

Traditional Song Forum Meeting, 25th Nov 2006 held at University of Sheffield Music School

Meeting Report

Chair: Steve Gardham

Twenty one members and guests joined us at the University of Sheffield Music School for our last meeting of 2006 with others joining us for the afternoon presentations. There is a lot of activity in Yorkshire at the moment and the 'Yorkshire Garland' project was our main topic .



Member's Activities

The meeting opened with our customary review of recent activity by those present

Ray Padgett opened the batting, referring to his work recording material for the 'Yorkshire Garland' project. He would be revealing all in the afternoon session

Malcolm Douglas has been working with Steve Gardham on a new edition of 'Marrow Bones', the first collection of songs from the Hammond and Gardiner manuscripts edited by Frank Purslow and originally published by EFDSS in 1965. Frank Purslow has been involved with the project and has approved changes such as the removal of guitar chords and the line drawings. The original notes were never intended to be were just a rough draft by FP that was suppose to be re-written. The book will be re-published with most of its original content. To bring in extra material would make the book too large to be economical so the additional information will be provided on the Web, as has been the case with other recent EFDSS publications. It is intended to publish 'Marrow Bones' in 2007 with the next in the series 'The Wanton Seed' following in 2008.

Jonathan Stock, our host for the day took the opportunity to introduce some of his students who had joined us for the meeting. He also circulated details of the 'Centre for Applied and Interdisciplinary Research in Music'. This venture, it is hoped, will allow better organisation for group research and build a network that will encourage cross-fertilisation across research areas by individuals within the group (copy of Jonathan's document attached as Appendix I).

Fay Hield has changed the direction of her PhD and is now stretching it beyond the Hudleston song collection since there have been some problems about the digitisation and other aspects of rights in the recordings which, although temporary, have made progress with her research difficult.

Lewis Jones has continued with digitization of Isaac Watts writings for the Project Gutenberg website. Lewis enthused about the virtues of Project Gutenberg and the wealth of literature there (a theme he has returned to on the Tradsong discussion group since the meeting).

Sam Lee spent some time earlier in the year working on films and 'outreach' for the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library. He is also helping to run a folk club, The Magpie's Nest, in London. He recently started working with Folk SouthWest running events in South-West England. In between these activities he is finding and singing songs from recordings of the best English traditional singers.

Dave Eyre has continued with his interest in Carols, both in the UK, the USA and now in Australia. He has recently been in touch with a choir in Grass Valley, California who have links to the Cornish tradition. He also explained his recent involvement in selling some of the books from the Peter Kennedy collection. Dave

suggested that there was a need for a course 'How to Run and Event/Folk Club' - could this form part of the curriculum for the Newcastle course or similar?

Mike Parsey is now eligible for his free TV license but is learning about music through the Open University. He has been helping with the grant application for 'Yorkshire Garland' about which more later

Peter Woods has now completed his year-long voyage through the ocean of nautical song, having discovered many strange things on the way (and had a lot of fun). He has returned to his earlier work on trying to use the idea of a 'Top 20' to explore the distribution of folk songs and trying to trace songs from the 'original' singer and the factors that lead to their becoming more widely sung. He has also been working on an article on the future of Folk Clubs, suggesting that the way in which they are dominated by older people is putting young people off. This may be a problem for the future of the movement. He is hoping that his article will provoke discussion. His other project is a book about the Elliott family of Birtley. He has a publisher but us still gathering information at this stage.

Shan Graebe mentioned the project recently completed with Wren to produce a CD (called Nice Warm Socks) and teaching material for children at an early developmental stage and for those using Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC). Her work as a speech and language therapist has convinced her of the value of using song with this group and she has found that simple, traditional song at an appropriate pace engages children from this group very effectively and assists their development. More detail on www.nicewarmsocks.org.uk.

Martin Graebe has provided a foreword based on material in Baring-Gould's letters to a new issue of his 1862 book 'Iceland - it's Scenes and Sagas' to be published in the New Year. His recent research has been to study links between Baring-Gould and other song collectors, particularly Cecil Sharp and he had given a talk at the EFDSS AGM on this topic. He has also spent time at Lewtrenchard, reviewing the contents of the Library remaining after the transfer of the bulk to Killerton and looking at the way in which Baring-Gould used Lewtrenchard as a centre for folk song study, inviting other collectors to visit him as well as using it as a base for his own activity.

Doc Rowe found that there were 6,300 hits on his website when he was the subject of 'The Archive Hour' - the majority of them during the programme itself. Otherwise his 'Blood Booze and Bedlam' experience has had further outings and he is working (with Jill) on the costumes and script for the Waterson-Carthy 'Frost and Fire' tour at the end of the year. The next book he is doing for English Heritage is due to be about 'Autumn' but there is a degree of conflict at the moment as one Government department is not supposed to be critical of another and he wants to highlight the issues of Health and Safety legislation affecting traditional customs. He has, of course, recently received the Gold Badge of the EFDSS - on which all present congratulated him.

Jill Pidd reported that the 'Penny Hedge' and the rest of the Folk Archive exhibition have now gone to the British Council and will be touring the World for the next few years. She also told us of Doc's ordeal by food with the Bodmin Wassail.

Bob Askew has recently contributed an article to English Dance and Song about George Gardiner and his work in Hampshire. He has also been working with a group including Sarah Morgan and Carolyn Robson putting on a concert in Titchfield with a talk on Gardiner. The object is to help draw the attention of people in Hampshire to their heritage of song.

Sheila Gammon is helping Vic to get his current book together.

Vic Gammon told us that, apart from his own research and writing, the Newcastle Degree Course now has 69 undergraduates and 10 postgraduates enrolled and that he is very proud of their success and enjoying his role as Senior Lecturer there. He is now trying to 'tidy up' the format of the course. He is also hoping to include a module on 'Northumbrian Music' for both undergraduates and adult learning, which he hopes will be available next year. He is also acting as an external examiner for Sheffield. He has recently reviewed an extremely good PhD thesis by Andrew Bathe on Alfred Williams.

Steve Gardham finished the round, mentioning his involvement with 'Marrow Bones' and with the 'Yorkshire Garland' already covered by his colleagues. He has also been going into schools with a local arts organisation working with people from 3 to 80 years old. The project, called 'Sing for your Life', involves the young people teaching the older ones their songs - and then vice-versa. Steve said that it had been a remarkable experience.

Forum Business

1 Subscriptions

Subscriptions are now due for 2007 and will remain unchanged at £6. All members are urged to send their cheque to Doc Rowe as soon as possible. After investigation it had been decided not to go ahead to set up a PayPal account for the Forum since the costs were high for relatively small amounts of money.

2 Next Meetings

It is still hoped that it will be possible to set up a meeting linked to the project in Hampshire on Gardiner's collection and associated research and performances. This has proved elusive so far and, as a back-up, it is likely that we would look for a spring meeting in London. Vic Gammon invited the Forum to come to Newcastle again in the Autumn and this invitation was accepted, subject only to agreeing a suitable date. In similar vein, Jonathon Stock invited the Forum to return to Sheffield in November 2008, by when, it is hoped, the Department will have moved into new premises.

Forum Focus - 'Mainly Yorkshire with a bit of old China'

Steve Gardham - Appraisal of member achievements and possible ways forward

Steve gave a short presentation in which he outlined some ideas on the future of the TSF. He stressed that this was for discussion and future consideration. He suggested that our collective achievements as an organisation have been limited compared with those by individuals and small groups. During the life of the organisation there have been a lot of achievements such as the Carpenter project, Farne, EFDSS/Roud Index to name but a few. TSF needs to encourage activity that fits with our aims.

Steve suggested some practical ways in which TSF could help:

- Recognition for excellence through a TSF award
- Write in support of grants etc for groups seeking funding for projects aligned with TSF aims

He believes that hard copy publications are important but that websites represent the future and should be a priority.

There are some gaps that need to be covered, such as

- Filming/digitization of 18th Century broadsides - a job that needs to be done.
- More study of folk song tunes as well as texts
- We have still not moved far towards the idea of a National Archive

It would be a good idea to include a discussion about the future of TSF as an agenda item for a meeting in the near future

Joy Lu - Walking Marriages, Roving Songs

Joy is a student within the University music department and talked about work she had been doing on the songs of the women of the Mosuo people of Yunnan in South-West China. This is a minority group of people who earn their living through agriculture. In their culture there is no marriage or conventional partnership. The work is organised on matrilineal lines, with the women of the family co-operating to raise their crops etc and the male relatives helping and protecting the females of their family. The women choose the fathers of their children for short-term relationships (one-night stands) and raise the children in their own home. The men continue to live with their mothers and are responsible for their sister's children rather than their own. Joy has visited the Mosuo to hear and record their songs and to photograph them. She showed us a number of slides and played us some of her recordings

The Mosuo women have a range of songs including songs of invitation for their lovers and songs while they are together as well as songs of rejection. One song that I noted from Joy's examples ran:

Dear Lover,

The long legged mosquitoes are biting me seriously and I can't stand it any more.

Please let me into your room.

Otherwise they have a number of songs which celebrate women and their work. This was a very interesting presentation. There are a number of articles on the net about the Mosuo but I hope that Joy will publish her work in the near future.

Vic Gammon - The Drinking Song Revisited



Vic gave a short presentation associated with his forthcoming book 'Desire, Drink and Death: Themes and Genres in English Vernacular Song' (Ashgate, 2007). This is a book of essays, reworking some that he has previously had published as journal articles as well as including some new ones. Topics covered include Desire (Song, sex and society, role of song metaphors etc), Drink (based in part on research done for the 1979 recording 'A Tale of Ale' which is still available) and Death (Funeral hymns, childhood death in ballads, etc). In his talk Vic outlined many of the ideas that he explores within the book and the sources of his information.

Steve Gardham, Mike Parsey and Ray Padgett - The Yorkshire Garland Project



Steve, Mike and Ray gave a well choreographed presentation about this exciting project, intended to put up on the Internet a collection of songs and related material that demonstrates the wealth of traditional song in Yorkshire. Some of these will be from existing material such as the Hudleston Collection and Steve's own recordings from the 60s as well as a number of other collections. They will also be making new recordings of singers such as Will Noble, John Cocking and Roger Hinchliffe who represent the current generation of singers in vernacular style. Steve is also revisiting some of the singers that he previously recorded and is also finding new singers who would have been in their forties at that time.

Some of these newer singers are writing their own material as well as performing traditional songs. They were successful in getting Lottery funding earlier in the year which has enabled them to start work and have now started the serious work on the project which will run for the next two years.



Mike Parsey talked about funding for the project and outlined some of the technical aspects including the way in which they are approaching the website design and the use of databases. They are making use of ABC notation for tunes. Part of the lottery funding has gone towards the purchase of Edirol solid state recording equipment which is now being used by both Steve and Ray for their recording work.

(Doc Rowe contributed the advice that it is better to store sound recordings as .wav files rather than as mp3s because of the losses on compression. He also offered to send the Unesco document on storage of files)

There are a number of factors that have kept the song tradition vibrant in Yorkshire. One of these is the caroling tradition which has focused attention and brought groups together. The Hunts have also played a part as has the Rural community in general and, of course, a number of enthusiasts and academics have interacted with

these groups.

Steve and Ray played a number of examples of songs from their recent work and from some of the other collections which illustrated the strength of the material that they have to work with

And in Conclusion ...

The day ended, as has now become customary, with a bit of a sing. We were delighted that Joy and Chiener joined us and gave us some wonderful examples of songs from their own culture.



Thanks ...

Thank you to Steve Gardham for organising the event and for taking the chair when Steve Roud was not able to attend. Thank you, also, to the speakers for the afternoon session who communicated such interesting material so compellingly. And, of course, thank you, once again, to Jonathan Stock for allowing us to use the University facilities, for making us feel welcome and for the hospitality. We look forward to our next visit.

Martin Graebe

5th January 2007

Environmental Factors

- We're in an increasingly well-funded environment for research funding-it is possible now to plan a career as a contract researcher in humanities based research. Such staff are (already) a major asset of a department like ours.
- The funding environment is also increasingly competitive-the greatest success is likely to go to those with a thoroughly professional approach to grant applications, management and the dissemination of results.
- The wider funding situation of universities generally appears to be moving into a new phase of competition.
- There's a renewed emphasis on interdisciplinary research within and across institutions and international borders.
- Much large-scale funding is tied to applied work related on policy-related matters or social well being, as well as to commercial interests, much of which involves collaboration with partners outside the universities.
- These large grants are difficult for an individual to apply for-the learning curve is steep and assembling a team for a collaborative application take much time.

Role of a Research Centre

- Establishing a Centre would allow us to better organize (stimulate, administer, support...) group research-we don't need to form an academic support system ab initio for each instance, and we can share expertise through the regular meetings.
- We will build up a useful pool of contacts and partners as we bid for projects and encourage fruitful cross-fertilisations as multiple projects ensue.
- A Centre provides a place where we can discuss our work with colleagues from here and elsewhere, before and during the research process, as well as on completion.
- It offers a convenient label for this work in the wider world, making our research more visible in its entirety.
- A Centre approach offers less direct benefit to the organisation of individual research projects, and so it is proposed to design our Centre around group work.

Action so far

- We've identified a core group of Music staff who wish to be actively involved.
- A number of contacts in other schools and departments within the University, all of whom have an interest in one or another aspect of music research, have agreed to join an internal advisory panel.
- A list of external contacts (academic and practitioner), in the UK and overseas, has been begun. There are two components: a smaller panel of external advisers who are willing to share ideas and a longer list of potential partners with identified experience and interests.