Projects

Steve Gardham led a review of the progress towards the projects discussed at the last meeting.

1 Ian Russell was not, unfortunately, able to be here today to discuss the idea of the 'virtual archive'. Following the last meeting he did comment that his vision was broader than the idea of the Internet Portal for broad range of traditional song archives outlined at the last meeting. He would like to see the package include recognised standards for archival storage, classification, and public access. We hope that it will be possible to expand on these ideas Ian at a later date.

2 Steve talked about the idea of putting into the TSF aims the idea of encouraging publication through the internet and supporting people who

Piers Cawley suggested that we should bear in mind the activities of the Open Rights Group and Creative Commons, who have interesting ideas on approaches to cultural archives. Steve agreed to prepare a draft paragraph for the TSF Aims to be considered at the next meeting (**Action:** Steve Gardham). Piers Cawley was asked to provide some more detail so that these ideas could be followed up - and to consider joining TSF (**Action:** Piers Cawley).

3 'Voices from the Attic' - Paul Cowdell, who suggested this idea could not attend the meeting but the possibility of encouraging people to place family recordings in an archive is appealing. TSF's role should be for TSF to promote the possibility. Piers Cowdell suggested that the place to put it would be 'Archive.org' and link it through Folkopedia - he believes that it should just happen and that there is no need for a central project to drive it. Dave Eckersley pointed out that identification of 'valuable' material would need to take place at some stage. Johnny Adams suggested there were three parts to this - Identification of new recordings that need processing, cataloguing of information about them and the possibility of streaming them on the web. He will contact Paul Cowdell and talk with him about how it could be made to happen and how it could be linked to Folkopedia. Paul should also be asked to write an article for publication to alert people and seek donations. (**Action:** Johnny Adams and Paul Cowdell). Johnny also suggested that this would be quite a lot of work for volunteers and that there was also the issue of longer term sustainability. There are also rights issues to be considered with this material.

4 The idea of support for song research was suggested by Martin Graebe and he is progressing one aspect of this which is the idea of a workshop on the basics of song research for performers and others interested in getting more information than is available on the back of a CD. He has already had two requests to deliver this at folk events this year. He asked whether people would be prepared to share their top tip for folk song researchers.

5 Steve Gardham has taken responsibility for persuading organisations to allow their 18th Century material to be digitised and placed on the web. He has contacted the British Library and other people (including Mike Heaney) - what he is hearing is that funding will have to be found.

6 Steve is also addressing the possibility of 're-doing Child' - looking at the big ballads and republishing in a more complete and accurate form.

Technical Presentations

Publishing - presentation by Dave Eckersley

Dave gave a useful presentation, sharing his experience as a small publisher and his perspective on publishing in the Internet age. His message was that there is a place for both and that TSF should be involved in both. He explained his rationale and shared a lot of useful and practical ideas on self-publication. His notes for the presentation are on the website.

Electronic Archives - presentation by Vic Gammon

The internet has had a big impact on research. There is a tension between the anarchy of freely available information, the publicly funded (or charitably funded) material and the organisations that have a financial motivation. He demonstrated a number of sites where complete texts or articles can be found. Vic's personal list of internet resources now runs to 35 pages. 'The Internet Archive' and 'American Memory' are examples of charitably funded sites. Early English Books Online (EEBO) is a commercial site that has a number of interesting texts. The 'Eighteenth Century Collection' is another example of a site that can only be accessed in practice through an institution (some public libraries may have access to some of these resources).

Forum Focus - Folk Song Research in the North

This session was introduced by Vic Gammon and introduced four speakers working in the North of England.

The Elliotts of Birtley - Peter Wood

Peter Wood talked about his research into a well known singing family the Elliotts of Birtley. He is, as he said in the morning, writing a book about them. In this talk he focused on the history of the families singing and on their repertoire. We were very pleased that Doreen Henderson (née Elliott) and her husband Brian, who had

given a great deal of help to Peter in his research, were able to join us for the afternoon session. The slides Peter used in his presentation are on the website.

More than just John Peel - Sue Allan

Sue Allan talked about traditional song in Cumbria, starting from the history of the song 'John Peel' from its publication by William Metcalfe in 1868 through its appearance in 'The New National Song Book' to the recordings of it made by Mickey Moscrop for the BBC in the 1950s. But, of course, as her title suggests, there is more to Cumbria than hunting. Many of the Edwardian collectors visited the district. Anne Gilchrist was very important but the role of Mary Wakefield as the founder of the Westmoreland Festival was a major figure. Read Sue's PowerPoint presentation on the website.

Pipe Dreaming - Musical Expressions of 'Northumbrian-ness' - Judith Murphy

Judith talked about the broad picture of popular music and song and how it fitted with the creation of the idea of 'Northumbria' in the 19th Century. She showed how a vision of a Northumbrian culture was developed by an elite who then supported its creation by support of music and song in the region. See the PowerPoint slides that Judith used in her presentation are on the website.

Song Recordings of English Prisoners of War in World War One - Gill Cawley

Gill Cawley's presentation was about the work of the German researchers who made recordings of British prisoners of war during WWI. The recordings were recently the subject of Radio and TV documentaries but are of particular interest to this group because they are records of younger men than usual and because their singing ability ranged from occasional singer to serious amateurs. The text of Gill's talk can be found presentation are on the website

Texts, slides and recordings of the presentations

Transcripts or slides for most of the presentations are available on www.tradsong.org. An audio recording of the six presentations as MP3 files on a CD-R is also available to paid-up TSF members. Peter Wood's presentation included some additional songs from the Elliotts that he was not able to present on the day. There will be a small charge of £2 to cover the cost of the disk and postage - send it to Martin Graebe at 100, Cheltenham Road, Gloucester, GL2 0LX and a copy will be put in the post.

Meeting Close

Next Meeting

Firm plans are not yet in place for meetings for the rest of 2008. We are working on this and will let everyone know when arrangements have been made. If anyone has any suggestions or offers for future meetings please contact Martin Graebe.

Thanks

Steve Gardham thanked Vic and Sheila Gammon and colleagues at Newcastle University for making the arrangements for the day. He also thanked the speakers for their excellent presentations, recognizing the time and trouble in putting them together and the skill with which they had delivered them



The meeting closed with a celebratory tea featuring TSF cakes (including one with genuine gold dust on the top) - our thanks to Shan Graebe for making them.

Following the meeting there was an excellent song session - for which the Doreen and Brian Henderson stayed and shared some songs with us from the Elliott family repertoire, to our great delight.

Martin Graebe