



Traditional Song Forum

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Held at Lansdown Hall, Stroud

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The town of Stroud in Gloucestershire hosted the meeting of the Traditional Song Forum meeting on 24 September. The meeting took place during the Stroud Folk Weekend and there were a number of other events where members had an opportunity to see or hear music and dance. The meeting was also the occasion for the first Roy Palmer Lecture, given by TSF Chairman, Steve Roud. The audience numbers grew to more than 60 people during the day.

Welcome

Steve Roud welcomed the TSF members and guests who attended the morning session which opened with a short business meeting before we embarked on our customary discussion of current projects and possibilities.

TSF business

1 Future meetings

We now have a full list of meetings, the next being in Liverpool on 19th November. The 2017 Broadside Day will be held in Oxford on 25 February and this will be followed by a meeting in Sussex on 25 March. Plans are being laid for a meeting in Sheffield on 16 September, which will be the occasion for the second Roy Palmer Lecture. We are hoping to open 2018 with a meeting in London on a date in January 2018.

2 Finance

Doc Rowe reported that we currently have £1,075 in the TSF account. It is not seen to be necessary to increase the subscription at present.

The costs of the Stroud meeting will be minimal, as the hall hire is covered by the Roy Palmer Lecture funding.

3 Election of officers

Being in the unusual position of having the three elected officers of the Forum at the meeting they offered themselves for re-election. All were willing to continue to serve and were re-elected unanimously.

It was suggested that we might consider the appointment of a membership secretary. That idea will be given some consideration.

4 Other matters

Martin Graebe reported that, following growing difficulty with the current website host he is looking at moving the website to a new provider. Following advice from Steve Rowley, he is looking at implementing a new version in the next few months.

Following the Hull meeting, a Facebook group was set up for the Traditional Song Forum. This is attracting a modest number of visits but, so far, not many contributions.

5 The Roy Palmer Lecture

Martin Graebe explained that the 'Roy Palmer Lecture' had been set up as a separate entity, with funding provided which is intended to sustain a series of lectures for at least ten years in memory of Roy. This funding is intended to cover venue costs and a modest payment for the speakers. At present the venture is run by Martin and Shan Graebe, but the intention is that, once the event is established, a small steering group will be formed to manage the lecture series into the future. While it is likely that future lectures will take place at TSF events, it may be desirable, in the future, to arrange the lecture at a meeting or conference of another group with appropriate objectives.

Networking Session

Carol Davies delivered a short report on the 'Single Gloucester' project, which had successfully created the Gloucester Traditions (GlosTrad) website – www.glostrad.com. This aims to make all the songs and tunes collected in Gloucestershire available freely and in various formats to anyone, anywhere. There are currently 1272 items on the website, of which 273 are songs. There is still a little more work to be done but consideration has been given to ensuring the sustainability of the resource after the project has finished. The project team are willing to offer advice to others undertaking similar work.

David Atkinson has been trying to make sense of the Eighteenth Century, not entirely successfully. He had attended a number of conferences. The Ballad Conference in Limerick was very good and focused on the Easter 1916 rebellion – not always a comfortable experience for the British delegates but nonetheless enjoyable. The EFDSS Appalachian Conference in London was also very good. It is hoped that there would be a publication from it in the future. He is currently working on the next issue of the journal, which is proving difficult. There was a discussion about the future of the Journal, the place of which is harder to understand for an organisation whose focus is on performance and the folk arts. Members were encouraged to take every opportunity to remind EFDSS of the value of the Folk Music Journal.

Paul Burgess introduced himself but had no recent work to report.

Gwilym Davies had nothing to add to what Carol had said earlier, and would be talking in the afternoon.

Andy Turner doesn't do research at present, but might when he is older. He currently sings with Magpie Lane. They will be playing for the re-opening of the Museum of English Rural Life in October. Magpie Lane, with Headington Morris, are also involved in a recreation of a concert held in Oxford in 1897 as part of the celebration of the centenary of Percy Manning, which is being organised by Mike Heaney.

Sue Allan Has now been working on her PhD ('Folk song in Cumbria: a distinct regional repertoire') for 8 years and claims to be able to procrastinate for England. The temptation is to write papers.

Lewis Jones has contributed transcriptions to the GlosTrad project and is presently checking cotillions for David Jacobs as well as continuing work on Lucy Broadwood's tunes. He has also been looking at folk song scales and finds it interesting that those from earlier times are so unlike those we are familiar with now. [This subsequently gave rise to an exchange on the Tradsong discussion group]. Steve Roud reported that next year's EFDSS conference will focus on tunes.

Matthew Edwards has been helping to organise the Liverpool meeting. He will be cataloguing the Liverpool broadside collection. He helped with the arrangements for Fred McCormick's collection after his death and many items have gone to Liverpool University and to VWML.

[This gave rise to another discussion about the difficulties of dealing with collections. Steve Roud said that for the less critical collections it is not a disaster if stuff goes to Oxfam as it then becomes available for a new generation to buy,]

Paul Marsh has been working with Steve Roud on assembling the Ken Stubbs collection. It is intended that this will become the first audio collection to be made available on the EFDSS/VWML website. Their approach has been to produce a package that will be ready for them to upload with little further effort. He has also digitised the Brian Matthews and Mervyn Plunkett collections as well as his own material collected over 40 years. These could become freely available in the future using the same template.

Bob Askew has been looking at the work of Grace Kimmins on children's songs and games in the 1890s. She was based at the Bermondsey settlement (London) where she founded the Guild of Play, which published a number of books written by her. She was known to Mary Neal and Cecil Sharp. She and her husband later founded the Chaily Heritage School in Sussex. Meanwhile Bob's interest Robin hood ballads continues unabated.

Derek Schofield is finding that, having given up editing English Dance and Song, his time is more fully occupied than ever before. He has written and talked about George Butterworth. He has, with Matthew Edwards, been pulling the programme for the Liverpool meeting together. In preparation for the meeting he became aware that the Anne Gilchrist collection still requires work to fully organise and catalogue.

Harry Langston is interested in Lancashire material – particularly the dialect poets, looking at the social context. He plays with groups in Bristol, working with local material. They are also doing bits of folk theatre and themed concerts.

Chris Langston knew Paul and Angela Carter when they were singing in Bristol in the 1960s and sang alongside Angela for several years. She has been asked to write things about it for various projects

associated with Angela Carter. She inherited some of Angela's manuscripts and other material from Paul Carter. She wrote a number of articles on folk song topics including Padstow May Day and Fred Jordan. She and Paul were recorded singing at Cheltenham Folk Club by Dennis Olding. There will be an exhibition in December.

Jill Pidd reported that she has been conducting interviews with people who were around the folk clubs in the 1960s, recoding their memories. She feels that there are a number of people who are making up their memories of the 1960s and would like to create a body of reliable evidence.

Doc Rowe has been working on a film about Fred Jordan – it is a large project and will be about 3 hours long. He has been given Arts Council funding for an exhibition in two years time. The archive is still a problem. He has produced a group of 700 recordings for the British Library

Peter Robson has continued his work on Thomas Hardy and folk songs, and has delivered several talks. Hardy quoted snatches of a number of songs in his books and it is often the case that you only understand how appropriate they are if you know the song – which most of his readers wouldn't have.

Martin Graebe reported that the first draft of his book about Sabine Baring-Gould and his folk song collection has been completed. Much more still to do, but it is on the way.

Steve Roud reported progress on the Sussex Traditions project. The group involved decided to obtain charity status and have a little HLF money. Their foundation project is to digitise and catalogue the Tony Wales collection. Other projects are also in progress. A test website is being developed and it is hoped that there will be something to look at when we meet in Sussex next March. Though the focus is on song at present, the intention is to include folklore and custom as well.

Notes from absent members:

Elaine Bradtke reports that she is currently working on the history of Morris tunes and their subsequent use as vehicles for songs. She says 'musicians are the ultimate recyclers!'

Forum Focus Session

Martin Graebe chaired the 'Forum Focus' session. The centrepiece of the afternoon was the first Roy Palmer Lecture, delivered by Steve Roud and called 'English Folk Song: some further conclusions'. The lecture looked at some of the issues of the definition of folk song and giving the key advice 'it's not its origin that makes a folk song – it's what the folk do with it. It was a talk with many interesting points in it and I hope to be able to post a recording of it shortly

There were three other presentations during the afternoon.

Gloucestershire Folk and Their Songs – Gwilym Davies

Gwilym Davies talked about the songs of Gloucestershire and the collectors who have sought them over the last 100 years. He played a number of examples, illustrating the history (and the improving quality) of recording down the years.

No News! – Ken Langsbury

Ken Langsbury shared some of his memories of growing up in Gloucestershire, the people he met and some of the songs that he learned. He sang some examples and told us some stories, including a nice Cantefable for which he brought hi daughter, Kate, onto the stage.

I Beg your Leave, Kind Gentlemen ... and Ladies of Renown – Doc Rowe

Doc Rowe took us on a journey through his collection of calendar customs, using recordings, photographs and video to illustrate the place of folk song in folk events.

Thanks

The meeting was held during the Stroud Folk Weekend and several members attended other events while they were visiting the town. We are grateful to John Shorter and Brad McEwen for fitting us into their programme.

Martin Graebe

19 October 2016