



Traditional Song Forum

Traditional Song Forum Meeting, 21 Jun 2014

Held at the University of Sheffield

This meeting was held in the Humanities Research Institute of the University of Sheffield, and was arranged for us by Kate Smith and Fay Hield, with the help of Steve Gardham. Despite a number of competing attractions, 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 Kate Smith and Fay Hield for their work in organising the meeting.

TSF business

1 Finance

Doc Rowe, our treasurer was unable to be present but reported that our bank balance is holding around a fairly steady level, currently £1,159. We have been fortunate recently that, as in the case of the meeting in Sheffield, our hosts have kindly met most of the costs.

2 Publication

There was some discussion about the potential use of our funds for other purposes, such as publication of songs (one of the declared purposes of the Traditional Song Forum). At the last meeting the case of Frank Purslow's second song-book, *The Wanton Seed*, was mentioned. Martin Graebe had, as requested at the meeting, written to Katy Spicer asking about the progress with republishing the book and had been advised that future plans for publication were still under consideration. It was suggested that TSF might be able to offer some financial help, perhaps through crowd-funding, and that some TSF members would be willing to assist with the completion of the project. Martin will write to Katy Spicer again.

Two new books have been published recently, that were drawn to the attention of the meeting. David Atkinson and Steve Roud have edited *Street Ballads in Nineteenth Century Britain, Ireland, and North America*, published by Ashgate. The cover price is £70 (£63 if bought on-line) and anyone wishing to purchase the book may like to get in touch with David or Steve, who may be able to obtain a discount for them.

The second book is David Atkinson's *The Anglo-Scottish Ballad and its Imaginary Contexts*. This has been published by OpenBook Publishers and, as well as being available in soft or hardback formats (print on demand) can be accessed free of charge on www.openbookpublishers.com.

3 Future meetings

The next meeting of the Traditional Song Forum will be held in Kings Lynn, on 11 October 2014. There will be a particular focus on the work of Ralph Vaughan Williams in the area and there will be a full programme of supporting events.

On 15 November there will be a session to be held at Cecil Sharp House, jointly with EFDSS, 'Exploring the Digital Archive'. This will be a practical, hands-on session designed to guide researchers and enthusiasts through the wealth of folk song material available on-line in the Full English database and in other places.

Next year's Broadside Day will be held on 21 Feb 2015. More details will be available nearer the time.

Networking Session

Martin Graebe has been delving into the minutiae of the publication history of Baring-Gould's song book *Songs of the West*. Otherwise, he is trying to stay focused on writing his book on Baring-Gould.

Mark Kerrison is a new member who has recently discovered folk music and particularly that of Derbyshire. He has started to explore sources of songs – listening and reading as much as possible. He is totally fascinated by the quantity and variety of English song – and particularly by variation. A number of examples of songs were discussed and the issue of the reliability of Mudcat – and its value – were raised again.

Ruairidh Greig enjoyed helping out as the local speaker at the 'Full English' Study Day in Lincoln, which was a great success. A number of useful contacts were made and a monthly afternoon singing session has been set up at the Museum of Lincolnshire Life. Has been doing text and tune transcriptions of the Grainger material for the FE website and would be keen to share experiences with others doing the same. Derek Schofield reported that there is still a backlog of items to go up on the website. The provision of text transcriptions is going ahead well, but there are no music transcriptions on the site as yet. Ruairidh has also reviewed the broadsides printed in Lincolnshire for the Broadside Index – including the 22-volume collection in Lincoln Central Library (which has very little song material in it). He has recently been visited by Prof Bob Thompson who has given Ruairidh his own copy of Grainger's hectograph manuscript, which he is going to pass on to the North-East Lincolnshire Archive. Martin Graebe asked Ruairidh whether he had heard what was happening with Brian Dawson's Lincolnshire material and recordings. Ruairidh replied that there had been some discussion at Brian's funeral, and that his nephew was hoping to get the material together for expert examination, but that he had not heard anything more. Brian himself was always very dismissive of his collection and said the he only had scraps and a few recordings. Derek has also had some contact with the nephew.

Kate Smith has been responsible for organising the meeting. She is shortly going to be taking on the role of General Manager for the Sheffield based '[Soundpost](#)' organisation, organising events and projects in the future.

Fay Hield has now got a proper contract for a permanent teaching post at the University (applause!). She has recently contributed to two books. First, one that Ian Russell has edited, *Taking Part in Music* in which her chapter is about how people learn songs and take part in singing sessions, and another part about social networks. Also working on a book on transmitting musical heritage, involving a number of different cultures. Her teaching is mostly general ethnomusicology, but she has just been put in charge of the Masters in Music management course and has been designing a distance learning masters course in Traditional Music of the British Isles. This starts in September – spread the word. In respect of performance, the 'Full English' performances and CD have worked

very well. Will continue touring with it again next year. Encouraging people to engage with the 'Full English archive is a major objective of their performance.

Steve Gardham has continued work on the creation of a local record of folk activity in Hull over the last few decades, which has now gone to the Hull Archive. Has been involved in cataloguing broadsides for the Full English and for the Broadside printers index. He noted that the Kidson collection has a lot of material from the 1880s and 90s, because he was collecting while they were being printed. Took part in the Full English Study Day in Leeds, which was an interesting day.

Fred McCormick had nothing to report – he is having a very lazy retirement and has started singing again, recalling songs from his past.

Derek Schofield has just completed a book about the Towersey Folk Festival, celebrating its 50th year – he is not going to do another festival history book! He is still editing English Dance and Song for the EFDSS, but said that he doesn't get a lot of feedback or letters for publication. It was suggested that he include something about TSF meetings or a feature about SF. There was an interesting discussion about reviews and the fact that we like to records what is good about them, with the result that bad reviews are rare. Derek said that there are a number of CDs received that don't get reviewed. He is very interested in the history of the 'Revival' and keen to talk about people who were involved in the early days. As ever, it is important to record as much as possible before it is too late.

Bob Askew is now working with Anna Baldwin and Annie Winter as 'Amsher', performing some of the songs that have been collected in Hampshire and talking about the people and places. They have been booked for several major festivals this year. Their most recent project has looked at the songs Gardiner collected from women, particularly Sarah Goodyear who introduced him to several other woman singers. He is also continuing to host ballad chats every month at Cecil Sharp House – details on EFDSS website.

Richard Mellish said he was just at the meeting to lurk and learn.

Paul Garrard is visiting for the first time and was there to listen. He discovered ballads while he was studying at the University of Bangor. He is particularly interested in maritime songs and shanties and he has played in Morris sides. Now he has retired he plans to get back into singing more.

James MacDonald is based in London, though he was born in Wexford. Most of his work has been on Irish song and he has a particular interest of the songs of the 1798 Rebellion – a genre of its own. He is a founder member of the Song Collectors Collective and would talk about that in the afternoon session.

Brian Peters gave a paper on 'The Wild Rover' at the EFDSS Conference, which he is now re-writing for the Folk Music Journal – which is hard work! Work on the song is still continuing, however and he is now looking at an Australian connection. He and Jeff Davis have got a grant from the Country Dance and Song Society in the USA to support further work of Cecil Sharp's collecting in Appalachia. They hope that this will enable them to perform the songs in some of the places where they were collected. They are also hoping to get the show based on the New Penguin Book up and running again, though without Bella Hardy.

Forum Focus Session

The afternoon session included four talks, followed by a discussion, chaired by Steve Gardham, on the work and ballads of Francis James Child. The talks were recorded and the recordings have been made available to members, through DropBox for a limited period. Details on how to access them have been given in a message to signed up TSF members.

English Child Ballads from the Seventeenth Century, *Steve Gardham*

Steve followed up his presentation of well-known folk songs that first appeared in print in the seventeenth century, that he gave at the December TSF meeting, held in London, and at the last Broadside Day. In this session he presented copies of English Child Ballads that first appeared in that century, some in unique copies and others widely printed, and talked about his ideas on their origins.

Songs in Seasonal House-Visiting Customs in the Sheffield Area, *Ruairidh Greig*

Ruairidh Greig talked about the work he did during his years in South Yorkshire as a volunteer with the University of Sheffield's Survey of Language and Folklore (later CECTAL and NATCECT) and as a part-time postgraduate researcher in the 1970s. The survey involved a lot of legwork as well as questionnaires, and was designed around a geographical grid to study their distribution. The Sheffield area has an unusually rich tradition of seasonal house-visiting customs and Ruairidh recorded many examples of these during the project. He talked about a number of these songs and customs, and background information to them.

A Devonshire Man goes North: Sabine Baring-Gould's quest for folklore in Yorkshire, *Martin Graebe*

Sabine Baring-Gould was the first of the large scale collectors of folk songs in England and our understanding of the importance of his collection of songs from Devon and Cornwall has been enhanced by new discoveries in recent years. Though his major quest for folk song began in Devon in 1888, it is becoming clear that his interest in English folklore, tales and song was already present when he moved to Yorkshire as a curate in 1864. While he was living in Yorkshire, from May 1864 to March 1871, he published a number of items, including stories, riddles and songs. Until recently little was known about when and from whom he had collected the items that he published. A previously unknown personal journal discovered in the autumn of 2009 throws new light on this early work and on the riddles, songs and stories that he heard from Yorkshire mill-girls and others. Based on this, and other documents, Martin Graebe has been able to fill in more of the detail about Baring-Gould's discoveries in the North and their influence on his future work in the South-West.

Song Collectors of the Future, *James McDonald*

James McDonald gave an overview of the first two years of the activities of the Song Collectors Collective (SCC); a group of song collecting enthusiasts that was established in 2012 in London with an aim to record traditional singers to help conserve traditional singing and songs. With financial support from the Arts Council of Ireland, recording trips have been made to Ireland to record Irish Traveller singers and to create a website to share these recordings and others that have since been donated to them. This [online archive](#) now has hundreds of recordings of songs and interviews from 'tradition bearers' from many different backgrounds from Britain, Ireland and beyond.

After the SCC's first conference in January 2013, it became apparent that many other people were keen to make field trips to record songs, but didn't know where to start. Funding from Creative Works London allowed SCC to collaborate with the Endangered Languages Archive at SOAS University to run the 'Song Catchers' programme. This has supported twenty-three aspiring song collectors through a 5-week fieldwork project with singers from various religious and ethnic backgrounds from Chassidic Jewish singers in Stamford Hill, London to Xhosa 'marking' ceremonial songs in South Africa.

These developments have raised many debates around aspects of best practice for modern day song collecting, validity of certain songs and singers, and the developing remit and identity of the Song Collectors Collective. They recognise the dangers of being pigeon-holed as collectors of gipsy songs, and are seeking to broaden their demographic as time goes on.

James described some of the material found and gave an example of how one unique ballad, Lord Courtown, was shared with the current Earl of Courtown and his family.

Francis James Child and his Ballads: Panel Discussion

The panel for this discussion included Julia Bishop, Brian Peters, and Steve Gardham, who led the discussion. Steve believes that Child became disillusioned towards the end of the project, largely because he had doubts about the genuineness of much of the material that he had to include. He believes that the publishers put pressure on him to moderate his comments on the ballads and because he felt it necessary to include material that might be genuine, without the evidence to confirm its eligibility. The discussion proceeded from here – and, at times – got quite heated.

Thanks:

Thanks to Kate Smith and Fay Hield for organising the meeting and to the University of Sheffield for their support for the event. Thanks also to all the speakers for their interesting and informative presentations, which were greatly enjoyed by those present, and to those who took part in the discussion.

Martin Graebe

17 July 2014