



Traditional Song Forum Meeting, 10th October 2009 held at Cecil Sharp House

Meeting Report

Chair: Steve Roud

This meeting was held in association with the EFDSS and the afternoon session was focused on the broadside ballad, with presentations from Steve Roud, Roy Palmer and Steve Gardham. Before and during the meeting there was a display of ballads from the Sharp and Vaughan Williams collections in the VWML and, also, from the private collections of Steve Roud and Steve Gardham.

TSF Business

Meetings for 2010 – the first meeting for 2010 has been agreed and will take place on 6th March in Newcastle, as guests, once again, of the University. Further details will be made available in advance. Martin Graebe reported that he has been in contact with Nicholas Carolan of the Irish Traditional Music Archive in Dublin and that it has been agreed in principle that we should arrange a meeting in Dublin. It is also possible that the An Goinn Singers Club will help with the event. We have agreement in principle for some speakers and are now looking at possible arrangements for the meeting. We will try to find ways to keep costs as low as possible and the aim is to create a weekend focused on aspects of Irish song in the English language. We will shortly be asking members whether they would be interested in attending to gauge likely numbers. Several people present at the meeting indicated that they would like to attend.

Folk Studies – Steve Roud reported on an initiative that was being looked at in association with EFDSS to run a series of evening classes on the basics of folk song, targeted at newcomers to the genre. Funding for the first series is being discussed and, if the series is successful, it will be rolled out to other locations, including, possibly, folk festivals. There was general support for this idea among the group

James Hepburn – Steve Roud showed the meeting a draft text for a book by James Hepburn called 'Scattered Leaves' which was about the origins of Broadside ballads but for which he had not been able to find a publisher. He asked the meeting for suggestions on ways of publishing it. There is also another book called 'The Bawdy Muse' which is in the same position. Both books are text only and it is unlikely that music could be provided. After some discussion it was agreed that 'print on demand' was likely to be the most appropriate route.

Finances – Doc Rowe reported that our account at present held £1096.80. Expenses have been low over the last year and most members have now paid their subscriptions for the year.

Member's Activities

The meeting continued with the usual review of recent activity by those present. The Chairman started by reading a message from **Derek Schofield**, who was not able to be present. He said:

"I have now taken early retirement. In addition to continuing to edit English Dance & Song, I am taking on an increased role with EFDSS publications – to provide some overall management of projects, as well as 'product champion' and ensuring that authors etc have an editor. Publications have been a bit quiet recently. Among the publications that we are currently concentrating on, there's the second in the Marrow Bones series – The Wanton Seed – which has of course been delayed because of the sad death of Malcolm Douglas. I am currently discussing the project with Steves Roud and Gardham and Paul Sartin, plus of course Malcolm Taylor. There is also the much-delayed Bert Lloyd biography, which Malcolm Taylor is continuing to manage at the moment. It remains to be seen about subsequent publications. Certainly, there needs to be a more demand-led approach to publications, greater consideration of the different levels of interest, and better marketing. Watch this space!"

Martin Graebe told the meeting that Wren Music's 'Devon Tradition Project' had now kicked off with funding from the Heritage Lottery. A key part of the project was to digitise the Baring-Gould song manuscripts and place them online. It had been recognised that the 'Take Six' project was a great model for this kind of exercise and, following recent discussions, it is planned that the project team will work with EFDSS to place the Baring-Gould material alongside 'Take Six'. The other key elements of the project are the digitization of Paul Wilson's collection of recordings made in Devon from the 1970s and to create teaching materials that will use the materials in schools in the west of England. Meanwhile his own work on Baring-Gould's life and work continues.

Shan Graebe is also, of course, working with the Baring-Gould manuscripts and transcription of the songs in the Personal Copy manuscript continues. Transcription of all variants in Volume 1 is now complete and good progress has been made with Volume 2. She has also transcribed a selection of children's songs from the collection and this selection will be placed onto the 'Songs of the West' website (www.sbgsongs.org) in the near future.

Bob Patten is interested in the fiddler, Claudy Phillips. He also mentioned that Bonhams had recently auctioned a significant part of the Enys collection of books on Cornwall at Oxford on April 7th. This included a book of 90 broadsides from Cornish printers as well as other ephemera. Since the collection went for £5880 he didn't take it home with him – but it looked interesting, with some unfamiliar names among the printers.

Peter Robson is working on a paper about Hardy and ghosts. He is also working on tapes of Frank Elliott singing

George Frampton is working on a collection of carols from Kent. His illness slowed things down a bit this year but he did, once again, run the sessions in the Volunteer at the Sidmouth Festival, though the talks were delegated. He is building a collection of Francis Day and Hunter and similar music hall and variety albums.

Lewis Jones is creating an e-text of the preface to Isaac Watts hymn collection which was omitted when the Project Gutenberg version was first created. He has also been examining "Early English Books Online" where he has found a number of early English Broad-sides with music – though these are hard to read. The 18th Century collection has also yielded a number of items, particularly West gallery music. He will shortly be losing his 'Ferret' website on Geocities and needs to decide whether to replace it.

Mike Tristram is inhibited by the day job but finds time to research the Boxgrove Tipteerers. He is putting together a community of local singers (in Sussex) to re-create the performances of the songs.

Most of **Dave Eyre's** time is now going to his weekly radio programme. He also talked about the revival of the Harvest sing-song in the Sheffield area and passed round a newspaper article about it.

Paul Cowdell is now midway through his PhD on aspects of ghosts. He has, meanwhile, done some recording of the emergent Irish singer Thomas McCarthy, who will shortly be doing a formal recording with John Howson. His article on folk songs about cannibalism in British folk song has now been re-vamped as a talk.

Frankie Armstrong said that, though she is not doing research on folk song herself, she is extremely grateful to those who do. She is still passionately devoted to the performance of songs and ballads from the British traditions.

Dave Eckersley will shortly be publishing a new book by Roy Palmer. He talked about the high cost of reproducing a 'written' song in a collection like this, referring to the example of a song by Cyril Tawney for which Music Sales hold the rights, for which they wanted hundreds of pounds.

The next issue of the Folk Music Journal is currently pre-occupying **David Atkinson**. He is also working on the Carpenter collection and hopes, eventually, to get back to his work on ballads. This year's Ballad Conference in Minsk was interesting, since it is still closer than much of Eastern Europe to an old-style communist regime. One of his abiding memories is of the women clipping the yew hedge outside the venue with hand shears. He is working on a number of publications including one on place-names in ballads.

Elaine Bradtke is also working on the Carpenter project. Marrying the recordings to the texts is proving more problematic than expected since they do not always coincide. She has also worked on the Singing London book project with the ubiquitous Sam Lee.

Bob Askew continues to work on George Gardiner's Hampshire collection. He is surprised to discover the extent to which his work has been forgotten within the county. Recent work has included research on the woman singers of Axford for the 'Axford 5' CD and concert series. There is now a group meeting regularly to talk about Hampshire song. One of this group has recently discovered a book of songs collected in the Isle of Wight. Bob has also created a display about Gardiner and local singers in Fareham public library which, he hopes, will attract responses from descendants of the singers. He is also helping Yvette Staelens and Chris Bearman produce the Hampshire Folk Map, scheduled to be published in January.

Malcolm Taylor reported that there are still some items from the Gilchrist collection to be put onto the Take Six website but that the project has been a great success. He has recently been in discussion with Clare College and is hoping that it will prove possible to put the Sharp manuscripts online as well. In the future it might be possible to put other manuscript collections (such as Broadwood and Carey) online. He also hopes that it will prove possible to put Sharp's diaries online in time for the 150th anniversary of his birth. Otherwise plans for the Library include a new, fully searchable catalogue. Malcolm will have been with the VWML for 30 years On 10th December – and feels that this is 'our time', when a number of things that seemed impossible not long ago have now become tangible possibilities.

Paul Marsh is continuing his work with the 'Forest Tracks' CD label and with the website 'Hampshire Voices'. He is trying, with that site, link material from a number of other sites and provide a portal that enables people to quickly find material relevant to Hampshire folk song. An article for the local paper on the Hampshire Folk map project has raised the profile and brought in some new information and contacts but there is still a shortage of photographs. The Ken Stubbs collection is now being digitised. He is also receiving interesting tapes from various sources. He recently received a new tape of Harry Cox and will be reviewing it together with other material he has to see if a new CD might be possible.

Doc Rowe is trying to find a new home for his archive rather nearer to home than it is at present. He has been involved in a project with Children in Rotherhithe with EFDSS. He has recently been involved in editing a compilation of films celebrating some of the singers and musicians who have recently passed on. He plans to make this available on DVD.

Steve Gardham reported that the first phase of the Yorkshire Garland project is now complete. Further material, including some more modern material will be added in the near future. His review of the Child ballads continues and can be seen on Folkopedia. He has, so far, done about 80. He is working on the notes for the re-issue of 'The Wanton Seed'. Unfortunately, Malcolm Douglas had not made as much progress as had been thought and it has been necessary to start, virtually, from scratch. He reported that EFDSS is committed to completing the series of re-issues of the Purslow series.

Where did the Oral Tradition get its Songs?

This informal seminar on the printed sources of traditional and popular song in Britain from the 18th to 20th century was organised in conjunction with EFDSS. A display of broadsides, chapbooks, garlands, songsters, sheet music, and other printed materials was put on to support the talks given by the experts.

Steve Roud

Before 1890, in order to learn a song, you had to be in the presence of the singer or to be able to access it in print. Broadsides provided early collectors with evidence of date for a song and also enabled them to repair songs that had been 'sung to pieces.' There was, in the C19th, the notion of a 'pure folk tradition' uncorrupted by broadsides. Now it is realised that broadsides that there is no doubt that broadsides influenced the tradition – the only question is 'how much?'

Steve proposed the following spectrum of publications:

Broadside	Chapbook	Booklet	Paperback Songster	Hardback Songster	'Universal Songster', Sheet Music
Rarely have music					Often have music
CHEAP					EXPENSIVE
Jobbing printer					Specialised printer
'Working Class'					Moneyed People or Piano Playing Class

For purchasers of printed songs it would be relatively easy to find someone to read the words. Finding someone who could read the music would be more challenging. Village shops would often sell chapbooks – stories as well as songs. The quantity of material produced suggests a formidable appetite for songs.

There are 4942 songs in the 'Universal Songster' – 3553 (73%) have known authors. Only about 3% have been collected (criterion being that they have Roud Numbers,) so we can say they didn't last in the oral tradition. Similarly in '2000 Songs' the proportion is 4%. But in the Madden collection 28% have Roud Numbers – you could say that songs that have been collected were 7 times more likely to have been printed on broadside. Does this mean that broadside printers had a better idea of what would 'take' with the working classes.

The notion of communal authorship can now be considered dead. 99% of songs were created by one or two people. Songs sung in the pleasure gardens by professional were particularly likely to go to print. Printing was the first stage in transmission in the majority of cases. C17th and C18th broadsides would identify the name of the tune. Very few C19th broadsides identify the tune. The tunes were more likely to be passed on orally.

In the subsequent discussion Bob Patten reminded the meeting of his comments at the last meeting on the strong relationship between printers and the wassail tradition in the South-West.

Hindley suggested that Pitts sent people out to 'collect' songs in the country. There is no real evidence of this.

The market was differentiated by technology – the lower end of the market being the domain of the jobbing printer, while sheet music required engraving and specialized printing techniques.

Roy Palmer

Roy started by playing Ron Copper's version of 'The Tradesman's Complaint' which was virtually identical with the broadside printed between 1815 – 1819, collected as 'Hard Times in Old England'. He was particularly proud that he had, at the age of 77½, burnt his first CD. Despite Francis Child's disdain for broadsides, 1 in 3 of the prime versions of the ballads in his collection were taken from stall copies. Baring-Gould frequently mentions broadsides and their printers. Baring-Gould referred a lot to Garlands – such as 'The Mountain of Hair Garland' (Roy's favourite name). Roy gave an example of 'The Drum Major', collected by Baring-Gould from John Peake of Liskeard and published in 'A Garland of Country Song' in 1894. Though Baring-Gould did not give all of the original words in his published version his notes record the words as he collected them from and two variants; a broadside and the version from 'The Mountain of Hair Garland.' including broadsides. Interestingly the collected version is longer than the printed version.

Roy went on to follow the development of 'The Keeper', as published and popularised by Cecil Sharp (based on the version he collected in Warwickshire) from 'The Huntsman's Delight' written by Joseph Martin to the tune of 'Among the leaves so green-a' and first printed in the 1680s. The song can be traced through to a garland and then a slip – with fewer verses and very similar to those collected in the late C19th.

The majority of broadside printers re-printed material from each other – this, he suggested, was because of the appeal of the familiar: the same reason that songs were sung repeatedly in families or in company.

Studying the output of individual printers can be very useful and the catalogues issued by them are a useful source of information. Among the songs listed by Pitts in his catalogue, for example, we can say that about 20% were among the titles collected after 1890. For Such, 40 years later, the figure is 18% (330 titles out of 1600) and for the Manchester printer T. Pearson the figure is 17%, demonstrating that the proportion was roughly similar for provincial printers. The catalogues show us the broadsides that didn't survive. Ford of Chesterfield inherited the business from his father, and he left behind a stock book which helps us understand the way in which his broadsides were printed and re-printed.

Many printers worked together in what Roly Brown has described as a 'nexus', selling the products from other printers. This helps explain why many ballads are so widespread. This was probably also a source of material for their own print-shop.

The Madden collection in, Cambridge, has a complete run of ballads from Harkness of Preston which is available on microfilm in the VVWML. Roy remembers visiting Cambridge many years ago and saw the originals of the broadsides. with the printers smudges and the 'bite' of the press – an experience that he remembers vividly. The stock numbers can be used to analyse the speed and quantity of output from his printing. Harkness didn't, unlike some of the Birmingham printers, produce any pornographic material – just bawdy.

The type of chorus such as 'derry down', torum rumpsey bumpsey, or 'whack-fal-the-diddle' are indications of a link to a traditional type of song. Both continuity and novelty. When newspapers urged readers to send in songs, such as the competition run by the West Sussex Gazette, then there is more heterogeneity than is seen in the collections of Sharp and his colleagues. Both Walter Pardon and George Dunn had songs from broadsides but hadn't themselves seen the print version. Roy had found it a salutary experience to hear that George Dunn's version of 'Nelson's Death' and later to realise that it was virtually identical to the broadside 'Nelson's death and Victory', a broadside printed by Kendrew of York at the time of the battle

In response to a question about the sort of men the printers were, Roy said that they were struggling small businessmen (and a few women) with a handful that were very successful. Their presses were usually inexpensive. Often they would buy second-hand type – explaining some of the oddities in the printing. Some had sidelines – circulating libraries, patent medicines etc. Some would, occasionally, slip in a political ballad that fitted their views, but mostly they were focused on earning a living. There are no instances of women starting a broadside printing business, but there are examples of women who took over a business when the owner gave up – Anne Ryle took over from Catnach and Mary Hodges took over from Pitts.

We don't know much about the people who went out singing and selling the ballads. They were generally at a pretty low level in society and they were not all renowned for their singing ability.

There is clearly a need for a study of (and a book about) the printers, sellers and singers.

Steve Gardham

Steve's talk is mostly about the 'top end' of the market – mainly printed sheet music. In his presentation he ran through a series of examples of ballads and songs in more-or-less chronological order. He has recently been working with John Earle on this material and acknowledged John's help.

Much of this material was art song, intended for performance in the pleasure gardens, theatres and drawing rooms. A lot of the stuff collected in the southern counties from singers like the Coppers – the flowery, rural stuff – originated from this group. 'Sweet Nightingale,' for example, comes from Thomas Arne's musical comedy 'Thomas and Sally,' from 1780. Another example is 'The Babes in the Wood' which derives from a printed song of 1795 based on the practice of Leicester Children parading models of the babes and singing a song, which was then rewritten. There is a 'spelling song', called 'Timothy', that is in 'Marrowbones' which derives from 'The Virgin Unmasked' by Henry Fielding of 1786.

Singing also took place in the supper rooms and song cellars and these were mainly middle and lower class venues. Some of them were pretty low. W.G. Ross sang in these venues with material like 'Sam Hall.'

Steve mentioned the book 'Tavern singing in early Victorian London: The diaries of Charles Rice for 1840 and 1850' by Laurence Senelick which is a good account of Rice's singing in different venues – sometimes several a night. One of these was 'Little Pigs' – the predecessor of 'The Old Sow' made famous by Albert Richardson.

One of Sam Cowell's songs 'O my love's dead' is an example of a burlesque song that derives from a C17th song 'Captain Digby's Farewell'. Some of the versions of ballads found in Child, for example, 'Giles Collins', are burlesques. 'The Two Sisters' was also a burlesque. By the beginning of the C19th burlesques were becoming very popular. 'Villikins and his Dinah' comes from this period as does 'Lord Lovell' and 'William Taylor'. Steve suggested that Barbara Allan may originally have been a theatre song that received the burlesque treatment – his clue being the punning use of 'Scarlet Town' instead of 'Reading'. Pepys heard a version which was probably the original theatre song. The burlesques were in turn parodied. 'All around my Hat' was a parody of the burlesque 'The Nobleman's Wedding'. 'Giles Scroggins Ghost' is a parody of 'Giles Collins' and 'The Vorkhouse Boy' of 'The Mistletoe Bough'.

In 1839-40 the Minstrel music arrived from the USA and had a big influence on what people sang. Songs like 'Buffalo Gals' arrived at this time. Minstrel songs form a large proportion of Steve's collection. They also turn up in the repertoire of singers after that date.

Music hall was the next phase. Lucy Broadwood included 'Woman's Resolution' in 'English County Songs' which is actually a music hall song aka 'Common Bill'. J.B. Geoghegan ran a music hall in Bolton and wrote (or stole) songs like '10,000 miles away', 'Down in a Coal Mine', 'John Barleycorn', and 'Glossop Road'. Steve is looking for confirmation that 'The Scarlet and the Blue' or 'The Merry Ploughboy' which Bert Lloyd said he saw in a shop in the Burlington Arcade.

By this time the songwriters are becoming well known – Arthur Lloyd ('Married to a Mermaid', 'Kafoozalum', etc.) Harry Clifton ('Watercress Girl', 'My Bonny lies over the ocean', 'My rattling Mare and I', 'Calico Printer's Clerk and so on.). He gave a number of other examples from this era.

He finished with the example of 'My Brother Sylvest'. This was actually recorded in the 1920s on a cylinder and based on an American song which was published in 1908 and probably came over during WWI. What has evolved is rather different to the original. It was necessary for Steve to bowdlerize the song because of its unacceptable racial content (though it was OK to parody Italians!).

In questions Steve said that he did not think there were many examples of people taking songs and rewriting them. The exception might be taking songs about, for example, sea battles and re-using some of the verses. As Steve Roud

pointed out, if there was no copyright, why wouldn't you. Entering a song at Stationers Hall for protection was an expensive process, available only to members of the Stationers Company. The Broadside printers didn't bother with this.

Printing was a skilled trade and many of the printers would have served a seven year apprenticeship. Some would break their apprenticeship by joining the army and then, after buying themselves out, setting up on their own. Indeed, many regiments had their own printing press, so they could learn the trade that way.

Steve Roud pointed out that many of the songs which may have come from burlesque sheet music, when they were picked up by traditional singers, were taken seriously again – eg 'Giles Collins', 'Lord Lovell'

Meeting Close

Thanks

Thanks to the three speakers - Steve Roud, Roy Palmer and Steve Gardham. Thanks also to Malcolm Taylor and the EFDSS for their support for the meeting and for providing the venue and the displays.

Recordings of the talks given:

You can get a CD-R containing recordings of the presentations by Steve Roud, Roy Palmer and Steve Gardham. This is not studio quality but you will be able to hear the full content of the talk. There is small charge of £1-50 to cover the cost on the disk and postage. Pay through PayPal to martin.graebe@btinternet.com or send a cheque to 100, Cheltenham Road, Gloucester, GL2 0LX. Non-UK residents please e-mail Martin for the appropriate price.

Next Meeting

The next TSF meeting will be held in Newcastle on Saturday 6th March 2010. Full details will be made available nearer the time.

Martin Graebe

21st October 2009