



Traditional Song Forum

Traditional Song Forum Meeting, 11 Oct 2014

Held at Marriotts Warehouse, King's Lynn



This meeting was held at [Marriotts Warehouse, King's Lynn](#). This historic building has been restored as a restaurant and conference facility and is run as a charitable venture. Despite a number of competing attractions, twenty members and guests took part in an interesting day of discussion and presentations (We had apologies from 21 members).

Welcome

The chairman, Steve Roud welcomed those attending and thanked Alan Helsdon and his colleagues for organising the meeting. Paul Richards, who is the Chair of the Marriott's Warehouse Trust (as well as of the True's Yard Museum that we would be visiting later in the day) then gave us his own welcome. He told us something of the history of the building and its restoration and of the area in which it is situated.

TSF business

1 Finance

Our treasurer, Doc Rowe, gave a summary of the current financial position of the forum. We have, at present, 157 people who appear on our list of members. Unfortunately only 51 of them actually paid their annual subscription in 2014. This is, clearly, something that we must take action on.

We do have, at present, £1226 in the TSF account before the cost of the current meeting is taken into account.

2 Publications

At the last meeting (Sheffield, June 2014) there was further discussion about the potential use of our funds for the publication of songs (one of the declared purposes of the Traditional Song Forum). The case of Frank Purslow's second song-book, *The Wanton Seed*, was considered a good example, since publication had stalled following the death of Malcolm Douglas. Actions had been taken to see if we could help EFDSS move the project forward but, recently, one of our members, Ron Day, had taken the initiative to approach EFDSS with a view to taking on the task of publishing the book with a group of Malcolm Douglas's friends. They are seeking contributions towards the publication from individuals and organisations. TSF has agreed to make a donation of £250 towards the cost of the project.

3 Future meetings

The next meeting of the Traditional Song Forum will be 'Exploring the Digital Archive', organised jointly with EFDSS at Cecil Sharp House. This will be a practical, hands-on session designed to guide researchers and enthusiasts through the wealth of folk song material available on-line in the Full English database and in other places.

Next year will start with the Broadside Day to be held on 21 Feb 2015. More details will be available nearer the time.

Locations for future meetings were discussed. Plans are already well advanced for a meeting in the Spring of 2015 in Newcastle, where the main topic for the afternoon's presentations will be Napoleon Bonaparte in song.

Other ideas for meeting venues were discussed and the front-running suggestions were:

- A meeting in Manchester – our first time in the Northwest.
- Sussex and/or Hampshire.
- Hull – Paul Davenport offered to follow up this suggestion.
- Glasgow will remain under consideration.

These ideas will be followed up after the meeting.

Networking Session

Derek Schofield reported that he had put a small article about TSF in the last issue of English Dance and Song, as had been suggested at the last meeting. There was a false report last week that Brian Dawson's papers were up for sale. This was a misunderstanding of an auction of his accordion and local history books. There is a group of people who are advising Brian's nephew with the intention of making sure that his papers are safe. There is also a plan to compile a CD of recordings of his performances. Derek had also been in touch with Roy Palmer whose health has worsened recently. Derek is going to see him shortly. Steve Roud said that Roy has, in exemplary fashion, been placing his manuscripts with various appropriate libraries in recent months.

Katie Howson said that, apart from preparing for the presentation she and John would be giving later, their biggest project has been on Jig-dolls. The [East Anglian Traditional Music Trust](#) continues to flourish – running 3 events annually.

John Howson talked about the research they have been doing about dulcimers in East Anglia. They have acquired a staggering amount of information and, in the process he has acquired 13 historic dulcimers made in the region, some of which he is planning to restore. The dulcimer is very strongly associated with East Anglia, with hundreds of players having been identified and with a significant industrial base for dulcimer manufacture, centred on Norwich. There is going to be a website. He will

be talking about his research at the World Dulcimer Conference in Malvern at the end of October 2015.

Jane and Keith Reynolds are locally based and enjoy the music and song of the area. They attended and enjoyed the recent Walter Pardon 100th Birthday Celebration.

Tony Langford is another local, born and brought up in rural Norfolk and with strong link to the 'old ways'. He has been attending folk clubs for many years. Talked about the archive group he works with and described the information they had gathered about Walter Deacon, who was a local dulcimer player who, given enough beer, would play his dulcimer while his wife danced in the table.

Bob Askew talked about research done in Hampshire by Simon and Jo Harmer on Alice Gillington, who collected songs from gypsies in the New Forest and performed them at a concert recently. They were particularly interested in Southern stepping, the dancing that went with the tunes collected from the gypsies in the area. He reported that work with his group 'Amsher', which specialises in Hampshire song, had gone well this year. His research on Hampshire singers and songs is continuing.

Paul and Liz Davenport talked about the difficulty of working with Reginald Gatty's folk song manuscripts, because of the restricted access imposed by Birmingham City Library who have the eight exercise books in which he wrote his songs up. They allow only limited time and do not permit copying. Currently working on the 200 instances of traditional seasonal dance noted in Yorkshire – which is interesting because of the variety and because some, like the Mell Suppers and the 'Acts' associated with them are unique. The acts are songs and plays, some with very early origins and some of which have similarities to the *Commedia del Arte*. They are not well documented. They have also edited a CD 'Blue Bell Folk' based on a privately made recording of the resident singers of the Folk Union One folk club from 1969 which is being sold as a fund-raiser for digitising the collection at the Hull History Centre.

Doc Rowe is 'still doing it!' He spent a pleasant day in the studio with Steve Roud, recording a 3 hour 'Halloween Special' for Radio 4 Extra. He is still battling with the archive – including 42,000 negatives. He has realised that to properly deal with them would take 8 hours a day for the next three years.

Laura Smyth took over as Library Director at the VWML in August and has just submitted a 3-year plan for the library. Many of the ideas are about digitisation projects, building on the success of the 'Full English' collection. There are other collections in the library that need digitising for preservation. Her own personal interest is in Lancashire songs and has recently released an EP of songs from Lancashire.

Alan Helsdon met Martin Graebe a year ago at Cecil Sharp House and today's meeting is a direct result of that. One of his distinctions is that of being the person that told Billy Bennington to stop playing (so that Walter Pardon could get a song in edgeways). He has been working with Jill Bennett and Liz James on the songs collected by Vaughan Williams in King's Lynn in 1905. They would be talking about some of their discoveries during the day and there would be a publication soon. Alan has made recordings of all of the 86 songs (and four tunes) that RVW collected in North Norfolk. He had the good fortune to meet Walter Pardon several times (using his mum's moped) and has recently produced a book of his melodeon tunes. In September 2015 there will be an event to celebrate the life on Sam Lerner, fifty years after his death.

[Talking of events, there will be a day for Bob Copper on 24th January – on what would have been his 100th birthday. 2015 also marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Ewan MacColl. Ashgate have just published a book edited by Allan Moore and Giovani Vacca called [Ewan MacColl; Last Interview](#), priced £65]

Hilary Friend is interested in music composed or created for women. She is currently based in London. For five years she ran a project on music associated with the women's movement in the 1970s, working with the WRPM (Women's Revolution Per Minute) archive of 2000 recordings. Details on the website of Goldsmith's College ([sc2-mus-leafletA4.pdf](#)). The collection is accessible to the public.

Eamonn Andrews said that he has benefited from the research done by others, and was happy to be at the meeting.

Judy Andrews came to singing through dancing. They are involved with the renovation of a Victorian School, at Horham (Suffolk) where they put on fund-raising events.

Shan Graebe is on the brink of publishing her collection of 30 traditional songs for children from Britain and America, called *Rosy Apples*. There will be notes (including the Full English references) and some photographs and excerpts from Cecil Sharp's diary. There is also a simple 'home-brew' CD with the book. Details on our [website](#)

Martin Graebe said that this was the year in which he was going to focus on writing his book about Sabine Baring-Gould's folk song collecting. But he has also been working with Prof Bob Garofalo on the songs in Ralph Vaughan Williams English Folk Song Suite. This visit gave him a chance to visit Tilney All Saints, where RVW heard John Whitby sing 'The murder of Maria Marten at the Red Barn' which was the third tune in the first movement of the suite. He has also continued the work that he and Matthew Edwards have been doing on the Rankin and Waring families, about which Matthew talked at the December meeting in London.

Liz James would be speaking later in the day about her work on the singers whom RVW met in 1905. She had been involved with Jill Bennett and Alan Helsdon in a celebration of the centenary of Vaughan Williams collecting in King's Lynn. They came to realise that the story needed to be told, which is why they have continued with their research and the desire to publish it. Since she retired a couple of years ago this has become a major part of her time.

David Atkinson reported that the production of the FMJ this year had been particularly difficult. New people at Clare College had recently decided that they needed to charge for the use of copyright material and this had led to extensive discussions and a compromise has been reached for the time being

Steve Roud declined to offer a report, claiming to have done nothing – we all know different

Absent friends and general discussion.

Gwilym Davies was not present, but had sent a report on the status of the 'Single Gloucester' project which has now got the necessary funding to proceed. Details can be found on the [Gloucestershire Traditions](#) website. They will be seeking help (via the Tradsong group) with identifying songs etc., and are also hoping for volunteers to assist with transcriptions.

Paul Davenport reminded us that he had a large collection of tapes from the Anne Coleman collection, which contain much original and valuable material. They have no time to do the transcriptions themselves and have not yet found anyone able to take the task on. Many of the tapes are in very poor condition and need specialised handling. This led to a general discussion of the difficulties associated with sound archives. One of the problems is that there is not a future-proof medium for digital recordings. Laura Smyth said that she was aware that the British Library was looking at future projects and that there were things in the pipeline. Steve Roud summarised by saying that the difficulty we faced was with small collections by private individuals

Martin Graebe reported that he had heard from the [Song Collector's Collective](#), following James McDonald's talk about their work at the last meeting. They were keen to involve TSF members in their work as expert advisers and as 'buddies' or mentors for fledgling collectors and researchers. Many TSF members were already in contact with them, but they are still keen to hear from more of us. It is good to see that they are still finding new material in their expeditions and sharing it via their website.

Steve Roud mentioned that there is a project starting to do for Sussex what others have done for their counties. The project involves Mike Tristram, the Coppers, Shirley Collins and several others. Things are at an early stage but watch this space.



Presentations etc.

The rest of the day was spent in a series of presentations related to Vaughan Williams's visit to King's Lynn in 1905.

- Chris Holderness and Richard Blake shared some of the tunes that Vaughan Williams had collected in Norfolk with us. Richard was using a historic dulcimer, made in Norfolk.
- Liz James gave a fascinating talk about the people that Vaughan Williams met in King's Lynn on his visit in 1905 and untangled some of the mysteries surrounding the visit.
- Liz James, Jill Bennett and Alan Helsdon then sang three of the songs that he had collected and demonstrated how he had used them in his Norfolk Rhapsody No. 2.
- Katie Howson talked about singers from King's Lynn who were recorded from by collectors in the 1950s.
- Doc Rowe overcame a raft of technical issues to talk to us about collecting from Sam Larner and the use of his songs in the Radio Ballads

In the afternoon there was also a visit to the [True's Yard Fisherfolk Museum](#) in King's Lynn's North End where we were able to see displays about the people who lived there at the time that Vaughan Williams visited and met some of the fishermen and others who lived in the community of the North End. Dr Paul Richardson, who we had met earlier, is also the chairman of the True's yard venture and gave us an interesting introduction, before we poked around the museum and enjoyed some of their tea and cake.

Saturday evening's concert had considerable added value since each of the performers gave additional background to the material they presented. John and Katie Howson played some tunes from East Anglia and gave us some of the background to them. Jill Bennett talked about her father, Bob Roberts, and dispelled many of the myths that have grown up about his life and his activities as

a singer. Chris Holderness and Richard Blake played us some more tunes from Norfolk. Damien Barber talked about the visits that he made to see Walter Pardon when he was younger and shared some memories of him.

On Sunday morning Liz James and Alan Helsdon led a tour through the North End where we learned more about the area and saw Vaughan Williams visit in context. The weather was kind and we were able to get a good impression of the area, though it has changed considerably in the last century.

Thanks:

Thanks are due to Alan Helsdon, who was the driving force behind the meeting, and to those who had contributed to the programme including Liz James, Jill Bennett, John and Katie Howson, Chris Holderness and Richard Blake. We are also grateful to the Marriotts Warehouse and their staff, who looked after us so well in their excellent facility. Dr Paul Richardson is the Chair of the Marriott's Warehouse Trust as well as of the True's Yard Fisherfolk Museum and is an enthusiastic ambassador for King's Lynn and its history and we were grateful for the time that he spared for us and for his personal support and interest.

Martin Graebe

10 Nov 2014

