



Traditional Song Forum

Traditional Song Forum Meeting, 26th Nov 2011

Held at the Elphinstone Institute, Aberdeen



The Trumpeter, Fyvie Castle

The meeting was attended by more than 30 TSF members and guests during the course of the day. It was held at the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen and was chaired by Steve Roud.

TSF Business

Subscriptions for 2012 will become due on the 1st January – the amount remains at £8 and should be paid to the Treasurer, Doc Rowe. Cheques should be sent to him at 4, Vesage Court, Leather Lane, London, EC1N 7RE.

The next meeting will be another full day session on Broadsides and street literature held jointly with EFDSS. It will take place on Saturday 25 February 2012. There will be a charge for admission but this will be discounted for TSF members who have paid their 2012 subscription. Tickets can be bought via the EFDSS website.

Meetings for the remainder of 2012 are in the process of being arranged.

Networking Session

Steve Roud opened the session by talking about the growing interest in broadside ballads, evidenced by the popularity of the annual Broadside Day, referred to earlier. He also outlined plans for a new online database of printers of street literature which is now being developed and which will be hosted on the EFDSS website. At present the scope will include only English and Irish printers, but will be expanded to include those in Scotland at a later stage in its development.

Vic Gammon retired from his post at Newcastle University in July and is getting himself engaged in a number of projects that have been waiting for the moment. He has been working with Fellside on the re-release of their double CD of A.L. Lloyd, for which he has provided additional notes. Vic's comments on how good the recently published book on Francis Child by Mary Ellen Brown was prompted a discussion on honesty in reviews. He has been working with a group of singers and with Dave Harker to put together a set of 16 songs by George Ridley for release as a CD. The intention is to sing them in contemporary style and he has been able to find C19th arrangements for 10 of them. He is also lecturing and performing, including a recent visit to Hungary, and is continuing his work on street ballads. He hopes to get back to his Sussex material but, for now, is writing a small article which will shock the world by demonstrating that 'Blaydon Races' was based on an American song.

Robin Seifert is working in the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library where he is digitising some early dance manuals and dance manuscripts. These will be published online at some point in the future.

Heather Wood talked about her work with the Folk Music society of New York, promoting concerts and workshops in the city and state. Details can be found on www.folkmusicny.org.

Louisa Killen has had a couple of quiet years because of the changes that have been taking place in her life, but is now getting back to performing and actively looking for gigs.

Martin and Shan Graebe have now completed the checking of their transcription of the first volumes of the Baring-Gould 'Personal Copy' manuscript and this is now being checked before seeking a way to make it available on the internet. Martin is looking at some of the women collectors who visited Baring-Gould and contributed to his collection, and this will be the topic for one of the talks he is preparing for 2012. Marianne Mason is of particular interest and will be the subject of a more extensive article. While visiting the USA earlier in the year the transcript of Baring-Gould's letters to Francis Child was checked and completed. The plan is that an annotated version will be prepared for possible publication. In an attempt to escape being described as obsessive about Baring-Gould, Martin is working with American writer Bob Garofalo on Vaughan Williams 'Folk Song Suite'. Otherwise, they continue to give talks and concerts in interesting places.

Ian Russell had eye surgery nine days before the meeting which has limited his activities. But he has recently produced a new edition of the Sheffield carol book with a number of new carols. He is now working on a book of Derbyshire carols which will be ready for the 2012 carol festival in Sheffield. This promises to be an exciting event with the Glenrock Carollers from the USA being the principal guests. He talked about NAFCO – the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention – which will be held in Derry in 2012 and for which a number of tune books are now available. Another project is a CD of carols from Foolow in the Derbyshire Peaks called 'On this delightful morn' which will be available shortly. He is also working on the book of the last European Seminar on Ethnomusicology held in Aberdeen and called 'Taking Part'. Unfinished work includes an article on the song 'Green the Ganger' which was sung by Stanley Robertson and, he has discovered, was about the Glasgow Railway Murder of 1840 – a case that generated a huge amount of interest and led to Scotland's biggest ever public execution. Another article in progress is about the fishermen's flute bands that go about villages on the North-East coast of Scotland on Christmas Day and New Years Day, visiting people's houses. He was surprised and delighted that a film that he made with Barry Callaghan about the Derby Tup is included on the recent DVD compilation 'Here's a health to the Barley Mow'. One day he will complete a monograph of North-East Ethnology which, as well as song, will include crafts such as

boatbuilding and people's 'party pieces' – songs and recitations. He ended by saying that rumours of his retirement are greatly exaggerated.

Tracy Boyle has recently joined the Institute as a student and is feeling a bit overwhelmed. She is looking for a project.

Alison MacMorland talked at some length about the project that is now coming to an end, working with Elizabeth Stewart to capture her songs and her life story (and that of her family) and publish a book – *Up yon wide and lonely Glen*. This work started in 1999 and has been a labour of love. The book is now at proof stage and it will be published by the University of Mississippi in the new year. This was a bit of background to her presentation with Elizabeth in the afternoon. Geordie MacIntyre also contributed some insights in to the background to the project.

Irene Watts was also presenting about her work in the afternoon, but she took the opportunity to talk about a new working group in Aberdeen, whose aim is to get young people involved in traditional song. She asked for advice on the practicalities of doing this and thoughts on how to get funding for the project – particularly on preparing proposals for funding bodies.

Chris Wright is working at the Scottish School of Studies on the Kist O Riches project, which is making a store of Scottish recordings available online. There are about 10,00 tracks c.2500 songs which have been cross-referenced to the Roud Index and to the Greig-Duncan collection. Chris is particularly interested in the influence of broadside ballads on the tradition. Working with, for example, the Poets Box collection, he is looking at the occurrence of songs that have been found in the tradition on broadsides. He mentioned the need for cataloguing and Steve Roud said that the absence of a catalogue was a problem with many broadside collections. This prompted a discussion and the suggestion that there should be a standard set of fields for cataloguing broadside collections. Eyes were turned towards Steve when it was asked who could provide this standard. Chris continued his report by talking about his own work, collecting songs around Dundee. Some of these were 'new'. A few years ago he started work on the ballad 'Andrew Lammie' and he had intended to submit a paper on this work, but then Amanda MacLean published her paper on the ballad in the FMJ. Vic Gammon suggested that a follow-up was quite in order, if there was more information to be published. He is also working with Steve Byrne on Hamish Henderson's papers, putting them in order – there are about 10,00 letters to be looked through.

Steve Byrne also working on the 'Kist O Riches' presented a paper on the print influence on the tradition, and also the influence of the gramophone – many traditional singers were known to listen to records of songs and their influence included Harry Lauder, Jimmy Rogers and others as well as the oral tradition. An expanded article on this was published in 'Born on the Carrying Stream'. Next year he and Chris will be taking at taking songs from the Scottish School of Studies collection back into the communities from which they came and seeing if there are any remnants to be found in the succeeding generations. He is working on the fringes of a project between the Universities of Edinburgh and Mainz, aiming to produce a new edition of Scott's Minstrelsy, and which is being led by Sigrid Rieuwerts. He has put in a proposal for a piece of work looking at the influence of print on younger ballad singers and the singability of the songs. His group, Malinky, are looking at a project recording the songs of Mrs Brown. He is also working, under the auspices of the Hamish Henderson Archive Trust, on the papers of Hamish Henderson – 10,000 letters, 40 notebooks and diaries and a lot of other material.

Bob Askew continues to research and promote the life and work of George Gardiner. He has been spending time in Scotland, following up on singers identified by Frank Purslow as well as visiting Gardiner's grave. He was involved in a concert organised by Forest Tracks of Gardiner's songs supported by an exhibition of photographs of the singers. Has done a write-up on Gardiner's early days, describing the broad range of his interest in European music, prior to his work on folk song.

Tony Robertson is singing and telling stories, carrying on the tradition of his family, and particularly of his father, Stanley Robertson.

Lewis Jones talked about his work, in association with Simon Furey, transcribing songs from the George Butterworth collection and placing them on the Folkopedia website. He is also looking at broadsides and their tunes using 'Early English Books Online'. He has identified a number which have tunes attached but is finding reading the music is difficult. Vic Gammon said that much of the music in early ballads is gibberish. A problem for those who do not have academic status is the difficulty of getting access to this collection. Steve Roud suggested that 'Eighteenth Century Collections Online' (ECCO) is another good source for early ballads.

Mike Parsey is seeking help with finding songs from the Dundee and Angus area and will talk to Chris and Steve. He also wondered whether there is anyone working on the Lewis pentatonic songs. He was told that Margaret Stewart is doing that work

Peter Shephard said that he had found when he was collecting songs round Fife that many of the singers had visited the Poets Box in Dundee (which survived until the 1950s) to buy the songs. It would be nice to put together a selection of Poets Box songs with traditional versions. Belle Stuart was a customer of the Poets Box. Some singers would also go into the Poets Box and get them to print their songs.

Derek Schofield reported that English Dance and Song will revert to publishing songs next year, when the EFDS Centenary is past. He is, personally, interested in the songs of the 30s and 40s and the boundary between 'The Tradition' and 'The Revival'.

Forum Focus - The Scottish Connection

After talking briefly about the Elphinstone Institute and its work, Ian Russell introduced the afternoon session, with speakers talking about work they are doing as students or staff at the Institute or with connections to it.

The James Madison Carpenter Project – Tom McKean (on behalf of Julia Bishop)

Tom gave an update on progress with the Carpenter Project, on behalf of the project team and the team leader, Julia Bishop, who was not able to be present. The first part of the project has been to produce the catalogue for the collection. The work that is now in progress is to produce a critical edition of Carpenter's collection – not just the songs, folk plays etc. collected in the UK but also the important African-American material he collected. The collection contains many different records of each song – rough copies, fair copies, and pencilled notes – and the aim is to elucidate the

relationship between all these different versions. They have now completed the first two stages – editing the texts and melodies of the various items of the major genres (folk plays, ballads, and sea shanties). This process has been made more difficult because they were photographed in black and white, and many of the documents contained notes in different colours. Transcription of the songs is in progress and all 760 ballad texts have now been transcribed. They are currently bringing everything together for the book. An important part of this is the production of the head-notes which will aim to explain Carpenter's working on the songs and the way they fit into the broader picture of songs and singing. They are preparing for publication by the University Press of Mississippi, starting in the summer of 2014. The books will cover some parts of Carpenter's PhD thesis as well as the song collection. The Library of Congress are aiming to put the original materials on their website. They have recognised the importance of the Carpenter material and are giving it a high priority for publication online, using the Carpenter Project catalogue. The book launch will be supported by a programme of events that not only publicise it but also celebrate the support and participation that will have gone into.

***New Songs for the Bothy: Vernacular Performance and Creativity in the North-East of Scotland* - Ian Russell**

Ian's aim was to trace what has happened over the years in the development of bothy ballads and to link it to what is happening today. Bothy Ballads are a form of localised vernacular song that have been documented as early as 1820. They were songs sung by and often composed by the men who 'lived in' on the farms where they worked, mainly (though not exclusively) in the North-East of Scotland. This is an ongoing tradition and there is an annual championship for Bothy Ballad singers. Many of the songs are in local dialect – Doric. The songs dealt with a number of topics; favourite horses, social tensions or how awful the farm they worked on was. Another name was 'Corn kisters' - describing songs sung sitting on the corn-kist (storage chest in the stable). Ian played some examples of the songs and showed, and talked about, some slides illustrating some of the places and singers.

***Lullaby Research* - Irene Watt**

Irene Watt talked about her project which, though it did look at texts, was particularly concerned with the experience of singing a child to sleep – something that was very important to her personally. There has not been a great deal of academic study of the lullaby to date. She identified for us the earliest known lullaby – a text on papyrus from the 4th Century BC as well as examples of medieval lullabies, when there was something of a 'golden age' for lullabies. In the C17th there were published collections like *Tommy Thumb's Song Book* (By Nurse Lovechild) which started to conjoin lullabies with other children's songs. An examination of songs collected in more recent times shows that they were frequently (and, perhaps, unexpectedly) sung by men. She described some of the themes she had identified in lullabies and some of the difficulties of analysis. As with many studies of this kind, she had found the project more complex and much 'bigger' than expected. She is particularly interested in the 'hidden voices' and the coded messages in the songs by the women who sing them – sometimes expressing quite controversial themes in the privacy of the lullaby. The

lullaby is functionally important, with real benefits. They are a signal for sleep and express love and confidence – and establish positive attitudes for later life. They have been shown to reduce stress in premature babies. Mothers should be encouraged to re-discover the lullaby.

A Gaelic Macaronic Song from Easter Ross - Thomas McKean

Tom McKean talked about what is, possibly, the only example of a macaronic Child ballad – a version of ‘Our Goodman’ (Child 274) that is half Gaelic, half English, which was collected by James Carpenter. Child only has two versions (though Bronson lists 58.) Carpenter collected 19 versions (sometimes as ‘Whiskers on a baby’) and two of these combined English and Gaelic. One of these versions came from Murdo McRea, from Abernish who sent him a written copy in 1931. McRae’s great nephew was Arthur Cormack, the well-known Gaelic singer and he has got some contacts with descendants. He also wrote to the West Highland Free Press and has been sent other macaronic versions of the song. Tom described a number of other versions of this song – including one that featured a guinea pig in the bed.

The Peter Hall Collection - Tom Spiers

Tom Spiers talked about the collection of songs made by Peter Hall, starting in the 1960s. He spoke about Peter himself and about the personal qualities that made him such a successful song collector. After Peter’s death in 1996 Tom was asked by his widow, Marion, to work on the collection to make it accessible to other people. Over a long period Tom has transcribed Peter’s recordings to digital format and has made them available to the Elphinstone Institute and others. Tom played a number of examples of song from the collection and talked about them and about the singers.

Ballads and Songs of the Stewarts of Fetterangus - Elizabeth Stewart and Alison McMorland

In this unscripted presentation, Elizabeth Stewart talked about her life and her music with Alison McMorland, as it will be told in the upcoming book, *Up yon wide and lonely Glen*, that they have been working on together. She played some tunes on the piano and sang some of her songs as well as talking about her family (particularly her mother) and other interesting matters.

Supporting Programme

As well as this excellent meeting, Ian Russell and his colleagues at the Elphinstone Institute organised a programme of events over the weekend which made it an even more enjoyable occasion. On the Friday evening we met at Ian and Norma Russell’s house for a chat and a sing-around, which introduced many of the participants to each other. Following the meeting on Saturday we enjoyed a ceilidh-concert, with a selection of fine local performers. Then on the Sunday there was an excursion to view the sites associated with the ballad ‘Mill o’ Tifty’s Annie’. We travelled to the ruins of the Mill o’ Tifty in suitably grim weather to see where the family lived and

where Annie is said to have met her sad end. Tony Robertson sang the ballad before we walked back over the bridge where the lovers parted for the last time before travelling on to Fyvie Castle, where the sun came out and lit the building for us. Finally we went to Fyvie church to see the grave of Agnes Smith, believed to be Annie herself. Finally the majority of the party made their way to the Ythan Hotel at Methlick for a final sing.

Thanks:

We would like to thank all the speakers and singers for their contributions to the meeting. Particular thanks are due to Ian Russell and his colleagues for organising the meeting and the supporting events and to Norma Russell who unobtrusively arranged the refreshments and lunches.

Martin Graebe

19 December 2012