

Traditional Song Forum

Notes from the meeting of 4th December 2004 held at University of Sheffield Music Department



The meeting was chaired by Steve Roud and we were pleased to welcome a number of people attending for the first time. Those present included:

Julia Bishop, Mo Bradshaw, Eddie Cass, Shan Cowan, Malcolm Douglas, Dave Eyre, Chris Foster, Steve Gardham, Martin Graebe, Andrew King, Anthony McCann, Gwilym Davies, Kalia Neoclous, Jill Pidd, Steve Roud, Andy Rouse, Doc Rowe, Jonathan Stock, Gideon Thomas, Heather Wood, Peter Wood

Apologies:

Frankie Armstrong, David Atkinson, Elaine Bradtke, Paul Cowdell, Ron and Jenny Day, Dave Eckersley, Ian Gustard, Ruairidh Greig, Lewis Jones, Peter Kennedy, Toby Parker, Mike Parsey, Bob and Jacqueline Patten, Peter Robson, Ian Russell, Derek Schofield, Yvette Staelens, Marilyn Tucker, Eddie Upton

INFORMAL REVIEW OF MEMBERS ACTIVITIES

The meeting opened, as is our custom, with an informal review of activities by members

Martin Graebe opened the session and talked about recent work on the Baring-Gould manuscripts. Since the last meeting he has written 3 new papers including a study of the relationship between Cecil Sharp and Baring-Gould which was delivered at the Sabine Baring-Gould Appreciation Society's annual meeting which was held at Clare College, Cambridge, where both men were undergraduates. Another paper delivered for the Baring-Gould Study Break had been a retrospective look at research into his collection carried out since the discovery of the Killerton manuscripts 12 years ago. Martin also told the group about the recording that he and Shan had just finished which included a number of songs from the Baring-Gould manuscripts recorded for the first time.

Gwilym Davies has provided Steve Roud with a list of songs that he has collected and these have been incorporated into Steve's index. He has continued to record travellers and has recently completed a 90 minute workshop on traveller's songs called 'Step it Away' (for details see <http://www.cmarginet.demon.co.uk/gwilym/Stepaway.html>).

Doc Rowe updated the meeting on the 'John Kanakanaka' video of children's games which had been issued last year by EFDSS. He had also been involved in the revival of the October celebration at Bampton (North Devon) closed down at the behest of the RSPCA about 25 years ago. Doc had been involved in an oral history project allied to the event. He had also re-visited the Cliff Bonfire Society performance at Lewes, adopting his traditional role as an unlikely monk. Doc's big event for 2005 is a major travelling exhibition on folklore involving Turner Prize winner Jeremy Deller which starts at the Barbican on 11th May 2005 and then travelling until February 2006. He also raised the topic of straw bale structures which led to an interesting sharing of sightings around Europe. This discussion also led to a further discussion on external domestic Christmas illuminations and their excesses. American retail giant Wal-Mart was identified as a significant influence as a result of their taking over ASDA - proving that TSF discussions can be extraordinarily - extraordinary (or is that a result of Doc being around?)

Steve Gardham is still working on his book of songs from Robin Hoods Bay. He is also working (with other Forum members) on the Master Titles Index for English folk songs. The work has reached 'B'. He is also working on his own indices.

Leslie Sheppard died a few months ago. He was recognised to have one of the best private collections of broadside ballads. Before he died he agreed to give his broadsides to the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library. Though this was not actually reflected in his will, his daughter has agreed to this bequest. There will be an appeal to get the collection digitised.

Andrew King had a mix of good and less good news. The good was that he has completed work on a number of archives including Roger Digby's recordings of performances at the 'Empress of Prussia', though this has not been

indexed. Further good news is that the Gaelic cylinders have all now been examined and identified. Lucy Broadwood's original notes have also been found which add to the knowledge about the cylinders. It is possible that a CD could be issued by EFDSS in the future. The less good news is that he has been handed a redundancy notice by the BL, though he will be appealing. The Sound Archive project is now complete and, unless Andrew's appeal is successful, is unlikely to be restarted. This was discussed and Forum members offered their support and it was agreed that the Secretary would write on behalf of the Forum, supporting Andrew's case. It was also suggested that support from individual members would be welcome. *Note: Since the meeting this has been done and support for Andrew was secured from a number of different sources - we now await the outcome.*

Julia Bishop reported that the Group working on the Carpenter Collection have now obtained funding (from the Library of Congress 'Save Our Sounds' Project) to work on the Carpenter cylinders and acetates. These will be digitised (though not, at this stage, cleaned up) and will eventually be available to listen to, though obtaining the necessary permissions will be difficult. They are also in the preparatory stages for work on the 'Critical Edition' of the collection. This will be a massive task (order of size of Greig-Duncan). Julia was also excited because, in researching descendants of the Carpenter singers they had found a descendant of the great ballad singer, Bell Duncan. Robin is organising a conference on Vernacular culture at Leeds on 19th March 05. Julia and Ian Russell are hoping, with the help of the British Academy, to produce a book of children's street songs and games from Scotland, taken from a previously unseen manuscript by James T R Ritchie, the Author of 'Golden City' and 'Singing Street'. There is further material among papers held at Ritchie's former house.

Jonathan Stock reported that the University of Sheffield had made a joint application for a grant to allow someone to work on the Huddleston collection. He is also involved in the organisation of the 38th World Conference of the International Council for Traditional Music which is to be held in Sheffield August 3rd – 10th. Though primarily focussed on traditional music, rather than song, the programme (which can be seen on the ITCM website) looks absolutely fascinating and relevant, given that a key theme for the conference is the revival of old traditions.

Andy Rouse has completed a manuscript (for Peter Lang) about the remunerated vernacular singer. He is also looking for photographs of people singing

Eddie Cass has, as well as being involved in work on the Carpenter collection, has recently published 'The Pace Egg Plays of the Calder Valley'. He was also involved in the CD of Manchester Street Ballads from the Axon collection (described and reviewed in the June newsletter on the TSF website).

Peter Wood has two projects at the Sage one of them involving kids in working on shanties in preparation for a stage performance. The other is celebrating the 200th anniversary of Trafalgar and the arrival of the Tall Ships in Newcastle with a 1hr 30min show on Nelson in song. The commissioning of 'The Sage' reached an exciting stage recently with a concert intended to test the acoustics of the main hall.

(It was noted that others working on shows to celebrate the anniversary of Nelson's death included Gregg Butler and Tim Laycock - there are more!)

Anthony McCann told the meeting about the resources on music and copyright that can be found on his website www.beyondthecommons.com. He is hoping to give a series of talks on the subject in April in Sheffield. He has also written an article comparing English and Irish language traditions in Ireland.

Chris Foster told us about teaching English Traditional Song to Music students at the Birmingham Conservatoire recently. His biggest project is putting together a touring show combining Traditional Songs from England and Iceland using a visual presentation as a background.

Heather Wood continues to sing but is also working (with Heritage Muse) on the digitisation of major collections. Their biggest project so far has been the Digital Child but this has now been joined by digital versions of the Maidment and Ritson collections. The really good news is that they have just completed digitising Bronson and that publication is anticipated in the not-too-distant future.

Gideon Thomas has just started studying English song collectors

Mo Bradshaw is studying folk music in the context of education and is also working on a project matching English songs with their counterparts in other cultures

Steve Roud is still keeping his index going but recognises that it is a blunt tool. He is, therefore, working towards a more 'in depth' index using master titles, synopsis of the songs and a key word index, among other features. It is a slow process. The Roud index is now on the prototype EFDSS website. Steve is organising a meeting on February 19th which will be a repeat of the collectors meeting that he organised a couple of years ago. More details will be available nearer the time. On the same day the Fred Jordan memorial will be unveiled and it is probable that Doc Rowe will be able to launch his Fred Jordan video. Other news from the EFDSS is that David Atkinson is now Editor of the Folk

Song Journal with Keith Chandler taking on the role of Reviews Editor. 'English Dance and Song' is to be edited by a committee. The back issues of The Folklore Journal have been digitised and are to be published soon.

TSF BUSINESS:

Recording meetings

The possibility of making an audio recording of the Forum gatherings has been raised. It was felt that a written record of the morning session was better but that a recording of the 'Forum Focus' sessions would be a good idea. Doc Rowe said he was willing to do such a recording. Anyone wanting to receive a copy should write to Doc and it can be theirs for a modest contribution to his costs.

Support for the RVWML

When the Forum was started one of the key concerns was the protection of key archives, chief among which is the Ralph Vaughan Williams Memorial Library. With recent discussion within the EFDSS about the future of the Library it was felt that TSF should consider how best it could help. The EFDSS recognises that it has a world class archive but that, with dwindling membership and the demands of maintaining its other key asset there is a difficulty in deciding how to enable the library to continue to develop. The proposed course of action is to find a University with appropriate courses where a mutual benefit would be achieved by co-location of facilities. Talks have been had with a number of institutions. The trust deed for the Library says it has to be housed in Cecil Sharp House and a resolution was passed at the AGM re-confirming this requirement. Though the National Executive Committee recognises that the concerns of members must be recognised it is not bound by this resolution. Change would be possible if a case were made to the Charity Commissioners that a move was essential to the Societies survival. A new archive would, though, need to be of a very high quality. Universities get their funding through courses (though research is important) rather than by accumulating books and manuscripts.

This is a complex situation and TSF, though a body of individuals concerned about the content of the Library and who make up a large proportion of its customer base, does not have any authority in this matter. It was agreed that we should take up the offer made by Jeremy West for a TSF member to sit on the Steering Group. Andrew King agreed to take on this role. It was agreed that this would become a standing item on the meeting agenda

Future meetings:

We are already committed, in principle, to holding the November meeting at the Sage in Gateshead. Peter Wood agreed to find out which dates might be possible. With the Collectors meeting being held in February it was agreed that we would delay the next meeting until April. Steve Roud and Doc Rowe agreed to look at the possibility of putting a meeting together on St George's Day at a venue in London (possibly Cecil Sharp House).

There was recognition that July meetings have not always worked well, though the meeting organised by Lewis Jones last year was well attended. It was suggested that July might be a slot for one-off meetings linked to a strong local base. Suggestions would be sought from members on possible themes and venues.

FORUM FOCUS

Kalia Neoclous - Cypriot Folk Songs



Kalia, A student at the University, talked about her work researching and collecting songs in Cyprus. Her project involved going out to singers in towns and villages in the Southern part of the island. She made more than 40 recordings during the project. Some of the ballads she looked at were from the Byzantine period and there are, for some of these, texts in books but without music. She asked the singers that she worked with to sing the parts of those songs that they could remember. She then moved on to collect songs from more modern times - The Second World War, The British struggle, the Turkish invasion and so on, talking to the people who made the songs. Kalia played examples of songs that she had collected. The Greek tradition, in Cyprus at least, is mainly unaccompanied singing. Some young people continue the traditional style of singing, particularly when linked to family and family events

Martin Graebe - Baring-Gould in Yorkshire

Martin talked about recent research that has thrown more light on Baring-Gould's earliest song collecting activities in Yorkshire and his first publication of the text of a collected song in 1866. The tune for this song has been identified in Baring-Gould's Rough manuscript and it has been re-united with its words. Baring-Gould started to note down songs from mill girls and other workers soon after his arrival in Horbury and we can now see that this was part of the wider interest that he was developing at this time in all matters related to folk culture. The demands of his 'day job' meant that he put this on hold for several years until he re-started collecting seriously in 1887 but it is clear that a lot of the background knowledge that he brought to his later work was laid down during his years in Yorkshire.

Dave Eyre - Carolling Traditions in Sheffield, Derbyshire and Beyond



Dave Eyre started by acknowledging the work of Ian Russell in studying and reporting the carolling traditions of the area. It is an amateur tradition and its origins lie in the rejection by the Church of England of the church bands and the move to choirs supported by the organ and the standardised repertoire of hymns represented by such collections as 'Hymns A&M'. To people who enjoyed singing carols in the old, vigorous way it seemed a bit boring - so they started to sing the carols in their pubs instead. Thus was born the tradition that carries on to this day and, while there are links between them, each of the pubs that has carolling takes pride in the way that they do it.

There are other carolling traditions in England. The Oddcombe carol singers in Somerset, for example, go from home to home. Interestingly, this tradition went unnoticed by the rest of the world for a long time because it started after midnight. Bob Patten found out about it in 1974 and has been documenting it since.

The Glen Rock Carolers in the USA have a tradition that derives from those of Derbyshire but which has thrived independently since it was started by ex-patriot Derbyshire men in 1848. This tradition has an archive that details its performances from the very beginning of its existence. Their fame is spreading and they were delighted to be able to decline an invitation to sing at the White House.

Doc Rowe - The Collection



Doc Rowe told the gathering about progress with re-housing his archive in Sheffield. There is, of course, a long way to go before everything is properly sorted out but good progress has been made and the archive is officially open for business. There is a prospect of even better facilities when the Barton Street site is developed further and he is hoping to get lottery funding for further improvements. Doc expressed his thanks to all those who had supported him in the move and in so many other ways.

THANKS

Thanks to Jonathan Stock for hosting us so excellently and to Steve Gardham for putting the programme together. The Chairman reflected that this had been one of our best meetings - again!

Martin Graebe

29th January 2004