



Traditional Song Forum

Traditional Song Forum Meeting, 1st Dec 2012

Held at The Cause, Chippenham



The meeting was held at The Cause, Chippenham and was organised in association with Wiltshire Folk Arts. The meeting was chaired by Martin Graebe and was attended by more than 25 TSF members and guests during the course of the day.

TSF Business

Martin Graebe welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the plan for the day. He thanked Bob and Gill Berry and Wiltshire Folk Arts for hosting and organising the meeting. He apologised on behalf of the TSF Chair, Steve Roud, who had intended being at the meeting, but who had been taken ill and had returned home.

Future meetings – The next meeting of the TSF will be the Broadside day to be held in association with EFDSS at Cecil Sharp House, London, on Saturday 23 February, 2013. The next 'normal' meeting will take place in Edinburgh on 20 April, 2013. Details of the meeting will be provided in the next few weeks. Other possibilities are being looked at for 2013, including London and Gloucestershire. Offers for other locations would be welcomed.

TSF Finances – In Doc Rowe's absence, it was not possible to give a detailed account of TSF finances, but he has confirmed that our account currently stands at £1,034.01. We have a small, but encouraging, flow of new members into the organisation. The subscription for 2013 will remain unchanged at £8.

Networking Session

Gwilym Davies opened by reporting that the 'Mudcat' website was appealing for funds to keep it going and encouraged TSF members to consider making a donation. He has been working with a newly discovered manuscript book of 46 songs from Alfred Brake, who came

from Somerset. He had worked in America and sang for parties and so on. Many of the songs are Victorian weepies. The songs are beautifully hand-written and are now being indexed. He has been in contact with Sam Lee and the Collectors' Collective, suggesting categories of people who might be good sources of songs. His suggestions include 'old folkies and morris dancers' – a surprising inclusion, perhaps, but many of them have songs learned directly from oral tradition. Gwilym has, for example, recently recorded versions of 'Seven Nights Drunk' and 'The Crabfish' from a singer who had heard them in local pubs. Other songs learned from sources other than recordings or folk club performances have been offered. He described work that is being undertaken by a group in Gloucestershire on songs from the county. The aim is to create a collection of songs from the county online. The first step has been to compile a collection of carols – www.gloschristmas.com. This includes field recordings as well as modern performances. This is seen as a test run for a larger scale exercise which will aim to put a large proportion of more than 1000 songs collected in Gloucestershire online. They will, of course, be looking for funding and also seeking help from TSF members in writing notes about the songs etc.

Martin Nail has been involved in folk music in London for many years. About 15 years ago he started a website that pointed people towards key sites dealing with English folk music – www.englishfolkinfo.org.uk. This has become a valued source of information and has recently been updated. He has also been working as a volunteer in the VWML, indexing the Fred Hamer collection. This includes several categories of material. His recordings of Bedfordshire singers are very important, and many have been released in the past. It is difficult to tell whether these tapes are the original field recordings, since some may have been edited to re-use tape. There are also a number of radio programmes recorded for him and books that were read onto tape for him. There are also recordings of Vaughan Williams tunes sung onto tape for him for reference purposes. All this material gives a fascinating insight into the way Fred Hamer worked. Many of his recordings can be heard on the British Library website.

Paul (and Liz) Davenport visited the Mitchell Library in Glasgow some years ago to look at Frank Kidson's papers and were surprised to find less than they expected. They have since located a lot more material and have produced a definitive catalogue of where his material is. Copies of this have been given to Steve Roud and to Pete Coe, who is doing a project on Kidson. Their work on Reginald Gatty, the friend of Vaughan Williams and a collector in his own right, is nearing completion and they are hoping to get a definitive publication of the 56 songs that he collected in South Yorkshire out in 2013. They have also been working with the library of Anne Cockburn, a leading figure in the Nottingham Traditional Music Club's research group in the 1960s, who died recently. They identified the more unusual items in the collection – chapbooks, songsters and manuscripts and other early music publications – and found that many of them were not in the VWML. They have now been given to the Library. They also have a large quantity of taped music, including recordings made at the NTMC, that need work. One tape has yielded previously unrecorded tracks by Johnny Collins which, when linked to other recordings available will make an interesting retrospective CD. Their website is www.hallamtrads.co.uk where there are various downloads, including Frank Kidson's articles from the *Leeds Mercury* (1890-91).

[Geoff Wolfe interjected with news of a tune manuscript from Sheffield that he had sent to Paul]

Bob and Gill Berry have a strong interest in Wiltshire song, though organising the Chippenham Folk Festival limits the amount of time they have to work on local research. They are conscious that, because the centre of the county is dominated by Salisbury plain, which is owned by the Army, the majority of people live on the edges and are isolated from each other. Bob would like to spend more time working on the music in the villages around the edge of the county and studying their songs. Apart from that, they will continue with organising their club and festival, as well as performing songs from Wiltshire.

Peter Robson has been putting together a talk on Dorset Christmas customs. In March he will be talking at a conference at Loughborough University – ‘The Rural Experience: Country Life in Literature, Song, Film and Folklore.’ He will be talking about church bands and Thomas Hardy and is based on his thesis. His original intention had been to cover Hardy and folk song in his thesis, but this was not possible and he now hopes to find an opportunity to complete this work. There is some manuscript material that has not been studied and he has found that Hardy sometimes changed a song quoted in the draft of a novel for another in the published version. There are also some unanswered questions about sources of some of his songs. He hopes to be able to put something together for the EFDSS Conference next autumn.

Shan Graebe reported that she has now completed the transcriptions of Baring-Gould’s ‘Personal Copy’ manuscript – more than 2000 separate items under 700+ song titles, including songs collected by him and his collaborators, songs sent by contributors and transcripts from broadsides and other printed sources. Discussions are now taking place to see whether these can be placed alongside the Images of the manuscripts as part of the ‘Full English’ project. The aim has been to replicate what is in the manuscript, warts and all, for both text and tunes, with only a few editorial interventions, which are clearly identified.

Martin Graebe was happy to be able to say that he had just heard that Baring-Gould’s books had now all moved from Killerton House to the Special Collections library at the University of Exeter. Once these have been catalogued, this will result in improved access for researchers, not just in folk song, but also in the other fields in which Baring-Gould was active. He has also written a chapter for a proposed book being edited by Steve Roud and David Atkinson on street literature about Baring-Gould and his broadside collection. He has also submitted an article to FMJ on Marianne Mason, the first Englishwoman to publish a folk song collection. Martin and Shan have also completed work on their project in association with an American writer on Vaughan Williams’ ‘English Folk Song Suite’. This has required identification of the songs used by RVW, which were taken from the collections of Cecil Sharp and Lucy Broadwood.

Geoff Wolfe was the editor of the recently published collection of tunes from the William Winter manuscript. He is a member of the ‘Hotwell Howlers’ and they have done some work on songs from around the Quantocks. He has taken a particular interest in the songs collected from Phyllis Marshall from Bathpool, who collected songs in the village and sent her manuscript to Janet Blunt. Some of these songs are in the ‘Take Six’ collection taken from Janet Blunt’s manuscripts. Geoff has established, however, that not all of Phyllis Marshall songs were included on ‘Take Six.’ The main singer was Florence Nation who contributed 15 songs, mostly learned from her mother. Phyllis Marshall was also active in collecting dances with Janet Blunt around Oxford and with D.C. Dakin in London. They are aiming to work on the songs and singers and to get local groups involved and to involve other researchers with an interest in Somerset.

As a fellow member of the Hotwell Howlers, **Harry Langston** has been involved in some of these activities as well. His main interest, however, has been in the dialect material of his native Lancashire. Some of the dialect songs of the late C19th/early C20th have 'lost' their tunes, and he has re-set them to new ones where necessary for the recent CD that has issued by Musical Traditions. He is hoping that retirement will give him more time to work on these songs. He is also working on the biographies of some of the old dialect poets – some of whom are very interesting characters.

Chris Wildridge has spent most of his working life as a librarian and became interested in folk music through television programmes like 'Alleluia'. He moved to Wiltshire in 1972 and started morris dancing and, as a result, singing and a general interest in folk music. When he retired in 2004 he had been working on the Wiltshire Community Website and the opportunity arose to create a website dedicated to Wiltshire folk song and, particularly, the collection of Alfred Williams. For the next four years he spent large quantities of time transcribing the Williams manuscripts for use online. The website was completed and launched in 2008. He has a particular interest in the lives of the singers and new technologies have made it easier to do the necessary research. It has also made it possible to resolve transcription errors, in names of singers, for example. Putting other Wiltshire material on the website meant getting in touch with copyright holders for other material – generally politeness helps. He has recovered some songs from the Wiltshire and Gloucestershire Standard. It is planned that the transcriptions of Alfred Williams' manuscripts on the Wiltshire songs website will be linked to the images in the 'Full English' website when it is complete

Bob Askew has been working with Robin Hood ballads collected in Hampshire but the main work has been on the songs collected by George Gardiner from 29 singers in the Portsmouth Workhouse. The range of songs sung in the town are very similar to those found in the country. There were, not surprisingly, a number of sea songs. They put on a concert in Portsmouth of the songs found in Portsmouth. Not many connections have been made with descendants of the singers.

Alan Rosevear is still a novice but has continued his work as one of the organisers of the Devonshire Association Music Section. One of the things that has been done is to look at the songs published in the DA transactions and an event took place in Okehampton in October where the songs were performed.

Ted Poole talked about the cataloguing of the Williams Mss by Ivor Clissold, Colin Bathe, and Frank Purslow and suggested that Williams hearing may have been damaged by his work in heavy industry. He and Ivy met Bill Whiting, one of the men who sang to Alfred Williams.

Forum Focus – Traditional Song in Wiltshire

Wiltshire Folk Songs –or so we have heard – Bob Berry

Bob Berry gave an overview of Wiltshire Folk Arts and about Wiltshire folk song. He had discovered folk song while he was in the army and in 1973 set up a folk club in Tidworth. His mother had an interest in the songs of Alfred Williams. He and Gill have performed together for several years and have produced a couple of CDs together. The field of Wiltshire songs is dominated by Alfred Williams but the usefulness of his collection is diminished by the lack of

tunes. A more useful collection is *Wiltshire Folk Songs* by Celia Cologne and Jean Morrison (1981). Wiltshire Folk Arts was started with the aim of collating and publishing Wiltshire songs, but the pressure of work on the Chippenham Festival has meant that they haven't done as much as they had hoped. It is people like Andrew Bathe, Mike Yates and Chris Wildridge who have driven the study of Wiltshire songs. Bob played examples of some songs recorded in Wiltshire including 'The Fly be on the Turmit', a song strongly associated with the county.

Songs from the Isle of Wight: the work of William Long – The Dollymops

The Dollymops – Virgil and Dorana Philpott and Justin Smith – gave a presentation on the life and work of William Long (1839 – 1925) who collected songs on the Isle of White. The presentation was illustrated with songs from the collection. Long was born in Calbourne and acquired an education despite the antagonism of his family. As a young man he supported himself as a 'book hawker', living in Devon and then, after he married, as a bookseller's assistant in Bristol. By 1881 he had become a bookseller in his own right with a shop in Portsmouth. He published his 'Dictionary of Isle of Wight Dialect' in 1886 and it included 55 songs, without tunes and with no attribution to the original singers. Though he published a number of other books he wrote no more about folk songs.

There be dragons – or Wiltshire as a source of traditional songs – Chris Wildridge

Chris Wildridge believes that Wiltshire has been under-represented as a source of traditional songs when compared to the other English counties and has set out to correct that. Alfred Williams was unique among the English song collectors in coming from a working class background. This may have influenced his attitude to the other collectors, who he considered negligent for not having looked to see whether songs that they had attributed to a particular county were not commonly found elsewhere. Chris gave us some details of Alfred Williams's life and his struggle to educate himself. He also mentioned some of the other collectors who visited Wiltshire – though none of them achieved a great deal. He described how the website of Wiltshire Songs and mummers plays (<http://history.wiltshire.gov.uk/community/folkintro.php>) was constructed and the subsequent inclusion of songs from the other collectors. Using the information in Williams' notes he has been able to construct biographical information for many of the singers.

50 years of folk song in Swindon: Interview with Ted and Ivy Poole

In an entertaining conversation with Martin Graebe, Ted and Ivy Poole described the part that folk music had played in their lives and the foundation of the Swindon Folksingers Club in 1960. Over the years they have played host to many of the best-known singers at the club but have also taken part in important national events and organisations that have shaped the course of the folk song movement in the country as a whole. They also talked about the political and social beliefs that lay behind their activity.

Come Forth and Sing For the Season: Exmoor Carols – Paul Wilson

Paul Wilson talked about a project that he and Wren Music, together with Bob and Jackie Patten, in which they have been working with the carols collected by the Pattens on Exmoor, bringing the carols back to the community and revitalising a carol singing tradition in the area. The carols themselves are a mixture of carols known nationally as well as some that have been locally written. They are planning a biennial singing event to celebrate the carol and this will coincide with the publication every two years with a new volume of the carols in print. The first such volume, *Come Sing for the Season* is now available (www.wrenmusic.co.uk),

[A recording of the afternoon's talks can be purchased by registered TSF members from the TSF Secretary]

Supporting Programme

On the Friday before the meeting many members took the opportunity to visit the Swindon Folksingers Club which is one of the longest running folk clubs in the country. The guests that evening were the Dollymops who talked about their work on William Long at the meeting on the following day.

On Saturday evening Wiltshire Folk Arts organised an enjoyable concert featuring several performers from the county.

Thanks:

We would like to thank all the speakers and singers for their contributions to the meeting. Particular thanks are due to Bob and Gill Berry and Wiltshire Folk Arts for organising the meeting and to Fred and Norma at The Cause for their hospitality. Thank you all!

Martin Graebe

29 December 2012