



Traditional Song Forum

Traditional Song Forum Meeting, 19th May 2012

Held at the Royal Oak, Lewes, Sussex



Firle Beacon, Nr Lewes

The meeting was attended by more than 25 TSF members and guests during the course of the day. It was held at the Royal Oak, Lewes and was chaired by Steve Roud.

TSF Business

Annual Meeting - It was agreed that we would have a 'proper' Annual Meeting as part of the event to be held in Sheffield in September. Volunteers for offices in the Forum will be actively sought.

Future meetings – Martin Graebe reported that it is getting more difficult to organise meetings, since there is a welcome increase in the amount of activity in our field of activity. It would be helpful if members could let the secretary know about events that are likely to be of interest to other TSF meetings, so that we know in good time of possible clashes.

At present two further meetings are confirmed for 2012. The next is on 22 September in Sheffield and is being organised by Fay Hield and Julia Bishop, with some additional help from Ian Russell. The agenda for that is being prepared and will be available in the next few weeks. The other is to be held in Chippenham on 1 December and will feature Alfred Williams and other topics related to Wiltshire song and that of the surrounding counties.

Meetings for next year are being looked at, including the possibility of a meeting in Edinburgh, and Martin floated the idea that a small group of TSF members might travel to Washington, DC in the autumn of 2014 to meet with American colleagues. More on these ideas later in the year.

TSF Finances – Doc Rowe confirmed that we have £1012 in the bank, before the day's expenses.

The new system for payment of subscriptions directly into the TSF account relies on members letting Doc know that they have made such a payment. If they don't then their payment may not be recognised.

Doc is looking at revising the way in which he assigns numbers on membership cards next year.

Martin said that it was proposed that we should have another blitz on unpaid members this year and 'weed' the membership list.

The Collectors Collective – Martin Graebe outlined a conversation that he had recently had with Sam Lee and circulated a document describing the new project that Sam is leading (this document is attached as an appendix). Sam is involved in the creation of a new group of people interested in the collection of folk songs and other cultural material and its preservation in the future. Many of the members of this new group are coming to it with different interests and with different ideas about the cultural material they are encountering. A number of them are anthropologists. While they will be separate from the Traditional Song Forum it is recognised that Forum members have expertise which is of value in these activities and it is hoped that they, and other experts, will be willing to share this expertise with the new organisation as advisors and mentors.

They are interested, for example, in establishing what is 'best practice' in song collecting, something that many TSF members could help with. They also want advice on dissemination of the material they collect.

In discussion there was general agreement that it would be in line with TSF's Aims to support this kind of activity, though there was some disappointment that they felt they needed to do this outside TSF. It was agreed that we should offer them what help we can and hope that we can set up a two-way channel that operates to the benefit of both groups. Martin agreed to go back to Sam and offer our support as discussed. This could include a joint meeting with some TSF members if that were seen to be appropriate. Sam has also asked for a regular point of contact within TSF and has suggested that Steve Gardham would be a good person to fill that role. Martin agreed to ask Steve if he would be willing to take that role on and to put him in contact with Sam.

[After the meeting Steve Gardham was approached and agreed to be the key contact with the new group, and will report back to future meetings on progress.]

Shirley Collins – Later in the meeting it was proposed by the Chairman that Shirley Collins should be given the status of Honorary Member of the Traditional Song Forum. The proposal was put to the meeting and was accepted unanimously.

Networking Session

Malcolm Taylor talked about the 'Full English Project, which is now kicking off. It will involve the digitisation and cataloguing of 12 collections of English song, amounting to some 68,000 images. The project has been funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund for 2½ years to the tune of £585,000. Steve Roud is the data manager for the project and the EFDSS will be recruiting 2 cataloguers. They will also be working with schools to develop educational materials. Five other archives are involved in the project. The aim will be to create an interactive website so that, as well as the images and catalogues, other information about the collections and the songs can be hosted on the site. They will be looking for volunteers to help to create content, including midi files and transcriptions of songs, as part of the project. There was some discussion about the style to be used for presentation of the material and the experience of designing *The New Penguin Book of English Folk Songs* was

cited by Steve Roud, such as the decision to minimise punctuation. It was agreed that TSF might usefully discuss this at another meeting.

David Atkinson is excited that a new version of a Child ballad has turned up in the Carpenter collection – this is a version of Child No 202 – ‘The Battle of Philiphaugh’. This was in Scott’s *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders* but there has never been a previous record of it having been collected. Otherwise the Carpenter project continues to make steady progress. They have failed in a recent bid for funding but are trying again. The folk plays should be published in the next couple of years. But it is a huge project and it is a long way from completion.

Sean Goddard is studying a writer and antiquarian called Fred Sawyer who with his brother Frank, did some folklore and song collecting back in the 1870s/80s and published some of their work. He has found some descendants. His manuscripts have disappeared.

Derek Schofield has just finished the latest issue of *English Dance and Song*, which includes an item about The New Penguin Book of English Folk Songs. When asked whether there were any particular types of article that he would like to have more of, he said that finding people to write about dance was difficult. He gets a steady flow of suggestions.

Bob Askew is extending his interest in Hampshire to songs from Portsmouth for an upcoming concert, including shanties, working with Tim Radford. He has found a new singer, Frank Spennimore who had a number of sea songs. Also interested in Robin Hood – he thinks that RH ballads were collected more frequently than is commonly believed.

Frazer Clarke is more a consumer than a researcher. He is interested in the possibilities for using social media to expand interest in traditional song. He had brought a few books of Sussex songs for people to look at.

Vic Smith is involved in a lot of activities in the Lewes area. He has an attic full of recordings made in the 60’s/70s, including a lot of Scottish Travellers, that need to be digitised. He has digitised a lot of the recordings of his radio shows.

Shirley Collins was pleased to be the Forum’s newest member and has just completed curating two new CDs for the Topic Records ‘Voice of the People’ series, working with Steve Roud. They have tried to present them in a slightly different, hopefully more accessible way. She had attended a Plumpton Day of Dance, where she had worked with a group of 350 – 400 children to produce two songs (‘Shepherd, O Shepherd’ and ‘Black, White, Yellow and Green’) Both had morris tunes, which was very appropriate. It had been a very uplifting day. Steve Roud interjected that further CDs in the new Topic series were in the pipeline. It is a pleasure to hear these recordings again, cleaned up and played on modern equipment.

Jane Jones said that she had a background in social sciences and some experience in recording oral interviews, including working with travellers, and she hoped her experience might prove of use.

Lewis Jones battles on with transcription of the Butterworth tune manuscripts, in association with Simon Furey. They are placing these on Folkopedia. He published two folk song booklets of Lucy Broadwood’s songs in the 1990s (with Margaret Crossland). These have been unavailable for some time and it is planned that these will be put on-line in the near future. He is also planning to put online a setting of a Dorset Mass from the Hammond collection, arranged by Cecil Sharp. He also offered the advice that membership of the Wellcome Library made access to a number of important

online resources, such as 'Early English Books Online', on a registered user's computer at home. Malcolm Taylor remarked that a number of local libraries also made online resources available to card-holders in their homes.

Malcolm also raised the issue of recordings on the British Library Sound Archive website that are on restricted access – those of The Pattens, Mike Yates and John Howson. These restrictions are imposed by the owners, rather than the British Library. Steve Roud pointed out that there was some justice in protecting material that had potential commercial value. John Howson, for example, makes a lot of his recordings available on CDs as a business and free online access would have a commercial impact. Lewis Jones raised the question of documents owned by the British Library, which are on paid-for databases. David Atkinson said that he believed that a lot of these agreements had a time limit, after which the data might be available free of charge. Malcolm says that Janet Topp Fargion is going to send Martin Graebe a document which will clarify the situation.

David Jones now lives in America, was a board member of the Country Dance Society and a member of groups such as the Bermuda Quadrangle and Poor Old Horse. His family are also deeply involved in folk music.

Colin Andrews spent some time looking at the West Sussex Gazette records, looking for a song from Michael Blann. He didn't find it but he discovered a song from Mrs Blackler of Sompting – Young Collins. This led him to wonder how many other regional newspapers had run similar columns. Steve Roud said there was something of a vogue for this around 1904 and that he would be talking about it in the afternoon.

Martin Graebe described his progress with his assessment of Baring-Gould's work and also some of the diversions that had recently slowed progress on the book. These included work on SBG's broadside collection. To demonstrate to the world that he isn't just interested in Baring-Gould he is also preparing an article on Marianne Mason and her 1877 folk song collection. Shan has now completed the transcriptions of Volume 1 of Baring-Gould's Personal Copy manuscript and is well into volume 2.

Mike Tristram mentioned that his sister has a business publishing material for primary schools and is interested in building in some traditional song. He wondered if anyone would like to help with that. Mike is interested in the possibility of organising a local meeting in Sussex as a 'gateway' for sharing information on Traditional song. Examples of other local groups such as that in Hampshire, Gloucester and Yorkshire were cited. It was agreed that TSF would offer help in setting up such a group, if required.

Doc Rowe now has his collection safely housed at the old workhouse in Whitby and is working on getting things sorted out. He is also doing an oral history recording of his life and work for the British Library. In the 8 hours so far recorded he has reached age 20 – giving some idea of how much more there is to do. In a similar vein, Simon Costin has included Doc's work in an exhibition of his work and equipment in East Anglia – including a mannequin of Doc draped with his massive old cameras and recorder from the 70s. He is also engaged in digitising the masters of his videos – copies will be given to EFDSS.

Sandra Goddard offered thanks to all those who are doing all the things she would like to be doing. She is somewhat behind the times with technology. A result is that all her activity since 1963, when

she first got involved in folk music, has been very much person to person. She has a lot of memories of the old source singers, which she would like to share – it is worth asking her about some of them.

Steve Roud mentioned that there will be a launch party for the New Penguin Book of English Folk Songs at Cecil Sharp House on 12th June

Forum Focus – Sussex Singers and Songs

Circumventing the Collectors – Steve Roud

The Victorian and Edwardian collectors were ‘a good thing’ but they did mediate the material, often with the best of intentions. They didn’t always document the singing or note all of the songs in a singer’s repertoire. Steve is interested in the other songs that people sang and in the contextual information about their singing. To do this he is looking at a wide range of material and, particularly, old books about country life written by ordinary people. A good example is the description of pub singing given by Flora Thomson in ‘Lark Rise’.

One of the most interesting sources, though, is the lists made by singers themselves. The largest of these lists is that of Henry Burstow who, in 1897, listed 420 songs that he knew and sang, not all of which would be regarded as folk songs. John Johnson was another who wrote his songs down and the most famous example is probably the Copper family who still work from the latest of a series of family song-books.

Another source is local newspapers such as the West Sussex Gazette which ran a competition for favourite songs. The entries for this range more widely in character than folk songs.

Michael Blann: Searching for his Songs – Colin Andrews

Colin ‘discovered’ Michael Blann in the 1960s while living in Shoreham and Eddie Upton discovered his song book in Worthing museum. He did more research on him and wrote a book about his songs. In this presentation he talked about Blann’s background and his searches for his songs. In his talk he described his search for a number of Blann’s songs

An interesting ‘fact’ emerging from his talk was given by Shirley Collins and concerns the song ‘Dame Durden’. The line ‘... and Humphrey with his flail’ should actually be ‘... his frail’ – a ‘frail,’ according to her mother, being a basket used by Sussex shepherds.

Shirley Collins in conversation with Steve Roud

With Steve’s careful interrogation, Shirley told us about the development of her interest in folk song and her experiences as a singer. She talked about Peter Kennedy ‘opening up’ Cecil Sharp House to people like her – before that it had been a frightening experience for her,

facing up to the rather daunting middle class values extant in the EFDSS at that time. She talked about singers and singing and it is no surprise that she considers that Sussex – ‘the most beautiful landscape in the world’ has produced its own style of singing. She only heard Carolyne Hughes for the first time 3 years ago when she started to work on the ‘I’m a Romany Rai’ CD – at first hearing she wondered if her smoky voice was that of a man. She thought that Jeannie Robertson could be a little pompous in her singing – particularly after she became famous. She found the Young Tradition to be a breath of fresh air and that they gave the revival new life and direction. Another great influence on her was Almeda Riddle, who she met in the USA. On the question of the Edwardian collectors not recording music hall songs she suggested that they didn’t need to – they were all around them.

Johnny Doughty: an appreciation – Vic Smith

Vic Smith gave a presentation on Johnny Doughty, based on an interview that he had done with him. A transcript of this interview can be seen on the Musical Traditions websites at <http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/doughty.htm>

Supporting Programme

Some members were able to join our host, Mike Tristram and friends for a traditional singing night at the Murrell arms, Barnham on the night before the meeting. This is a monthly event, started by Mike, which has become very popular – and most enjoyable! Mike also hosted a session at his barn in the South Downs for a walk followed by a singing session and some food

Thanks:

We would like to thank all the speakers and singers for their contributions to the meeting. Particular thanks are due to Mike Tristram and Vic Smith for organising the meeting and the supporting events. Thanks are also due to the folks at the Royal Oak who coped marvellously with our meeting only a couple of days after taking over the pub.

Martin Graebe

27 June 2012

Appendix – Proposal to the Traditional Song Forum from Sam Lee

Establishment and Practise of the Song Collectors Collective (SCC).

The proposal is for establishment of a new community of collecting enthusiasts and empowerment of a new generation of song collectors currently mobilising under the SCC.

Despite wide assumption within the folk community that all the traditional singers have long passed away and no more songs or material exists within the oral tradition, it has become quite clear of late that there is still a wealth of music unrecorded from singers who have never before encountered the wider traditional music community. With particular emphasis on the Gypsy Traveller community and especially amongst the elders of this community, though not exclusively, there is a memory of the days of life on the road, in tents and a music that went hand in hand with this traditional way of life. Over the last 5 years several informants encountered but unrecorded have since passed away taking with them a store of songs never to be heard again. It is becoming acknowledged the pertinence with which the elders still carrying this music and lore need to be recorded and their material documented. It is a common plea amongst both the elders and their adult children that the old ways are not being passed down and this huge store of knowledge of an ancient way of life is not being passed on. In this age of digital facility there is no excuse for the lack of documentation and making accessible on a more national scale the rich but fragile lore of these people. The disappearance of the context within which the passing on of song and lore happened means the songs are not surviving against the appeals and accessibility of contemporary culture amongst the younger generations. However experiences within the camps and homes of this community reveal a great reverence of the elders and interest in their music and the old ways.

There simply is not a functioning forum in existence within the G&T community for the passing down of this knowledge. The future community is faced with cultural and heritage erasure if the thread and fabric which has bound together and been the identity for previous generations goes to the current elder's graves. It is an equal loss to the ongoing exploration within the folk community if these flames are allowed to die out without an attempt at keeping its vital purpose and practise conserved and available to future generations to discover and have access to this repository

The aim of the **SCC** is to record more than just songs but stories, family histories, yarns, folk knowledge, lore and experiences of social change. The material gleaned will then be edited, indexed and hosted on a dedicated website and associated Face Book pages with unrestricted access for both the families represented and enthusiasts of wider British Folk and G&T culture and traditional song and story enthusiasts. Copies of the indexes and recordings will also be gifted to Irish Traditional Music Archive (ITMA), the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library (VWML) and the National Sound Archive (NSA)

The aims of this group are to:

- Establish the extant of traditional singers, tellers and folk material in the UK
- Gathering of folk material still held in the minds of communities across the UK. Namely the Gypsy & Traveller community
- Careful recording and indexing of the material gathered

- Establish a new web portal through which the conservation of this material can be hosted
- Dissemination and repatriation of the material gathered back to the communities and sources through a dedicated website. Creating this facility with the appeal and access for both the singers and their families as access their own culture and family riches.
- A new repository of this music and culture as a primary resource for the wider public; Singers, folk enthusiasts, story tellers etc
- Empowering a new generation of students of folk culture who are interested in the documentation and discovery of indigenous culture.

Objectives of the Song Collectors Collective

Creation of the SCC

The idea is to create a joined up community of collectors, editors, archivists, academics and enthusiasts all supporting and empowering each other to assist in the thorough collecting of material still existing within the British community today. The SCC will work as a 'Buddy' system of specialists and enthusiasts matched to new enthusiasts where expertise can be shared. Through this network of experts and enthusiasts we hope to match up those new to the art of field collecting and folk studies to those with experience and knowledge. The 5 key skill groups are: The Collectors; The Advisors; The Indexers and Editors, The Digital Task Force; The Administrators. See below for more info on the Key teams.

Forum Meetings

The Forum will be established around quarterly meetings. These sessions are designed to be a uniting of the new generation of field workers and established collectors who can share their skills, techniques, ideas and empower the new recruits to go forth well prepared with knowledge of approaching informants, the key objectives of what material is being sourced and an understanding of good practise.

The Field Work

This is self-explanatory one hopes.

Cataloguing

As material is being gathered it is handed over to the 'The indexers and Editors'. They will analyse the material, indexing and editing it as necessary and offering feedback on the material to the collectors aiding them to continue their dialogue with their informants with knowledge of the repertoires they are encountering and key information on the songs etc.

The Website

A dedicated website will be constructed with the dual-purpose function of being a cross-reference able library of songs but also a musical portrait of the families and singers involved. There will be two interfaces to view the website; one from a musical perspective and one from the family perspective.

This allows for members of the informants extended families to search through the material along family lines and for music enthusiasts to search through musical lineages of the songs. This will reconnect the material to its ancestral origins. Family pages will be interfaced with the following aspects:

- Family photographs
- Music player
- Catalogue of the family songs
- Songs background and progeny – both historical and family explanations
- Family stories, knowledge and lore (text and sound files)

For visitors from a non - family perspective songs can be found through a navigation portal searching under different criteria useful to singers and enthusiasts:

- Performer,
- Location,
- Song,
- First line,
- Date,
- Theme

Material collecting and clearance

All recordings will be made on broadcast quality digital sound recording devices. All recordings will be done with full consent of all informants and release forms will be signed before any recording is made. The full details of the project will be explained to informants in advance of any recording so everyone will be fully informed of the purpose of the gathering and its eventuality.

Social Networks portal

Each family portrait will have an associated 'Face book page' administrated by both the SCC and the family. Each page will have links back to the family's website page and a profile of their material. 'Fans' (friends and family members) can then 'like' the page and a community can be built up around the face book page encouraging awareness of the website as it grows. This way the family can take ownership of their own page and will be encouraged to submit material to the project gathered from other family members so that singing families can help grow the sound archive.

Key Members of the SCC

The Collectors: Those enthusiasts of documenting oral culture. The field Collectors; open to anyone

The Sources: The Singers and informants to the project

The Advisors: These are specialists of song collecting / oral reminiscence, folk songs / story telling experts and academics, archivists etc These are the people who will be supporting the songs collectors in up skilling them in the ways of collecting techniques, reminiscence advice, song and story backgrounds and advice, direction and ultimately a knowledge bank to be accessed as required.

The Indexers and Editors: The team of home support who will be taking receipt of the material gathered, editing it and indexing it for ease of digital upload and searchability within the Roud index and on the website.

The Digital Task Force: This team will be overseeing the digital upload of all material onto the website and upkeep of this platform. They will be involved in the social network integration of the website and keeping it linked in with the sources and wider user ship.

The Administrators: This group will steward the dissemination of material and skills across the group, establishing meet ups, systems of support and keeping the work-flow moving. etc

The Legacy of the SCC

The hope is that this forum continues as a self-perpetuating skills service and that as material is gathered it becomes an ever-growing portal for song and folk study and exploration. It would be hoped that that existing archives of sound collections would one day be uploaded, as permissions allow, to add to the on going accessibility of traditional art to both those who carry it and their families and those who wish to develop their folk knowledge. This would help develop the integration of informants and source singers and their families with the wider folk world.

For more information please contact Sam Lee

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