



# Traditional Song Forum

Traditional Song Forum Meeting, 9 May 2015

Held at Newcastle University

For the Spring meeting of the Traditional Song Forum we were the guests of Newcastle University. We had just passed the bicentenary of the commencement of Napoleon Bonaparte's 'One Hundred Days' and the 'Forum Focus' session looked at the songs from that period and what they tell us about Napoleon, his adversaries, and the people at home in the Britain of the time. The meeting was attended by sixteen members and guests took part in an interesting day of discussion and presentations (We had apologies from 21 members).

## Welcome

The chairman, Steve Gardham, welcomed those attending and thanked Peter Wood, and Vic and Sheila Gammon for organising the meeting.

## TSF business

### 1 Future meetings

The next meeting of TSF will be held in Hull, on 21 November, when we meet at the Hull History Centre for a programme of talks and other events, which is being coordinated by Paul Davenport and Steve Gardham. More details on this programme will be sent out nearer the time.

Meetings for 2016 (including the Broadside Day) are still to be fixed.

### 2 Finance

Doc Rowe, our treasurer, reported that we currently have a balance of £896.77 in our account. Though this is still within the expected range, the expenses for the meeting in Kings Lynn were higher than usual, and we made a donation of £250 towards the re-publication of 'The Wanton Seed'. A number of our members are overdue with their subs this year.

## Networking Session

**Lewis Jones** spoke about his role as literary executor for the late Chris Bearman. The papers concerning his work on suffragettes was not accepted by the Women's Library at the LSE and has now been taken by the University of Hull. Chris's work on folk song has been given, through Yvette Staelens, to Bournemouth University. Lewis's own work is still focused on transcribing tunes for the Full English archive. George Butterworth is now complete and he and his colleague, Simon Furey, are now working on Ralph Vaughan Williams's tunes. He mentioned that some versions of Microsoft Windows are not able to read midi files – further work is needed on this.

In answer to a question by Steve Gardham, he reported that Flos Headford has transcribed many of the Hammond-Gardiner tunes.

**Vic Gammon** has passed his paper 'How good a transcriber was Cecil Sharp' to Camsco (Dick Greenhaus's company) for publication in a book of papers from the 2013 EFDSS Conference which is being edited by David Atkinson and Steve Roud. He is also working on another project in association with Arthur Knevitt on 'The Idea of the peasant and the English folk song collectors'. The description is used from the 1840s onwards but it has given rise to some strong criticism – particularly in our more sensitive times. Sharp was a member of the Peasant Art Society but Kidson objected strongly to the use of the word. He has also been doing a study of Barbara Allen – which ends up with John Travolta singing it. His current obsession is early Scottish rag-time – a discovery he has made through the examination of old tunes which came over from America and which have a rag-time form. He is hoping to do an article and CD.

**Russ Clare**, living in Scotland but strong ties to Yorkshire, interested in traditional song and glad to have a TSF meeting within reach.

**Ron Day** talked about the project to republish Frank Purslow's collection, *The Wanton Seed*. The project was intended to complete the work of Malcolm Douglas, who had done the bulk of the work on the reprint before his untimely death. EFDSS had not proceeded with the project and Ron has raised funds from various sources to complete the work. Others deeply involved were Steve Gardham and Graham Pratt. There will be events in Sheffield and in London to launch the book. TSF members will be able to buy the book at a discounted price of £9 + £3 p&p (recommended price £12.99 plus p&p), as a small reward for the funding given towards the project. To take up the offer, contact Ron Day at [ronaldday@talktalk.net](mailto:ronaldday@talktalk.net).

**George Frampton** is now living in Whitley Bay. Moving house required him to dispose of some of his archival material, but found it difficult to find places that would take cassettes. He wants to get some of his projects published and has had four items published through the Faversham Society. These include: *Discordant Comicals* (Hooden Horse tradition), *Lenham Camp* (Country dances from a Kent village), *Blackberry Fold Revisited* (George Spicer), and *Arise and Hail the Happy Day* (West Gallery Carols). He is also working on Simon Evan's collection. He asked whether anyone was working on Brian Dawson's collection. Martin Graebe reported progress as he understood it on a project led by Brian's nephew to publish a CD of Brian singing some of the songs he collected. George, Doc Rowe and Peter Shephard said they had recordings of Brian singing that could be made available. It is possible that Ruaridh Greig also has some.

**Peter Wood** has been helping to catalogue the Baring-Gould street literature collection in preparation for their being added to the collection on the Full English archive – a tedious but necessary job. He took part in the Full English event at the Sage in Gateshead as the local expert. He does not yet have a date for publication of his book on Napoleonic songs, but it should be in the near future. He gave a talk on Nelson in song at the Music of the Sea Symposium at New London, CT in June 2014.

**Paul and Liz Davenport**, through their organisation Hallamshire Traditions, have issued a new CD by Vic and John Bowden called *Still Waters*. They have also produced a book, *Under the Rose*, which is a study of traditional dance in Yorkshire. Paul talked about the work they are doing on Frank Kidson's manuscripts. While the bulk of his collection is in Glasgow, his tune books were given, by his niece, Ethel, to fellow song collector, Anne Gilchrist, and are now in the VWML. Other items are in Leeds Library, including a scrapbook containing the articles on old songs that Kidson published in the *Leeds Mercury*. They have photographed these articles and they can be found on their website [hallamtrads.co.uk](http://hallamtrads.co.uk), (Go to the 'Research' page and click on the link top left of the main picture). They have also photographed a number of other tunebooks etc. The Leeds Library collection includes a number of other Kidson notebooks, watercolour books and other items of great interest.

**Sandra Kerr** has continued her work with students, helping them to discover songs that are useful for them and reflect the region from which they come. She is finding that her students are increasingly reluctant to explore industrial songs and bawdy songs – something that concerns her,

and might be worth future discussion. Her own research has included work on the history of the Women's Institute who are currently celebrating their centenary and for whom she has written a centenary song. She is also interested in folk choirs and surprised that the field seems dominated by males – though she quoted the example of a 'fishermen's wives' choir based in Southend.

**Andy Rouse** has also discovered with his own students in Hungary that they are very resistant to bawdy material of the type that students of a decade ago would have enjoyed. Having hosted the International Ballad Conference at the University of Pecs last year he is now pulling the papers together for publication. Has formed an association for producing e-publications. His own first effort is a book called *Mr Pepys and the Turk, Popular Constructs of the "Turk" in England*. His Anglo-Hungarian band, Simply English, is celebrating its anniversary with a new CD and will be making a small tour in England in the summer. He will, again, be organising a series of events, British Autumn, when a singer from the Isle of Man, Ruth Keggins, who sings in the Manx language. He is also looking, with a colleague from the geography department, at producing a book about songs that are about places, rather than events.

**Sheila Gammon** took the opportunity to say that she was not just there because Vic was – she was a great enthusiast for traditional song.

**Anne Lamb** said she had little to contribute, but had a strong interest in traditional song. She was, of course, known to many of those present as a fine performer of traditional songs.

**Lena Shephard** is involved in a number of projects alongside her husband – who has a big list of jobs for her.

**Peter Shephard** has just finished a project which has resulted in a CD by Border fiddler [Tom Hughes](#) who he first recorded in 1978. He is now focusing again on song – specifically going back to some of the material he collected from travellers which has not yet been published and issuing it on CD. He is also planning to release further material from Scotland. He is also involved in organising the Fife Singing Weekend and has issued highlights from each festival on CD. He asked about the possibility of converting midi files to mp3s. He uses Sibelius for notation and is very pleased with it and listed its virtues. There was some discussion about the value of 'proper' notation versus ABC. He is singing with Arthur Watson (since Tom Spiers moved northwards).

**Desi Wilkinson** is a flute player who is interested in singing – teaches at Newcastle University. Plays Celtic and European music with a band ([Cran](#)). Has looked at French songs about Napoleon. He is working on a book about Breton song and dance. We are coming towards the anniversary of the beginning of the process of political separation of Ireland from Britain in 2016, and Desi is interested in how this is reflected in the musical culture of the Irish diaspora in Britain. Trying to establish an agenda for a conference next year to be held at the University. He commented that he was pleased to be at the meeting and to hear about the variety of work that people are doing.

**Doc Rowe** said that he had now got through a couple of difficult years, had achieved his three score and ten years and was ready to start working at full throttle again. He talked a little about the British Libraries project to audit the recorded material held outside of major institutions. This has led him to tot up the number of hours of recordings that he has got which has shown that it will take him three years to produce the metadata for his collection, which also includes 42,000 black and white negatives. Realising that this sort of time is not available, he is looking at setting up a company with charitable status and lottery funding to deal with the material. He has been looking back over the 8mm film material that he has had digitised and, because it has never been through a projector since he filmed it, is in remarkable condition. He has been showing film of 'dear departed friends' in recent presentations and has found that younger people who have never seen some of these artists perform are fascinated by it.

**Martin Graebe** said that moving house has been an 'interesting' process and has slowed things down a lot. He and Shan have not yet had the opportunity to introduce their transcripts of Baring-

Gould's manuscripts to the Full English as hoped. Progress with Martin's book on Baring-Gould has been slowed, but he remains hopeful that the draft will be completed before the end of the year. If Steve Roud had not been unwell and able to be at the meeting he would have reminded people about the EFDSS Folk Song Conference in October. If anyone has a paper they wish to present they should get in touch with Steve. More details about the event would be released soon. Another thing that has occupied his time recently has been the re-emergence of a group of books that the National Trust had 'lost' at Killerton. These were rediscovered last year and sent to Exeter University to join the rest of his books in their Special Collections department. The good news was that there were some books that were previously unlisted, as well as some that Martin had been aware were missing. The bad news is that the books were damaged by water and rodents to such an extent that they had to be quarantined. The item of the greatest potential interest to this group, the volume of large format broadsides, some of which are coloured, is present and should be recoverable with only minor conservation work. Since the sad death of Roy Palmer he has been helping Pat Palmer to sort out his remaining papers and other items that have not already been placed in appropriate institutions. These include the original work for his many books and it has been agreed that they will be given to the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library. He has written some obituaries for Roy, which will be published in coming months.

**Doreen Henderson** commented that it was the first time she had heard conversation at this level and that she had found it very interesting.

**Emily Lyle**, who was to talk in the afternoon, said that she and Lucy MacRae had been working on a volume looking at Scott's border ballads and what lay behind them. Lucy had done her PhD in that area.

**Steve Gardham** is continuing his work on looking at the forgery of ballads in the Nineteenth Century. He is also digitising recordings made at Hull folk clubs which is to go into the local archive. He talked about the tentative plans for the third volume from Frank Purslow's collection. The notes for this will include information about the singers in more detail.

### **Forum Focus Session**

The afternoon session included five talks in a session chaired by Vic Gammon which, to mark the two hundredth anniversary of Napoleon Bonaparte's '100 Days', looked at the way in which he, and the period, were reflected in song. The talks were recorded and the recordings have been made available to members, through DropBox for a limited period. For details on how to access them, contact the TSF Secretary.

### **Napoleon in song: A survey of Napoleonic songs, 1793 to 1841, *Peter Wood***

Peter Wood has analysed the hundreds of songs that appeared in broadsides during the Revolutionary Wars (1793-1802) and looked at the rate of their survival in the tradition. He has found that very few of the songs appeared in later printed and oral collections. Of the 158 songs that he looked at, only 16 were recovered from the tradition. A large proportion of the total were propaganda, produced with government encouragement. Others never achieved the necessary popularity and resonance with popular sentiment. Many of those that did endure were written in the years after Waterloo. Though many of the broadsides entered the Irish tradition, nearly all were actually written in England. Only 'The Green Linnet' can be identified as being of truly Irish origin. One of the songs most popular in the revival of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century has been 'The Plains of Waterloo'. This is an example of the distortion caused by popular uptake of a good song, since, of

the 15 versions recovered, 14 were heard in Canada, and it is one particular Canadian version that is now regularly sung.

### **First as farce, then as tragedy: The Hundred Days in British Song, Oskar Cox Jensen**

In 1817, Robert Shorter was outraged by the lighthearted treatment of the recent wars in popular culture and wrote a song for the penny radical journal, *Sherwin's Political Register*, 'On Seeing in a List of New Music, *The Waterloo Waltz*'. Oskar took us through a number of examples of the metropolitan topical songs performed on the London stages. Some of these songs also appeared on broadsides as light satire, boozy triumphalism, and high farce. A number of them were pirated and parodied – the laws of copyright being very loose at that time. He gave a number of examples of the writers who contributed at different levels to this body of songs. He spoke of ordinary people in later years being sympathetic to Napoleon because, like many ordinary people, he was transported to a foreign land. In response to a question, he commented that singing in the Prussian army tended to be more sophisticated – singing on the march in four part harmony, for example. The words of one of the best-known songs, 'Reiterlied', were written by Schiller. The French, though, have no songs (or broadsides) about Napoleon.

### **Scotch Sodgers true, Napoleonic songs in the Grieg-Duncan Collection, Emily Lyle**

Emily's title is taken from a song called 'The Battle of Waterloo' and begins with the phrase 'Scotch sodgers true' which she has taken as a title for the talk. The song came from the Greig-Duncan collection. Her talk focused on this song, which is a fragment taken down from Mrs Petrie who got it from someone who learned it at the time of the battle. The words appeared in a chapbook, published in by James Fraser of Stirling between 1816-1820. Emily, together with Lucy MacCrae, has reconstructed the song from the published version. Lucy sang the song, slightly edited and probably for the first time since the Nineteenth Century. She went on to talk about other Scottish songs in the genre.

### **Boney went a'cruisin: Napoleon Bonaparte and the *Bellerophon*, Martin Graebe**

Martin's talk also focused on a single song, in this case a broadside 'Napoleon Buonaparte's exile to St Helena', published by Joseph Pannell of Liverpool. This is a reworking of the song 'William and Susan', written around 1720 by John Gay and set to music by Richard Leveridge. The broadside tells of the surrender of Napoleon to Captain Maitland of *HMS Bellerophon* off Rochefort. Martin talked about the twenty days that Bonaparte spent on board the ship before the government, concerned by the response of the English public to his presence, and the huge numbers that flocked to catch a glimpse of him in Plymouth harbour, decided to expedite his onward journey into exile on St. Helena.

### **'The Burial of Sir John Moore at Corunna', Andrew Rouse**

Andrew talked about the famous poem written by Charles Wolfe, and its background. Wolfe was an Anglo-Irish cleric who came across the story of Moore's death and burial and wrote the poem based on the story. Andy described the way in which the poem metamorphosed in print. It entered the oral tradition and the text, probably obtained orally, was written down by the Sussex shepherd, Michael Blann. He played a recording of the song based on Blann's version. He also told us a little about the way the battle is remembered in Corunna today. The French, apparently, think that they won the

battle, the English think they did, and the Spanish consider it a draw. Lord Byron considered the poem to be the greatest written in the English language.

The meeting concluded with a session of songs.

### **Thanks**

We are grateful to Newcastle University for making the facilities for the meeting available, to Vic Gammon and Peter Wood for organising the meeting and to Sheila Gammon and Shan Graebe for organising the refreshments.

Martin Graebe

5 July 2015