



Traditional Song Forum Meeting, 19th November 2005 held at The Sage, Gateshead

Meeting Report

We had, once again, a goodly collection of TSF regulars, students from the Newcastle University course and new faces for the meeting. A number of people also sent apologies as diaries filled up with pre-Christmas events. 'The Sage' is now the permanent home of the Newcastle University Degree Course in Folk Music and Vic Gammon, Alistair Anderson and Sandra Kerr were our hosts for the day. For those who have not seen the Sage yet it is a remarkable building set in an area that has seen massive redevelopment. The facilities are magnificent, with two concert halls as well as other performance spaces and good facilities for food and drink that meant that we did not have to brave the wintry weather. The University's facilities are in the lower part of the building and were very impressive and a pleasant venue for our meeting. The lunch break gave Dave Eyre and Steve Gardham a chance to sell some of their books to an eager audience. After the meeting we had a couple of hours of singing for which a number of people who didn't have too far to go (and a few that did!) stayed.

Member's activities

The meeting opened with our customary round-up of recent activity by those present.

Peter Wood reported that, following his recent retirement, he was now able to describe himself as a 'Professional Musician'. Because of the activities associated with SeaBritain 2005 and the Tall Ships in Newcastle there have been many opportunities for shantying. Peter did a lot of work with schools and the highlight was a memorable session in a hall with 1700 kids. Peter was also involved in two shows, 'Doxies' which celebrated the sailor and his doxie and 'Nelson - The Fiery Admiral'. Both of these involved searching for appropriate songs and, indeed, writing a few to cover gaps in the narrative.

Sandra Kerr is very involved in the University's Folk Degree Course, teaching Singing and, particularly, songwriting. She observed that the intake for the course has changed now that a lot of the students who grew up as 'folk kids' has given way to a steady flow of students who start with less knowledge of folk music but who have a real interest in learning more about the music and who are keen to perform it. Working with these students it is clear to Sandra that the music has the power to touch people in a profound way. Supporting them in their learning is a challenge - by turns frustrating, exhausting and challenging. She is also immensely impressed by the songs that they are writing and in the way that they are using traditional ideas in unexpected ways.

Andy Rouse proudly told us that his book 'The Remunerated Vernacular Singer' has now been published by Peter Lang. He presented a copy to the University Library. He is also very active in Hungary's only English folk band and they have recently produced a CD of 16th century songs associated with a show that they are taking around schools.

Steve Gardham is also, in retirement, working in schools. He has also thrown off his disguise as the Dungbeetle and has reworked the series of articles 'A Veritable Dungheap' that have appeared in 'English Dance and Song' and has, with Rod Stradling's assistance, made them available on the Musical Traditions website (see <http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/dungheap.htm>). He has also been working as part of the group who are developing the Master Titles Index and who have now reached the letter 'L'. The key criterion that has been chosen to help select the best title is to use that most commonly found in the oral tradition. Steve has also been involved with Mike Parsey and Ray Padgett in a lottery bid for funding to construct a Yorkshire Songs website.

Mike Parsey is a newcomer to folk music and, following his retirement, is using his project management experience in helping with the project mentioned by Steve Gardham above for a website of Yorkshire song, the working title for which is 'Yorkshire Garland'.

Vic Gammon is now in post in his new role as Director of the Folk Music course at Newcastle University. He did manage, however, to secure six months study leave, the majority of which he spent in the Surrey Record Office working on Lucy Broadwood's papers. He has made a number of interesting discoveries including her friendship with Bram Stoker and a dinner with the Russian anarchist, Prince Peter Kropotkin. He has also pushed back the date of the Broadwood family's interest in folk music to Henry Fowler Broadwood in the 1830s. He has two articles going forward for publication. One on Sharp and the ideology of dance and another on Sharp's work in education. He is also working on an article that is intended to set the record straight on the end of west gallery music, where he has evidence that it was not the peaceful transition that is generally presented. He is also working on the revision of some of his earlier work. Vic is finding, though, that now the pace of his working life has picked up again it is hard to find the time to do everything that he would like to.

Poppy Holden outlined the basis of her study of the border ballads as a PhD - about which she talked more in the afternoon session.

Jane Harland is a 3rd year student on the University course. Her work has included some singing with children and she reported that, surprisingly, 'Henry Martin' got a strong response from her young audience

Lewis Jones has completed his work of transcribing three books of the hymns and psalms of Isaac Watts for the Project Gutenberg website. (See index for these at <http://www.gutenberg.org/browse/authors/w#a4876>) While publication of folk songs is his main interest he does not have enough time to do all he wants to. He has, though, written a review of Roy Palmer's book on the folklore of Warwickshire. Lewis described some online collections of journals that he has found useful, though access is only available through subscribing library services. Three he considers particularly useful are 'Early English Books Online', 'Project Muse' and 'Jstor'. He reminded members that 'Folklore' is available online. Another site that he recommends is Old Bailey Online (<http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/>) where you can find the proceedings of our major criminal court from 1674 to 1834 as well as a large amount of interpretive material.

Maggie Hunt is a part of Sunshine Arts - a folk-arts group working in schools, at festivals and in the community (see their website at <http://www.redowa.co.uk/sunshine.htm>). They make a lot of use of traditional song in their work with schools. She gave examples of a couple of projects they are working on, the first looking at the images of birds in different cultures and the second based on the history of m8iniing in Shropshire.

Jill Pidd and Doc Rowe talked about a number of interesting things they have done looking at a number of customs all over the country mentioning, among others, Lucky Birding and Nutcracker day. They have been recording some of the old locals in Bampton. They have taken part in the Bonfire Night celebrations in Lewes. They have created a replica of the Burry Man and have 'collected' the 2005 'Penny Hedge' from Whitby for the Folk Archive exhibition. Doc is working on a book for English Heritage and promises that he will have a website in the New Year. He is also working with Rosemary Tawney, Eddie Upton and others to organise a celebration of Cyril Tawney's life at Cecil Sharp House on April 1st. Doc also reported that some of the manuscripts belonging to Ella Leather have turned up and are now in the Library at Cecil Sharp House. There is also interest in getting Mary Neil's papers into the public domain, though it is not yet clear how this might happen

Dave Eyre has now retired to Spain where he is able to enjoy genuine flamenco music in his local bar. He has recently bought Nigel Gatherer's library including a large set of 'English Dance and Song' which he has passed to the University. A number of other books were offered for sale at lunchtime.

Fay Field has now completed the degree course and has moved to Sheffield where she is working with the Huddleston collection as well as singing.

Mike Sutton had for many years taught history and enjoyed folk music in separate compartments. Now he has discovered the joys of combining the two. He has done a two hour interview with Johnny Handle. He is working with a student on their thesis and is working on a project on folk dance.

Derek Schofield regrets that so much of his time seems to be spent writing obituaries and has recently taken on the editorship of English Dance and Song - for which he is keen to have new ideas and new material. The last edition had a feature on Nelson that linked to recordings on the EFDSS website. He is hoping to make more use of this sort of cross-media approach in the future. An example in the next issue will be that his article on marking the centenary of Percy Grainger's folk song collection (based on the talk he gave at the last TSF meeting) will include links to songs. The issue after next will include a feature on the Newcastle University folk music course. Derek described his tour on the Ballad Bus organised by Ian and Norma Russell which set out from Aberdeen on a tour of locations associated with traditional songs - the appropriate song being enjoyed by the company in its location. A good time was had by all!

Shan Cowan described the project that she is working on with Wren Music to produce a CD of songs for people with learning difficulties. She uses song in her work as a speech and language therapist and finds that the structures and pace of traditional song work well with her students. Wren have secured funding for

the project which also involves staff and children from a special school in Exeter. The CD will be launched next year.

Martin Graebe closed the session with a progress report on his recent work. His only contribution to the Nelson celebrations was an article reviewing Baring-Gould's book on Nelson that marked the centenary of his death (see <http://www.sbgas.org/nelson.pdf>). Other work on Baring-Gould in the last few months has included a study of his work on ballads which was presented at the Baring-Gould Study Break in October. In the course of this work he was able to study the origins of the version of 'The Brown Girl' that Baring-Gould sent to Child and confirms that the text came from a song that he had collected, rather than being a fabrication, as has been proposed. Other work has filled in some of the gaps in the history of Baring-Gould's early collecting and more biographical detail about his friends and associates.

TSF Business

- Subscriptions will be due again on January 1st. At present our financial position is sound with more than £200 in hand to cover expenses for meetings etc.
- The website is now established in its new format and with its new address (www.tradsong.org). News and other contributions are still welcomed by the editor
- Martin Graebe suggested that he would like to place on the website facsimile (scanned) copies of some of the key folk song texts that are out of copyright. The reaction from the meeting was positive. Suggestions for books to be included were requested

Forum Focus

The afternoon session focused mainly on the Newcastle University degree course in folk and traditional music with presentations from two students and two of the staff. But first we had a couple of presentations from TSF members.



Steve Gardham's presentation

Steve Gardham gave us a talk on *'Ballad and Burlesque in the early 19th Century'*. He talked about the way in which performers such as Sam Cowell and William Robson who worked in the supper rooms of the early 1800s borrowed and re-presented broadside ballads as comic material. Many of these burlesques passed back into the tradition as distinct versions of the original songs. Examples quoted included 'Lord Lovell', 'William and Dinah' (which became 'Villikins and his Dinah'), 'George Barnwell' and several others. Steve drew a parallel with the parodies of The Kipper Family in modern times. 'Sam Hall' is an example of a song that took an earlier broadside and turned it into a strong dramatic performance that had a great impact at the time and for some years afterwards. Many of the songs were presented in Cockney style, though there were also strong links to the minstrel and yokel styles of song. Most had a 'tooralay' chorus. Several of the songs survived when the supper rooms became the music halls of the later part of the century.



Andy Rouse gave a short talk on the development of the folk song revival in Hungary which can be dated very precisely to 6th May 1972. Initially it developed as a house dance style that was a reaction against the heavily choreographed state dance troupe. Singing gave a space within which the dancers could take a rest. He observed that, unlike the UK, folk music is a passion of the political right wing

Fay Hield talked about *'My Voice - singing in everyday life'* in which she shared with us her observation of the way in which people sing and use music as they go about their lives. She started by careful observation of her own behaviours, then extended that observation to those around her, looking for example at her flat-mate singing as she turned her computer on - the singing being totally secondary to the activity. Her observation of herself - waiting, for example, for a quotation helped her to conclude that singing for one's self is not a performance. It is often a subconscious soundtrack but, she asserted, for many people, it is a building block of life.



Poppy Holden's talk was entitled *'Joseph MacHaydn to Newcastleton, from the 18th Century Edinburgh Parlour to a 21st century village hall: What's tradition'*. In it she shared with us her work on border ballads which she is undertaking as a PhD thesis. Her interest was kindled by hearing the 'Lament of the Border Widow' which touched her deeply when she first heard it. Working on ballads as a PhD has given her the focus for study that she needed. She has looked at the history of a number of ballads, following back, for example, 'Thomas the Rhymmer' from Scott's version of 1833 to a printed version in the 1420s and a report of a 'real person' upon whom the story was based in 1280. She has dated Sir Patrick Spens back to 1281. The reference to Haydn reflects the fact that he did a setting of 'Broom of the Cowdenknowes'. Her working definition of a order ballad is that it:

- Tells a story
- Is set in the Border lands
- Dates from before the Union in 1603
- Was intended for a border audience

Alistair Anderson and Vic Gammon shared the stage to talk about the development and future of the Newcastle University Folk and Traditional Music course at The Sage. Alistair talked about its genesis in the observation through his work with 'Folkworks' that there was a keen interest among many young people to learn about folk music at a much deeper level. Recognising that there was no degree course in Traditional music in England he looked at what universities in other countries were doing. In creating the course the aim was to achieve a balance between the skills required to be a professional musician and the philosophy of engaging with the broader community. The funding level achieved for the course is higher than a standard BA but not as high as the level that would be achieved by a Conservatoire. Vic is now taking over as Director from Alistair at a time when the first graduates from the course have moved into their chosen profession. There are 70 students on the course at present. Vic emphasized that it is not a 'Mickey Mouse' option and that a rigorous standard of scholarship is applied. The field of study is broader than just English music - unlike the courses at Glasgow or Limerick, for example, which focus on their own national music.



A broader discussion developed in which it was asked how TSF might be able to help. A suggestion was floated that help from the expert researchers involved in TSF with the production of a 'handbook' of folk song resources would be one possible area that would be of benefit to the students at The Sage and, potentially, to a wider audience.

Thanks:

Thank you to all of the speakers who contributed to the afternoon session - Fay, Poppy, Andy, Alistair, Vic and Steve. Thanks, also, to Peter Wood who co-ordinated the arrangements for the meeting and worked

with Alistair to put the programme for the day together. Thanks to all of those who attended and contributed to the day.

To those of you who weren't able to attend I have to say you missed another good one. The facilities at The Sage were superb and there were lots of opportunities for good conversation and exploring ideas. The song session after the meeting was very enjoyable and it was great to swap songs with other members and with the University staff and students. With his spirited performance in the evening on top of his excellent sung illustrations for his talk in the afternoon we must now see Steve Gardham in a new light!



We have often said that a 'song forum' should have a few songs - We will see if we can make an early evening song session a regular feature of TSF meetings for those who are as interested in the sound of the songs as in the chase to find them.

Martin Graebe

2nd January 2006